



# Members' Handbook

01208 640079

[www.immanuelchurchbodmin.org](http://www.immanuelchurchbodmin.org)

[info@immanuelchurchbodmin.org](mailto:info@immanuelchurchbodmin.org)

This Handbook is an introduction for newcomers, and a guide for the church as we seek to serve the Lord. It functions as a Constitution, in that it reflects our present understanding of the Bible and of our situation. It is in every way subordinate to Scripture and is therefore open to change in the light of greater understanding.

All or any part of this Handbook will be reviewed every five years or at any time the elders deem necessary.

## About Us

We are a company of Christians who regularly meet together, generally in our building on Berrycoombe Road, Bodmin.

We understand that all believers are members of the universal Church, the body of Christ in all places and at all times, and that Christians should express this by coming together as local churches. We do this in order to glorify Christ through corporate praise and witness and through helping one another in our Christian lives as a church family.

As an evangelical church, we believe and proclaim the great truths of the Christian faith, as taught by the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles, and as summarised in our own Statement of Beliefs. We affirm the central importance of the inerrancy and authority of the Bible; of Jesus' death as an atonement for sin; of justification by faith alone, and of the need for new birth by the Spirit of God.

Although as a free church we are self-governing and therefore independent of any ecclesiastical ruling body, we affirm our unity and interdependence with other evangelical churches. We seek to express this through affiliation to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC), and through involvement with other churches and Christian organisations, such as the Peninsula Gospel Partnership (PGP). We understand that unity must be based on a common commitment to the central truths of the Christian faith.



## Statement of Beliefs

### God

There is one God, who exists eternally in three distinct but equal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is unchangeable in His holiness, justice, wisdom and love. He is the almighty Creator, Saviour and Judge who sustains and governs all things according to His sovereign will for His own glory.

### The Bible

God has revealed Himself in the Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments alone. Every word was breathed out by God through human authors, so that the Bible as originally given is in its entirety the Word of God, without error and fully reliable in fact and doctrine. The Bible alone speaks with final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief and practice.

**We believe these truths of historic, biblical Christianity**

### The Human Race

All men and women, being created in the image of God, have inherent and equal dignity and worth. Their greatest purpose is to obey, worship and love God. As a result of the fall of our first parents, every aspect of human nature has been corrupted and all men and women are without spiritual life, guilty sinners and hostile to God. Every person is therefore under the just condemnation of God and needs to be born again, forgiven and reconciled to God in order to know and please Him.

### The Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, and lived a sinless life in obedience to the Father. He taught with authority and all His words are true. On the cross He died in the place of sinners, bearing God's punishment for their sin, redeeming them by His blood. He rose from the dead and in His resurrection body ascended into heaven where He is exalted as Lord of all. He intercedes for His people in the presence of the Father.



# Statement of Beliefs

## Salvation

Salvation is entirely a work of God's grace and cannot be earned or deserved. It has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ and is offered to all in the gospel. God in His love forgives sinners whom He calls, granting them repentance and faith. All who believe in Christ are justified by faith alone, adopted into the family of God and receive eternal life.

## The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit has been sent from heaven to glorify Christ and to apply His work of salvation. He convicts sinners, imparts spiritual life and gives a true understanding of the Scriptures. He indwells all believers, brings assurance of salvation and produces increasing likeness to Christ. He builds up the Church and empowers its members for worship, service and mission.

## The Church

The universal Church is the body of which Christ is the head and to which all who are saved belong. It is made visible in local churches, which are congregations of believers who are committed to each other for the worship of God, the preaching of the Word, the administering of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; for pastoral care and discipline, and for evangelism. The unity of the body of Christ is expressed within and between churches by mutual love, care and encouragement. True fellowship between churches exists only where they are faithful to the gospel.

## Believers' Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Baptism of Christian Believers and the Lord's Supper have been given to the churches by Christ as visible signs of the gospel. Baptism is a symbol of union with Christ and entry into His Church but does not impart spiritual life. The Lord's Supper is a commemoration of Christ's sacrifice offered once for all and involves no change in the bread and wine. All its blessings are received by faith.

