RODBOROUGH TABERNACLE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

Constitution

(March 2017)

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The members of Rodborough Tabernacle United Reformed Church assembled in Church Meeting on 19 March 2017 adopted the following Constitution:

1. THE LOCAL AND THE WIDER CHURCH

1.1. Rodborough Tabernacle United Reformed Church ('the Church') is a local association for the public worship of God, Christian witness and service in accordance with the principles and usages of the United Reformed Church ('the URC'). Admission to the full responsibilities and privileges of membership confers membership simultaneously in the Church and in the URC. The Church supports the wider councils of the URC through giving and participation, and may share in activity with other faith communities on an ecumenical basis.

2. BASIC CONSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS

2.1. As a local church of the URC, the Church is governed by the Scheme of Union of the URC ('the Scheme of Union') and those constitutional decisions of General Assembly binding on Local Churches. This constitution supplements the provisions of these as they affect the Church. In the event of any conflict between those provisions and this constitution, those provisions prevail.

2.2. The principal provisions of the Scheme of Union and other binding constitutional decisions are set out at Appendix 1 of this document.

3. TRUSTS AND ADMINISTRATION

3.1. The general funds of the Church, comprising all assets and funds held by and on behalf of the Church, are held upon trust for the advancement of the Christian faith for the benefit of the public in accordance with the Scheme of Union. The charity trustees are the members of the Elders' Meeting qualified to serve as such, acting in accordance with procedures laid down by the Church Meeting.

3.2. The Church Meeting, after considering the recommendations of the Elders' Meeting and any guidance issued under the authority of councils of the wider URC, will review procedures for proper administration of the general funds of the Church

3.3. The Elders are the charity trustees of the general funds of the Church and are responsible for presentation of an annual set of accounts to the Church Meeting and, where Charity registration has been completed, for preparation and submission of the annual Trustees report.

4. MEMBERSHIP

4.1. Admission to membership of the Church on profession of faith takes place when a person:

a) is considered by the Elders' Meeting able to make a meaningful profession of faith;

b) has received preparation that the Elders' Meeting considers adequate;

c) is accepted by the Church Meeting on the advice of the Elders' Meeting;

d) makes during public worship the profession of faith prescribed in the Basis of Union; and

e) if not previously baptised, is baptised;

f) is not eligible for admission by transfer.

4.2. Admission to membership of the Church by transfer takes place when a person

a) is a member of another local church of the URC, or of a Church with which the URC General Assembly has declared pulpit and table fellowship and

b) is accepted by the Church Meeting or (by delegation) by the Elders' Meeting.

4.3. There shall be a Roll of Members on which persons admitted to the full privileges and responsibilities of membership in the Church, whether on profession of faith or by transfer, are to be entered. Names are to be removed from this roll

a) on transfer to another church of the URC;
b) at the written request of a member wishing to relinquish membership;
c) by resolution of the Church Meeting on advice from the Elders' Meeting
d) on death.

4.4. A member by transfer shall be welcomed in public worship at an early opportunity but enjoys the full privileges and responsibilities of membership from the passing of the accepting resolution.

5. LEADERSHIP

The exercise of the total caring oversight by which Christ's people grow in faith and love is the special concern of elders and ministers, which may be complemented by the work of a Church Related Community Worker ['CRCW']. Before a call can be issued by a Church Meeting to a Minister of Word and Sacrament or a CRCW the procedures to be followed shall have been agreed by the Church Meeting after considering the recommendations of the Elders' Meeting and any guidance issued under the authority of councils of the wider United Reformed Church.

5.1. MINISTERS

The Church may, at any one time, have one or more ministers in pastoral charge; these are called to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

5.2. CHURCH RELATED COMMUNITY WORKERS

The Church may at any one time have one or more Church Related Community Workers. They are called to a ministry of caring, challenging and praying for the community.

5.3. ELDERS

5.3.1. Elders are appointed by the Church Meeting and are ordained to their office. Once ordained they remain an Elder, even though they may cease to act as a serving Elder. They share with Ministers of Word and Sacrament in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the church.

