

CONSTITUTION FOR RIVERSIDE CHURCH, SLEAFORD

1. Name, Status and Objectives

- 1.1 This constitution governs the church that was formed by the union of Sleaford United Reformed Church and Sleaford Community Church (The "Partner Churches"). The new church shall be known as Riverside Church ("**the church**"), operating as an Independent church serving the district in and around Sleaford. It is also a continuing congregation of the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom.
- 1.2 The church primarily serves the community of Sleaford and those who associate with, or can benefit from, its ministry. Its overall purpose is to act as a Christian Church meeting the spiritual and social needs of its members, associates and the wider community.
- 1.3 The church shall also support, through charitable giving and other involvement, Christian mission in any place throughout the world that the members shall from time to time decide.

2. Doctrine and general rules for the conduct of church business

- 2.1 The partnership church accepts the statements of faith, Basis of Union, and rules of conduct as contained in The Manual of the United Reformed Church. It also accepts the Basis of Faith of the Evangelical Alliance (reproduced as an appendix at the end of this constitution.)
- 2.2 Those on the roll of full members meeting together (i.e., the Common Roll as referred to in 3.6) shall have the power to make such decisions as they deem necessary and appropriate to order the affairs of the church, always given that no decision may properly be taken that contravenes the statements of faith, Basis of Union and rules of conduct of the United Reformed Church

3. Baptism and Membership

- 3.1 Baptism, whether of believers or infants, is such an important step, that any persons involved (candidates or parents of infants) should proceed with the full knowledge of the options available to them. Infant Dedication and Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child, as well as a service for the Re-Affirmation of Baptismal Faith, are among such options. Infant baptism shall normally only be administered where one or both parents or at

least one sponsor (also known as a "Godparent") are regular members of the church. In accordance with the United Reformed Church Basis of Union, where a Minister of the United Reformed Church cannot in good conscience administer the baptism, s/he shall not be required so to do.

- 3.2 Preparation for believer's baptism by full immersion and preparation for admission to the responsibilities and privileges of full membership of the church shall include biblical teaching and Free Church tradition.
- 3.3 Baptism shall normally be administered within an act of public worship, and a register of baptisms, infant dedication and blessings shall be kept.
- 3.4 **Church Membership** is primarily a declaration of willingness to enter into a covenant relationship of mutual care with the other members of this part of the Body of Christ. It carries with it certain responsibilities and duties, which include: regular attendance at worship including the Lord's Supper; active sharing in the life of the church including attendance at members' meetings of the church; regular sacrificial giving; witness to God's love in the world by word and deed.
- 3.5 Those seeking membership of the church must give personal assent to their acceptance of the Evangelical Alliance Basis of Faith and/or the United Reformed Church Confession of Faith. They must also accept the provisions of paragraph 3.4 above.
- 3.6 A service of Reception into Church Membership shall normally be held during an act of worship. At the church's inception, all those joining from the Community Church, all who are currently members of the United Reformed Church and any who attend the URC but are not formally members may, if they so wish, be automatically deemed members of the new church, provided that they accept the provisions of paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5 above. Those received into membership in this way are full members of the church and if the member requests may also be a member of the United Reformed Church.
- 3.7 There shall be:
 - A Common Roll of the members of the church
 - A separate list of members of those members who are also members of the United Reformed Church
 - A separate list of those who are not in full membership of the church but who are regularly associated with the church, for the purposes of pastoral care.

- 3.8 For the purposes of financial assessment by the United Reformed Church for Ministry and Mission purposes, the membership figure will be that of all those members of the church who are on the Common Roll of membership.

4. **Worship and the Lord's Supper**

- 4.1 The church shall respect the faith and practice of the free church tradition including the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. In arranging worship services, encouragement shall be given to the participation of Lay/Local Preachers and others authorised as worship leaders.
- 4.2 Whilst recognising the traditions of the two partner churches, this is a new church which may develop its own new traditions and styles of worship relevant to witnessing to the contemporary community.
- 4.3 A balanced and varied pattern of worship shall be offered, to enable the congregation to explore and express its ecumenical life and aspiration, whilst at the same time ensuring that worship is accessible and sustaining for all its members.
- 4.4 Ordained ministers or other duly authorised persons shall preside at the sacraments of **the Lord's Supper and baptism**, except in the case of pastoral necessity where a suitably prepared person may preside with the consent of the Church Meeting.
- 4.5 The table for the Lord's Supper shall be open to all who truly seek Jesus as Lord and Saviour, regardless of their previous or current church background.