## The Future

The Lord Jesus Christ will return in glory. He will raise the dead and judge the world in righteousness. The wicked will be sent to eternal punishment and the righteous will be welcomed into a life of eternal joy in fellowship with God. God will make all things new and will be glorified forever.

# Church Life and Membership

## Membership

- A number of corporate activities are central to our life as a local church. We gather together to receive teaching from the Word of God; to share in the fellowship of mutual encouragement and practical help; to remember and proclaim Jesus' death as we participate in the Lord's supper, and to join in prayer, praise, and partnership in the advance of the gospel.

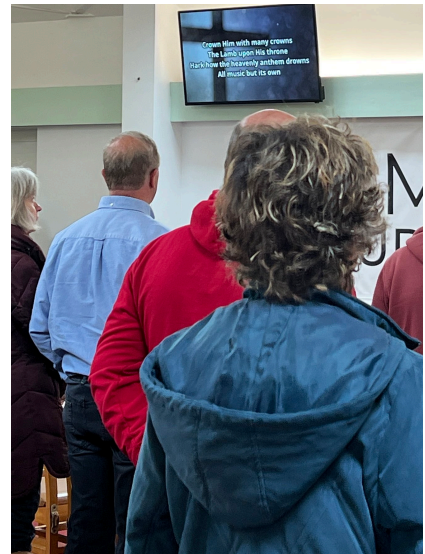
- We understand that local churches in the New Testament were made up of recognised members, who were committed to one another for these common activities of church life, all Christians being members in this way.

Each one who was joined to Christ was joined to the universal Church, and this union was seen in commitment to a local church. Baptism was the initial sign of coming into union with both Christ and His Church, and the Lord's Supper was the sign of continuing union.

- Church members are therefore those who have been baptised into union with Christ and His people, and who have committed themselves to:

- love and accept one another, irrespective of ethnicity, class, culture, sex, age, ability or personality
- support one another and the ministry of the church through prayer, partnership, finance and practical help
- attend the meetings of the church for teaching, prayer, praise, the Lord's Supper and mutual encouragement.

- Membership is thus a commitment of each member to the whole body, and of the whole body to each member, involving accountability on both sides. Those who regularly meet with us but who have not committed themselves in this way are not asked or expected to take up any specific role in the life and work of the church.



## Church Life and Membership

### Membership (cont)

- We receive into membership those who have been baptised, who give credible evidence of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who accept the privileges and responsibilities of membership as set out above and elsewhere in this Handbook. Complete understanding of and agreement with the Handbook in every detail is not, however, a requirement of membership.
- Members whose convictions are at variance with the Handbook at any point are expected to respect the teaching and practice of the church. They are only to seek change through the eldership of the church in a way that expresses Christian love and humility and which strives to maintain the unity of the body of Christ.
- Baptismal practice has a direct bearing on the question of membership, and is a subject on which evangelical Christians differ. We teach and practise the baptism of believers only, and do not regard infant baptism as valid. However, although we do not baptise infants, we respect others who hold this practice to be scriptural. Evangelical Christians who in good conscience believe their baptism as an infant to be valid are welcome to join with us in the Lord's Supper and in membership of the church, on the understanding that they will respect our teaching and practice.
- Believers normally become members after interview with more than one of the elders, and subsequent announcement to the church.
- Members who move permanently from the area are encouraged to find a suitable church near their new home and to request a letter of commendation from the church here, thus expressing our unity and fellowship with the wider Church. Until they become members elsewhere, we offer pastoral and prayer support.
- Resignations from membership are to be reported by the elders at the next convenient meeting of the church.
- Caring enquiries will be made, and support offered, if a member has stopped attending church meetings. If after three months the member is still not attending church, the pastor or an elder will visit to discuss the status of their membership.