5.3.2. Elders may only be appointed to the office of Elder once they have been a member of the Church for twelve months, unless they have been accepted by transfer from another Church of the URC, in which case their membership of their previous Church will be counted towards this qualifying period.

5.3.3. The Church Meeting determines the term of office as a serving Elder. Unless otherwise specified, Elders will serve for a term of three years, which may be followed by a second term of three years after which they stand down for a year.

5.3.4. The number of serving Elders at any one time shall be between 15% and 30% of the congregation.

5.3.5. The method of election of serving Elders shall be as follows:

a) Nominations to serving Eldership shall be invited five weeks before the date of the Annual Church Meeting. Each member may nominate up to the maximum number of vacancies. After the nominees have agreed to be nominated, nominations shall be submitted to the Minister or the person nominated by the Church Meeting to be scrutineer.

b) The Minister or the person nominated to be scrutineer shall report the names of the nominees at the Church Meeting.

c) The election shall take place at the Annual Church Meeting and the result shall be declared at that meeting. If contested, the election shall take by ballot.

d) Arrangements for the induction of new Elders shall be made as soon as possible thereafter.

6. HONORARY OFFICERS, REPRESENTATIVES AND COMMITTEES

6.1. The Church Meeting shall:

a) consider the candidates nominated by the Elders' Meeting for the offices of Church Secretary and Treasurer. If the candidate for Church Secretary is not acceptable to the Church Meeting then a fresh nomination is to be sought from the Elders' Meeting.

b) elect a Church Treasurer.

c) elect a person or persons to represent the Church on the Synod. These shall normally be members of the Elders' Meeting

d) elect such other honorary officers and representatives to external bodies as it sees fit;

6.2. Church meeting may, with the agreement of Synod, appoint a serving Elder as an Elder in Lay Leadership, should the need arise.

6.3. The Church Meeting and Elders' Meeting may each establish such committees or ministry groups as they see fit, prescribing their method of appointment, terms of reference and frequency of reporting to the parent body. The Church Meeting may determine to which council of the church (itself or the Elders' Meeting) any committee or group established by it is to report.

6.4. Control of a delegated budget, with or without the competence to sign cheques drawn on church funds, may be delegated by the Elders of the funds concerned to committees, ministry groups or individual officers.

7. EMPLOYEES AND PAID CONTRACTORS

7.1. To avoid doubt, this clause does not apply to the appointment of stipendiary ministers or church-related community workers.

7.2. Appointment to any employed position in the service of the Church will be made by the Elders. The Elders will also be party to any contract with an independent contractor for services to the Church. Unless the services to be rendered are solely to assist the Elders in their function as such, the following rules will apply:

a) The creation of a new permanent employed position or its permanent abolition requires a resolution of the Church Meeting acting on advice from the Elders' Meeting.

b) The selection of an employee, the decision to vary contractual terms or terminate an employment (except for disciplinary reasons) or the decision to contract or

terminate a contract with an independent contractor are matters for the Elders' Meeting.

c) Another church committee may act in lieu of the Elders' Meeting under the foregoing paragraph but only by express delegation from the Elders' Meeting.

d) The Elders are to scrutinise the terms of any contract of employment or for services before it is concluded.

e) The Elders are at liberty to take, without receiving explicit directions, such other measures in relation to employees as good employment practice may indicate.

f) Elders may only employ or contract with one of their own number for the supply of goods or services if all requirements of charity law in relation to the remuneration of trustees are satisfied.

g) An Elder must be absent from the part of any meeting at which his or her employment or remuneration, or any matter concerning a contract to which he or she is party other than as a trustee (including his or her performance in that employment or the performance of the contract) are discussed. He or she must not vote on any matter relating to his or her employment or the contract and must not be counted when calculating whether a quorum of Elders is present for that item of business.

8. PROCEDURES

8.1. CHURCH MEETING

8.1.1. The Church Meeting shall be held in the context of worship and prayer, members seeking at all times to discover and obey the will of God for themselves and the Church.