5. **Ministry & Leadership**

- 5.1 The church shall be led by a **Ministry Team**. There shall normally be a **Minister** of the United Reformed Church within this Ministry Team, duly called by the members of the church, according to the current practice and procedures of the United Reformed Church. Other suitably trained and gifted people duly called by the members of the church shall also be appointed to this team.
- 5.2 United Reformed Church Ministers shall be subject to the normal discipline of the United Reformed Church, and all members of the Ministry Team shall be accountable to the Church Meeting through the Leadership Team.

- 5.3 The Ministry Team shall be joined in providing leadership and oversight of the church by members of a **Leadership Team**. This team shall consist of no more than 8 full members of the church (or such other number as the Church Meeting shall from time to time agree, on advice from the Leadership Team.) All church members shall be eligible for appointment to the Leadership team, unless they are disqualified by law from acting as charity trustees.
- 5.4 All members of the church who are appointed to the Leadership Team shall be set apart for office by prayer in the context of public worship.
- 5.5 The Leadership Team will be appointed by the Ministry Team from among the members of the church. Each member of the Leadership Team will have a particular area of responsibility, and be the Team Leader for that area.
- 5.6 Team Leaders will be responsible for appointing members of their team with the approval of the whole Ministry and Leadership Team, and the Church Meeting.
- 5.7 There will be no specific length to the terms of office of the Leadership Team. They may be asked to step down by the Ministry Team or Church Meeting for disciplinary or other reasons, otherwise their departure will be by mutual consent.

6. **Authority and Responsibility**

- 6.1 The main decision making for the church shall be by means of the Church Meeting.
- 6.2 The **Church Meeting**, consisting of all those on the Common Roll (see 3.6 above), shall meet at least 4 times a year. In the meetings, members share in the privileges and responsibilities of membership and through discussion, responsible decision-making and care for one another, strengthen each other's faith and foster the life, work and mission of the church.

- 6.3 In particular, the Church Meeting shall:
- further the church's mission in Sleaford and develop local ecumenical relationships,
 - consider and support the wider work of the Church at home and abroad,
 - consider public questions in relation to the Christian faith and reports and proposals sent down by the denominational authorities and other church bodies,
 - bring concerns for consideration by the wider councils of the church.
- 6.4 Always on advice from the Leadership Team, the Church Meeting shall also:
- admit and transfer members
 - make, or provide for the making of, the proper maintenance of buildings and the general oversight of the church's financial affairs
- 6.5 Those not on the Common Roll may normally attend and speak but not vote.
- 6.6 Meetings shall normally be chaired by a member of the Ministry Team, but in their absence, one of the other members of the Leadership Team shall be invited to take the chair.
- 6.7 One Church Meeting each year shall be designated the **Annual Church Meeting** at which, in particular:
- there shall be a conversation on the work of God through the life and witness of the church, including consideration of reports from such church organisations as the Meeting may require;
 - independently examined/audited accounts for the previous financial year shall be presented for adoption;
 - an independent examiner/auditor shall be appointed for the current year.

- 6.8 As part of its role the meeting of the **Leadership Team** shall in particular:
- foster in the church concern for witness and service to the community, evangelism at home and abroad, Christian education, ecumenical action, local inter-church relations and the wider responsibilities of the whole church;
 - keep the church's objectives under regular review;
 - see that public worship is regularly offered and the sacraments are duly administered, particularly during a ministerial vacancy, and generally promote the welfare of members and adherents;
 - ensure pastoral care of members and adherents;
 - keep the rolls of members (see 3.6 above) and lists of names of adherents and children attached to the church, and in consultation with the Church Meeting, advise on the admission of members on profession of faith and by transfer from other churches;
 - be responsible for the institution and oversight of work among children and young people and of all organisations within the church;
 - recommend to the Church Meeting arrangements for the proper maintenance of buildings and the general oversight of all the financial responsibilities of the local church;
 - act on behalf of the Church Meeting and bring concerns to the wider councils of the Church.
- 6.9 The Leadership Team shall:
- meet at least 6 times a year;
 - set up such teams as it may from time to time consider necessary;
 - recommend the process and agenda for Church Meetings.

7. **Premises and Finance**

- 7.1 The church shall normally meet for worship and other activities in the church premises on Southgate that are owned by the United Reformed church and held in trust by The United Reformed church East Midlands Provincial Trust ("the custodian trustees").
- 7.2 The Leadership Team shall be responsible for the repair and upkeep of the premises as Managing Trustees for the Custodial Trustees. Major repairs and alterations should be approved in advance by the Custodial Trustees, and no decision to sell, rent or let any part of the premises may be undertaken without permission from the custodian trustees.