# Church Life and Membership

## Discipline

- All who truly repent and believe the gospel call on Christ for salvation from sin and judgment and submit to Him as Lord. This entails continually striving, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to become more like Christ, for example, rejecting all false teaching, dishonesty, slander, factionalism, jealousy, selfish ambition, drunkenness, greed, occult practices, false worship (including that of other religions), blasphemy, hatred, bitterness, rage, violence, sexual immorality <sup>1</sup> and obscenity.
- Mutual rebuke and admonition are the normal and regular means by which members of the church help and encourage one another to leave behind and/or avoid such sinful behaviours. However, when these means fail to bring about repentance, the exercise of formal church discipline would become necessary.
- The purpose of such church discipline is to glorify Christ through the protection of the church and the sanctification of the member concerned. Discipline is not to be undertaken lightly. It requires a spirit of love and humility, with a conscious desire to restore the person involved. Members are liable to discipline if they:

- evidently and stubbornly persist in sinful behaviour
- deviate seriously from the truth of the gospel <sup>2</sup>
- wilfully neglect the privileges and responsibilities of membership.

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<sup>1</sup> For clarity, we affirm that we uphold the traditional biblical view that (1) sexual intimacy and intercourse is a gift to be enjoyed only within (heterosexual) marriage and that, outside of this setting, it is sinful; (2) marriage involves one man and one woman, who are not closely related members of the same family, bound together in a publicly witnessed and lifelong covenant relationship – thus excluding casual, homosexual, polygamous and incestuous relationships. (3) The casual or habitual practice of sexual intimacy outside of marriage, the viewing of pornography, adultery, homosexual sex, transvestitism, transsexualism, paedophilia and abusive conduct are all contrary to God's will for human beings. At the same time, we will always seek to make clear and to reflect in practice the forgiveness and grace that Christ extends in the gospel to all repentant sinners – including those for whom sexual sin has formed a major part of their backgrounds. Recognising that many Christians struggle with sexual temptation (whether of a same-sex or heterosexual nature), we will prayerfully seek to provide gracious support of one another in such struggles.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in opposing the teaching of the church as set forth in the Statement of Beliefs, or the implications of these beliefs for the practice of the church or the behaviour of believers.

## Church Life and Membership

### Discipline (cont)

- Discipline may entail suspension from serving within the church, from participation in the Lord's Supper or from other privileges. In the last resort it will involve dismissal from membership.
- Where disciplinary suspension from the Lord's Supper or dismissal from membership becomes necessary, it is by the elders' decision that will be disclosed at a special meeting of the church.
- If one third of the membership disagree with the elders' view of the matter they will be given the opportunity to state their case at a special meeting. The matter is then to be resolved by a vote of all members.



Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

(Colossians 3:16)





# Leadership

## General Points on Leadership

- We understand that Christ has given gifts to the church through the Holy Spirit. These gifts include men and women equipped and empowered for specific service. Leaders are to be formally recognised by the church.
- We understand that there are two groups of such recognised servants in the local church, the elders and the deacons. While acknowledging that only God is perfect, we believe that all such servants are to:

- be above reproach in marriage, in the care and discipline of children, and in business, social and church life
- show honesty, integrity, hospitality, temperance, patience, self-control, gentleness and godly contentment
- have a good and sincere grasp of the doctrines of the faith
- show spiritual maturity, not being recently converted
- have abilities appropriate to the work entrusted to them.



# Leadership

## Elders

- The elders, who in the New Testament are also called overseers and pastors, care for the church and oversee all aspects of its work. They must not act on their own authority but in submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom they will give account for their ministry. Their lives are to be governed by God's word, so that they lead by example. Above all, they are to be like Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life for His people.
- Elders must be able to teach the word, whether to the gathered church, to smaller groups or to individuals, since it is principally by this means that the church is protected, fed, edified and directed. They will vary in degree and type of gift and will consequently have different but complementary teaching roles. It is desirable that one or more be paid in order to give full-time attention to the ministry of the word.
- We understand that, in accordance with the pattern established in Scripture, only scripturally qualified men may be recognised for eldership. Women are encouraged to take up complementary and equally important roles in the church.
- Elders must have been baptised as believers and hold and teach the church's position on baptism of believers only.
- Elders will serve a three year tenure. This is renewable subject to a maximum of six consecutive years. An elder who is a pastor on a permanent contract is subject to annual review.