8.1.2. The Church Meeting consists of all those whose names are included in the Roll of Members of the Church. Others present may speak but not vote.

8.1.3. 14 days' notice must be given for the convocation of a Church Meeting; in exceptional circumstances a motion may be passed by two thirds of those present and voting to accept a shorter period of notice.

8.1.4. Members gather in Church Meeting at which the Minister shall normally preside, once a quarter or at such other times as may be duly appointed and announced. In a period of vacancy, the Interim Moderator appointed by Synod will normally preside. In the event that the Minister or the Interim Moderator is not available, the Church Secretary or another Elder agreed by the Elders may preside.

8.1.5. Decisions may be taken by the Church Meeting will be binding if the meeting is quorate and the motions are passed by an appropriate majority. Unless otherwise specified in this document, the appropriate majority will be greater than one half of

those members attending and voting. The quorum for the Church Meeting is one third of the members on the Roll.

8.1.6. Any two members may move that any vote shall be taken by ballot or that any particular decision shall require a two thirds majority of those present and voting.

8.1.7. Any motion to modify the Constitution shall require a majority of 75%.

8.1.8. Any motion to call a new Minister shall require a majority of 80%.

8.1.9. Any resolution to close the Church shall require a majority of 75%.

8.1.10. The Annual Church Meeting shall be held not later than 31st March in any year, the date to be settled at the last Church Meeting of the previous year. Matters to be included in the business of the Annual Church Meeting are:

a) to elect Elders, and
b) to adopt the Annual Financial Statements of the previous year.

8.1.11. The Church Secretary and Treasurer, having been nominated by the Elders at their first meeting after the Annual Church Meeting, shall be elected at the first Church Meeting thereafter.

8.1.12. Other matters reserved to the Church Meeting are:

c) to call a Minister (with the concurrence of Synod Council),
d) to admit and transfer members, to maintain standards of membership, and to suspend or remove names from the Roll of Members, always on the advice of the Elders Meeting,
e) to approve the financial budget for each financial year
f) to close the Church.

8.2. ELDERS MEETING

8.2.1. The serving Elders shall meet at least 10 times per year.

8.2.2. The notice period for an Elders Meeting shall be at least seven days.

8.2.3. The quorum for taking decisions at an Elders meeting shall be one half of the serving Elders.

8.2.4. Any decisions of the Elders meeting shall require a simple majority of the Minister and the Elders present and voting.

8.2.5. Matters to be discussed at Elders meetings include:

a) matters related to the Functions of the Elders, as set out in the basis for Union (see Appendix 2 to this document).

b) matters referred to Elders by the Church Meeting,
c) at the first meeting after the election of one or more Elders, the Elders meeting shall consider the lists of those assigned to the pastoral care of particular Elders and bring those lists up to date.
d) at the first meeting after the election of one or more Elders, new Elders shall be given a copy of a statement of the working practices in the care of the property and a copy of a record of the whereabouts of the records, memorials and other articles in the possession of the church and their placing and condition.
e) consideration of the financial position of the Church
f) approval of matters required by the Financial Procedures to require the approval of Elders.
g) The care and responsibility of all property held for and on behalf of the Church, in which responsibility Elders will seek the support of all members of the church.
h) The Roll of Members shall be reviewed annually. The Elders shall give prayerful consideration to the names of any whose membership appears to have lost its reality. They shall take such steps as may seem wise to visit and encourage such members in their discipleship. If after such pastoral endeavour they are satisfied that membership has effectively lapsed they shall bring recommendation to the Church Meeting for the removal of the name or names in question.
i) any other matters related to the pastoral care and management of the Church as may be deemed appropriate.

8.3. FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

8.3.1. The Treasurer shall maintain a record of the financial procedures to be followed by the Church and this shall be reviewed and confirmed at least annually by the Elders.