- 7.3 The premises shall be subject to inspection in accordance with the current Regulations of the denominational authorities.
- 7.4 There shall be a **common purse**, out of which there shall be discharged:
- a minimum of 10% of the church's total annual income given to charities both local and international. Such giving will be approved from time to time by the Leadership Team but, in cases of immediate or urgent need, the Ministry Team may agree donations.
 - the expenses of ministry and the administrative costs of the church;
 - financial obligations to the central and other funds of the United Reformed Churches;
 - upkeep and development of the premises, in accordance with the requirements of the custodian trustees;
 - such other donations and expenditure as the Church Meeting may approve.
- 7.5 The Church Treasurer shall be responsible for receiving all monies paid or donated to the church from whatever source, discharging all expenditure (as at 7.4 above), presenting accounts to the Leadership Team and the Annual Church Meeting, and submitting copies or details of the accounts as adopted to the denomination.

8. **Wider Participation**

- 8.1 The church affirms its continuing commitments to Churches Together in Sleaford & District.
- 8.2 The church shall maintain a proper relationship to the appropriate regional and national councils of the United Reformed Church.
- 8.3 Other churches in or near Sleaford are welcome to negotiate for formal union with the church at any time, subject to the agreement of the appropriate denominational authorities and the Church Meeting.

9. **Review, Termination and Amendment**

- 9.1 The church may be dissolved only with the approval of the appropriate denominational authorities.
- 9.2 This Constitution may be amended only by the endorsement of a Church Meeting called for that purpose, notice of proposed amendments having been given at least two weeks before the Church Meeting, and with the approval of the appropriate denominational authorities.

Appendix 1

The Evangelical Alliance Basis of Faith.

We believe in...

1. The one true God who lives eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
2. The love, grace and sovereignty of God in creating, sustaining, ruling, redeeming and judging the world.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. The incarnation of God's eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—born of the virgin Mary; truly divine and truly human, yet without sin.
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 justification of sinners solely by the grace of God through faith in Christ.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH CONFESSION OF FAITH (1972 version)

We believe in the one living and true God, creator, preserver and ruler of all things in heaven and earth, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Him alone we worship, and in Him we put our trust.

We believe that God, in His infinite love for all, gave His eternal Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who became man, lived on earth in perfect love and obedience, died upon the cross for our sins, rose again from the dead for evermore, saviour, judge, and king.

We believe that, by the Holy Spirit, this glorious gospel is made effective so that through faith we receive the forgiveness of sins, newness of life as children of God and strength in this present world to do his will.

We believe in one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church, in heaven and on earth, wherein by the same Spirit, the whole company of believers is made one Body of Christ, to worship God and serve him and all people in his kingdom of righteousness and love.

We rejoice in the gift of eternal life, and believe that, in the fullness of time, God will renew and gather in one all things in Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.

ALTERNATIVE URC CONFESSION OF FAITH (1997 version)

1. We believe in the one and only God, Eternal Trinity, from whom, through whom and for whom all created things exist. God alone we worship; in God we put our trust.
2. We worship God, source and sustainer of creation, whom Jesus called Father, whose sons and daughters we are.
3. We worship God revealed in Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God made flesh; who lived our human life, died for sinners on the cross; who was raised from the dead, and proclaimed by the apostles, Son of God; who lives eternally, as saviour and sovereign, coming in judgement and mercy, to bring us to eternal life.
4. We worship God, ever present in the Holy Spirit; who brings this Gospel to fruition, assures us of forgiveness, strengthens us to do God's will, and makes us sisters and brothers of Jesus, sons and daughters of God.
5. We believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, united in heaven and on earth: on earth, the Body of Christ, empowered by the Spirit to glorify God and to serve humanity; in heaven, eternally one with the power, the wisdom and the love of God in Trinity.
6. We believe that, in the fullness of time, God will renew and gather in one all things in heaven and on earth through Christ, and be perfectly honoured and adored.
7. We rejoice in God who has given us being, who shares our humanity to bring us to glory, our source of prayer and power of praise; to whom be glory, praise and adoration, now and evermore.

Appendix 2

The following arrangements shall apply upon formation of the church, to aid the transition from the two uniting churches into the one partnership church.

Ministry Team

The first members of the Ministry Team shall be the Revds Steve Faber and Peter Harding.

Leadership Team

Within one month of formation of the church, the new Leadership Team shall be appointed, with equal numbers from the two uniting churches.

Church Members

At the church's inception, all those joining from the Community Church, all who are currently members of the United Reformed Church and any who attend the URC but are not formally members may, if they so wish, be automatically deemed members of the new church, provided that they accept the provisions of paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5 of the Constitution above.