## Deacons

- In the broadest sense, all Christians are deacons as they serve Christ as members of His body. All who serve and particularly those whose service involves teaching must assent fully to the church's Statement of Beliefs and must display the qualities required of deacons as set out opposite.
- In the formal sense, the deacons are those who are recognised by the church as leaders in specific ministries. They have widely differing responsibilities, depending on their gifts and the work entrusted to them, both men and women being eligible to serve as deacons. They work closely with the elders, who have overall responsibility for leadership in the church.
- Like elders, deacons must have been baptised as believers and hold and teach the church's position on baptism of believers only.

# Leadership

## Further General Points on Leadership

- All church members are to cultivate a teachable spirit, to accept the elders' and deacons' care, and to seek to follow their lead willingly. When members feel that the leaders are mistaken in a course of action, they should explain their thinking directly to them, in a way which glorifies Christ and edifies the church.
- All in positions of responsibility, both elders and deacons, need the continual prayers of the church that the word and example of Christ may always be the controlling influence in their life, work and teaching.

## Recognition of Leaders

- All members, and particularly the elders, are to encourage the use and development of gifts within the church. In some cases this may lead to a recommendation that a member with appropriate gifts be recognised as an elder or deacon. Recognition of new elders and deacons is by resolution at a special meeting convened for the purpose.
- While we understand that it is usual for elders and deacons to be found from our own number, we recognise that it is sometimes necessary to seek an elder or deacon from the wider Church.
- Elders and deacons demonstrate their adherence to the fundamental doctrines of the faith by signing the church's Statement of Beliefs on the occasion of their recognition and on the first Lord's day of each year or, if absent, as soon as possible thereafter. On that day, the Statement of Beliefs will be read out and members asked to give their verbal consent.



## Discipline of Leaders

- Elders and deacons may be removed from their role through neglect of duty, sinful behaviour or wilful doctrinal error. As with all church discipline, this is a serious matter and should be carried out with the utmost concern for Christ's glory, the protection of His church and their restoration.

# Leadership

## Discipline of Leaders (cont)

- Any accusation against a leader should be made to the eldership. Where necessary, the matter should be dealt with in line with the safeguarding policy.
- If any complaint regarding neglect of duty, sinful behaviour or doctrinal error is found to be justified, the elders are to take disciplinary action. This action is to be confirmed by resolution of members at a special meeting, with the elder or deacon losing recognition and associated ministry from that time.
- If a disciplinary charge is brought against one or more of the elders, a special meeting of the church may be called by those elders who are not included in the charge or by one third of the members. Those calling the meeting are to explain the reasons for it and the basis of the charge. Every effort will be made to reach a decision by consensus. If necessary, additional special meetings can be arranged. Should the church fail to achieve consensus within three months of the first meeting, the outcome will be determined by a vote taken at a final meeting. If that meeting is quorate (see page 13) and the charge is upheld by 75% of members present, the elder(s) will be removed from their role.
- In disciplinary cases involving one or more of the elders, advice or help may be sought from leaders of other churches.



Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2-3)



## Decision-making in the Church

- Since Christ is the head of the church, the aim of all decision-making is to hear and obey His will as He has made it known in the Scriptures. Therefore, we are always consciously to be subject to the Scriptures and to rely on the Holy Spirit for help and wisdom in planning and discussion, whether by the leaders, by the whole church, or by groups with particular responsibilities.
- Although the elders have overall responsibility for the church, decision-making should involve general communication and discussion within the membership. This may be of an informal or a more formal nature.
- Some issues need to be discussed and decided by the whole church gathered together. The elders will give as much notice as possible of issues to be considered in this way, and where necessary will provide relevant teaching so that discussions are well-informed. Members wishing to raise matters for general discussion should speak to an elder.



- Where appropriate, such discussions may take place in one of the main meetings of the church. However, a special meeting will be convened for consideration of any matter which is confidential or likely to be time-consuming. Special meetings are generally convened by the elders but may also be held at the request of one third of the members. Advance notice of such meetings should be given on preceding Sundays and by electronic means to all members. The church also meets regularly, at least once a year, to discuss its finances.



## Decision-making in the Church

- All members should make every effort to attend such meetings and be willing to voice their thoughts on any point. If they cannot be present, they should make their opinions known to the elders. Non-members may attend at the convenors' discretion.
- Since the church is called to unity and peace, our discussions should reflect these ideals. In practice this means showing mutual respect and submission to one another, particularly where more than one view is expressed. The aim of discussion is to reach decisions through consensus among the members.<sup>3</sup>
- Meetings held for discussion are normally chaired by an elder of the church. Decisions can only be taken where two thirds of the membership are present. The elders are responsible for ensuring that decisions are recorded accurately and communicated to all members. Once a decision has been taken, all members are to support it.



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If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (James 1:5)

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to 'Reaching Decisions in the Church.'

## Evangelism and Mission Partner Support

- We understand that, as a local church, we share in the obligation to preach Christ in the whole world. This obligation applies within our own area and further afield.
- 'Within our own area' means that all members should use every opportunity to proclaim the gospel and to make it credible and attractive through a godly life. The elders should seek to teach and train the church for personal evangelism, whilst themselves leading by example.
- 'Further afield' entails partnership in evangelistic activity and church planting ministry and supporting new or needy churches. The elders should ensure that news of such work is brought regularly to the church, so that all members can be informed and prayerful for the advance of Christ's kingdom.
- While the ideal pattern is for mission partners to be sent from among our own number, it is good to help with the support of workers who are members of other churches. The elders are responsible for assessing the personal and doctrinal standing of all who may receive such support, before making a recommendation to the church. Members are encouraged to have fellowship with those supported, through visits, correspondence, gifts and prayer.
- At least one tenth of the church's income is devoted to mission partnerships, both in the UK and overseas.



## Finance and Legal

- We believe that the Lord provides for the church's needs principally through the giving of the members. All are therefore to give as the Lord enables them, and such gifts are to be seen as God's provision. The highest standards of integrity and efficiency are required in the use of money.
- The elders, together with the trustees, are responsible for bringing to the attention of the church any special needs or financial concerns and for ensuring that a treasurer and an Independent Examiner are appointed.
- The elders, together with the trustees, are responsible for appointing one or more deacons to ensure that the activities of the church abide by UK Law, in particular in matters of Health and Safety, Safeguarding and Data Protection.

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Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:10)

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## Premises and Property

- We understand that the buildings and equipment which we use are God's provision for many forms of activity. No part of any premises owned by the church is a "sanctuary" the use of which is restricted to congregational praise and teaching. The premises of the church can therefore be used in any ways that further the work of the gospel, provided that they reflect sound biblical standards and good stewardship of resources.
- In reaching judgments about activities and functions for which the church building on Berrycoombe Road may legitimately be used, the elders together with the trustees are required to take into account the Constitution of the Charity and the Trust Deed held by Western Counties and South Wales Evangelisation Trust.
- The members of the church are corporately responsible for the maintenance of the building and other property, whether through their own work or by employing outside agencies. Although the building is not the church, it is an aspect of the church's presence in the world which is continually seen by the public. High standards of safety and upkeep are therefore important.

## The Church and the Charity

- Trustees will conduct the business of the Charity in accordance with the decisions taken by the elders.

Proposed changes to the Handbook are explained by the elders at a meeting of the whole church. Where appropriate a consultation period can be set and a date agreed for a decision.

## APPENDIX 1 - Doctrinal Distinctives

### **The Sufficiency of the Scriptures**

Immanuel Church Bodmin believes that God speaks to men and women today through the Scriptures. When the Scriptures are read or explained, whether publicly or privately, God speaks by His Spirit.

The Scriptures contain everything that is necessary for God to say, whether explicitly or through deduction by good and necessary consequence, to enable people to come to salvation through Christ, and to grow to maturity in Christ such that they might know how to live to please Him.

Since the Scriptures are entirely sufficient in this regard, no additional word or revelation from God is required to enable a person to know God, or to know His will. Where anyone claims that God is speaking a word by any means other than through the Scriptures, such word shall not be accepted unless it is first rigorously tested to determine whether it is consistent with the Scriptures.

In accordance with the teaching of the New Testament, the elders of the Church are the persons within the congregation who bear the responsibility for assessing whether any such word is genuinely from God.

### **Baptism**

Immanuel Church Bodmin believes that Baptism into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is an outward sign which marks a person's regeneration and baptism by the Holy Spirit into membership of the Church of Jesus Christ. As such it should only properly be administered to a person who publicly professes faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism should, wherever possible and practicable, be administered by immersion in water, symbolising that the person baptised has been united with Christ in His death and resurrection and is the possessor of the benefits of this union.

### **The Lord's Supper**

Immanuel Church Bodmin believes that the Lord's Supper is a remembrance meal at which Christian believers share bread and the cup together to remind themselves of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, of the new covenant of salvation which He inaugurated, and to proclaim that He will return. Jesus Christ is no more present at a celebration of the Lord's Supper than at any other gathering of the members of a local church. The Lord's Supper should be celebrated on a regular basis by the members of the church, ideally in the context of a fellowship meal demonstrating their unity in the body of Christ.



## APPENDIX 1 - Doctrinal Distinctives

### **Election and Evangelism**

Immanuel Church Bodmin believes that God is sovereign in the salvation of people. Those persons who exercise genuine repentance and true faith in Jesus Christ do so because they have been chosen by God. Knowledge of this truth promotes amongst believers absolute humility and assurance of salvation. However it does not follow from the truth of election that believers need not participate in mission and evangelism.

The Church is commanded by Jesus Christ to preach the gospel to all people everywhere, and the proclamation of the gospel is the means by which the elect are brought to salvation.

### **Baptism in the Holy Spirit**

Immanuel Church Bodmin believes that every genuine believer was baptised by the Holy Spirit at the moment at which they were born again and brought to true faith in Jesus Christ. The experiences of the disciples at Pentecost and of the Samaritan believers in Acts Chapter 8 were unique and unrepeatable moments of salvation history, and they do not provide a pattern for present day spiritual experience. Whilst every genuine believer is therefore always indwelt by the Holy Spirit, it does not follow that every believer is necessarily filled with the Spirit at all times. All believers are urged by Scripture to ensure that they constantly yield to the power, influence and control of the Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

### **The Gifts of the Holy Spirit**

Immanuel Church Bodmin believes that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including but not limited to those mentioned in the New Testament, may be bestowed upon believers today as God Himself directs in His sovereignty. Gifts of the Holy Spirit, but not including those sign gifts that were manifested to authenticate Christ and His apostles, continue to be given to the Church for members to serve the common good of the Church. In order to safeguard the church, the public speaking of tongues as commonly practiced in Pentecostal and charismatic churches is not encouraged at Immanuel Church Bodmin meetings. However, should a person be moved by the Holy Spirit to speak in a tongue, we believe another person will be provided to interpret, and what is said should then be evaluated by the elders before being disclosed to the church as a word for the church from the Holy Spirit.

## APPENDIX 1 - Doctrinal Distinctives

### Salvation by Christ Alone

Immanuel Church Bodmin believes that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, and that He provides the sole means by which men and women may come to salvation. The Christian faith is the only true religion, and adherence to any other belief cannot lead to salvation. Believers in Jesus Christ are required to display tolerance in their attitude towards those of other faiths, but also to seek to bring them to a true saving knowledge of Him by prayer and evangelism.

### Leadership of the Local Church

Immanuel Church Bodmin believes that, in accordance with the pattern established in Scripture, a local church congregation should be led by a plurality of suitably gifted elders. Whilst God created men and women in absolute equality, he also ordained that leadership in the family, within the context of marriage, and in the church, should be the functional responsibility of men. For this reason, in obedience to the Word of God, the elders of Immanuel Church Bodmin are required to be male. The duly appointed elders of the church are the under-shepherds of Christ, and they must exercise their leadership of the

local church in accordance with the character of Christ's own leadership of the Universal Church. They are to love the members of the church and to give themselves in their service, working to present them to Christ as holy and blameless. In turn the members of the church are required to submit themselves to the leadership of the elders, in so far as such leadership is exercised in accordance with the Scriptures. Also in accordance with the pattern of Scriptures, male and female members of the church with appropriate gifts may be set apart as deacons to serve particular needs arising in the life of the church.



For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8)



## APPENDIX 1 - Doctrinal Distinctives

### Every Member Ministry

Immanuel Church Bodmin believes that each and every member of the church is called by God to utilise his or her gifts, whatever they may be, by ministering to other members of the church. The provision of teaching and pastoral care within the life of the church is not the sole responsibility of the elders and deacons. The church does not believe that there is any scriptural justification for a distinction amongst believers between clergy and laity, but affirms that every believer is a priest who enjoys direct access to God and is able to minister to others. The elders and deacons of the church are not qualitatively distinguishable from other members of the church, but are believers who have been appointed by the



members of the church to provide pastoral leadership of the congregation, in recognition that they are suitable in character and gifts to undertake such responsibilities.

### Sex and Sexuality

Immanuel Church Bodmin believes that God created men and women as sexual creatures. As such it is entirely right and pleasing to God that they should enjoy the pleasure of sexual intimacy. However, God has ordained that the only proper relationship within which such sexual intimacy may be enjoyed is marriage. Sexual intimacy between a man and a woman who are unmarried, or between persons of the same gender, is sinful and displeasing to God. Those who engage in sexual intimacy outside of the context of a marriage relationship, and who do not repent of their sin, face the certain prospect of judgement. However, God longs that all persons who have fallen short of His standards of sexual behaviour should come to repentance and faith so that they might receive complete forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and that they might resist temptation and live in a manner which is pleasing to Him.

## APPENDIX 2 Reaching Decisions in the Church

(Adapted from a paper by Richard Chester)

### Decisions Have to be Made!

#### a) Who is Going to Make Any Given Decision? (Authority)

- One person? (Who?)
- A small group? (Who?)
- The whole church?
- Some external authority?

#### b) How is the Decision to be Reached? (process)

- By dictat?
- By a vote?
- By consensus?

### What Does the Bible Say?

#### a) The Responsibility of Leaders

- 1 Timothy 5:17; 3:4-5.

#### b) The Importance of Unity

- Romans 15:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 2:1-4.

#### c) New Testament Examples of Decision-making

- A personal matter (Matthew 18:15-20)
- A policy matter (Acts 6:1-7)
- A mission matter (Acts 13:1-3)
- A doctrinal matter (Acts 15:1-35)
- A moral matter (1Corinthians 5:1-8).

The passages above emphasise the preciousness of unity, the necessity for the whole church to be involved, the tremendous privilege of the presence of Christ and the direction of the Spirit, the priority of prayer and the importance of sensitive leadership. Our aim should be to reach decisions that seem good to the whole church. Nothing is said about democracy, elections, majority rule, percentages, secret ballots, casting votes or imposed solutions.

## APPENDIX 2 Reaching Decisions in the Church

### Achieving Consensus in the Church

#### a) The Right Attitude to Christ

- Looking to *HIS WORD* (apostolic truth or principles) rather than our own taste or tradition
- Relying on *HIS SPIRIT* rather than our own resources
- Seeking *HIS GLORY* rather than our reputation.

***Christ must have the supremacy - It is HIS church***

#### b) The Right Attitude to One Another

*'The concern that discussion of controversial issues would tear a church apart is a sad commentary on the state of the church, the level of commitment to each other and the willingness to seek God's will earnestly in all things' (Gish).*

- Accept one another (Rom. 15:7 – see 14:15)
- Submit to one another (Eph. 5:21)

- All must feel free to contribute
- We must listen to one another and express our views with humility
- We must seek to use strong arguments but soft words. One person speaking the truth in love can change the whole direction of a meeting
- There is no place for manipulation, emotional blackmail, temper tantrums or sulking.

- Attitude is more important than the process; process more important than the decision.

#### c) The Authority of Leaders

- Administrative decisions should be taken by elders or other responsible people (1Tim 5:17)
- Authority of elders is bound up with their teaching role (1Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7)
- Where their teaching is in accordance with the word of God the church is under obligation to obey
- The views of the leaders and those who labour in the work should be greatly valued (1 Cor. 16:15-16)
- BUT elders must beware the danger of 'lording it over the flock' (1 Pet. 5:3)
- That means holding on to their proposals or judgements about what should be done with humility when they do not have direct biblical authority
- In decisions which will have a significant impact on the whole community they should seek to gain the approval of the whole church.



## APPENDIX 2 Reaching Decisions in the Church

### d) The Responsibilities of Leaders

- To set out the biblical teaching or principles impinging on the subject <sup>1</sup>
- To explain the advantages and feasibility of a proposal with realism and faith <sup>1</sup>
- To relate (if possible) how the proposed change has worked elsewhere (visiting testimony)
- To guide the church in its discussion
- Giving opportunity for all to contribute
- Discerning and articulating what people are saying
- Challenging any deviation from Scripture (Gal. 2:14)
- To propose a date when changes can be reviewed.

<sup>1</sup> Note: If possible these should be available in written form prior to any meeting.

### e) Dealing with Differences

- When Christians meet in the right spirit and the meeting is led sensitively we can look to the Holy Spirit to bring agreement
- The views of those rejecting biblical teaching or principles cannot be considered in arriving at a decision.
- If genuine difficulties remain the following actions can be taken:-

- **Amendment** - period of consultation with a view to an amended proposal
- **Discussion** - arrange groups representing varying viewpoints to meet for prayer and discussion
- **Acceptance** - one group may be prepared to accept the judgement of the rest. i.e. not to oppose. Where a spirit of love prevails leaders may feel able to ask one group to submit to the rest. Either way there can be complete harmony of spirit without complete unity of opinion.
- **Postponement** - such a delay should not be viewed negatively, but as an opportunity for fellowship and united prayer. As long as people feel they have biblical objections their reservations must be respected. One individual may be right. If dissenters are acting wilfully out of selfish motives they have not only to live with their own consciences, but also with the Lord who can convict, change or even remove them.

When we experience the unity the Spirit gives, we certainly will not want to forfeit those precious blessings that accompany His working - joy, peace, hope and freedom (Acts 13:52, Rom. 14:17, 15:13; 2Cor. 3:17).

## APPENDIX 2 Reaching Decisions in the Church

### A Comparison Between Parliamentary Democracy and the Church

a) Democracy is rule by the people

*The church (a Christocracy) is ruled by Christ through His word and Spirit.*

b) Democracy is a good process where a society of individuals has to function as best it can without any inner, unifying Spirit

*The church is not a society of individuals but a fellowship of the members of Christ's body, each possessing the same Spirit - it has a unique and divine oneness.*

c) Democracy governs by majority rule

*The church strives to know the mind of Christ the head of the body.*

d) Democracy assumes an equality of each person's vote and functions best where there is a common level of awareness among all persons

*The church includes a great variety of spiritual maturity in its members - hence the need for guiding elders who are themselves under the authority of God's word.*

e) In a democracy people can vote for what is most advantageous to themselves

*In a body we are forced to consider what will be most beneficial to all the members.*

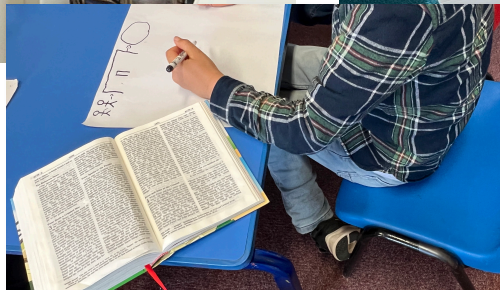
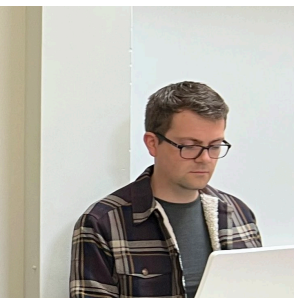
f) In a democracy votes are merely counted not weighed. The minority view may in fact be right, but lose the vote.

*Seeking a consensus means weighing the biblical rightness of every view and submitting to what best expresses the teaching of Scripture.*

g) Democratic procedure can harden party attitudes and leave a legacy of bitterness

*Seeking a consensus requires acceptance of one another and patiently working and praying for harmony.*





Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with

Christ. For we were all

baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body - whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. (1 Corinthians 12:1)



Immanuel Church Bodmin: Registered Charity No 1177704.  
Address: Immanuel Church Bodmin, Berrycombe Road, Bodmin, Cornwall PL31 2NS.