8.4. CALLING OF A MINISTER

8.4.1. In the event of an impending vacancy in the pastorate due to resignation or death or when a resident minister gives news of his or her impending removal, the Elders shall ensure that this is made known to the Synod Moderator and the Area Minister. At an early date, and in consultation with the Synod Moderator and the Area Minister, steps towards the appointment of an Interim Moderator should be initiated.

8.4.2. The Church membership shall be kept fully informed of the procedure to be followed and throughout the vacancy be given frequent opportunity to express its mind on the steps being taken by the Elders.

8.4.3. As soon as can be properly arranged, the Elders should seek a meeting with the Interim Moderator (minister) to work out a pattern of relationship most likely to sustain the life of the Church during the vacancy.

8.4.4. The Synod Moderator will be invited to discuss with the Church the steps to be taken.

8.4.5. Pastorate Profile – in cooperation with the Interim Moderator the Elders should seek with the membership to update a Pastorate Profile in accordance with the Synod Moderator's advice. The Synod Moderator will endeavour to bring to the Church the name of a suitable candidate to fill the vacancy.

In the matter of calling a minister, the procedure should be:

8.4.6. Three members from among the serving Elders should be nominated to represent the Church on a Vacancy Group.

8.4.7. The Vacancy Group is responsible for recommending that the candidate visits the Church. When doing so it is advised that there should be a joint Elders Meeting with the candidate on the Saturday afternoon followed in the evening by a congregation meeting for questions and conversation. The candidate will take a service in the Church.

8.4.8. The Interim Moderator in conjunction with Elders will arrange a special Church Meeting at the earliest convenient date after the candidate's visit to consider the appointment. The meeting will be chaired by the Interim Moderator.

8.4.9. Notice of the meeting and of its purpose shall be given at least two Sundays in advance.

8.4.10. A ballot will be taken seeking an 80% majority of the votes cast by those members present. Two scrutineers will be appointed to oversee the ballot.

9. AMENDMENT

9.1. Alterations of, or additions to, this constitution may be made by the Church Meeting, normally on the recommendation of the Elders' Meeting. They must be consistent with charity law and with the provisions mentioned in clause 2.1 that affect the Church, and must receive the support of at least 75% of the members present and voting at the session of the Church Meeting.

10. CLOSURE AND DISSOLUTION

10.1. Any resolution to close the Church must be passed by the Church Meeting and approved by the appropriate wider council of the URC. When approved the resolution will have the effect of dissolving the Church as an association, at the date agreed between the Local Church and the Synod.

10.2. A direction may be given by the Church Meeting for unrestricted monies held as part of the general funds of the Church to be applied after the satisfaction of debts and

liabilities, in a specific manner determined by the Church Meeting (within the charitable objects set out in the relevant trust instrument).

10.3. If no such direction is given the Church Meeting shall be deemed to have directed the trustees to apply the unrestricted monies held as part of the general funds of the Church, after the satisfaction of debts and liabilities, as determined (within the charitable objects set out in the relevant trust instrument) by the Synod.

11. INTERPRETATION AND MISCELLANEOUS

11.1. In this constitution:

a) 'Elder' refers to a serving Elder but 'ordained Elder' refers to any person ordained to the Eldership and includes ministers of word and sacrament who are on the Roll of Members but currently hold no active office in the URC.

b) 'Minister' refers also, where the context allows, to the Interim Moderator during any vacancy.

c) 'Synod' refers to the Synod of the URC on which the Church is, or was last, represented.

Appendix 1 – Scheme of Union

The following significant provisions of the Scheme of Union are binding on local churches.

The provision:	Principal provisions of the Basis of Union (B) or Structure (S)
a) assigns the immediate oversight of the Church to the Church Meeting and the Elders' Meeting	S1(3), 2(1), 2(2)
b) provides for the membership and functions of the Church Meeting (in particular, in the Call of a Minister) and for non-voting attendance	S2(1)
c) provides for the membership and functions of the Elders' Meeting	S2(1)(viii), 2(2)
d) provides for councils of the wider church, for the Church's direct or indirect representation upon them and for appeals from more local councils to a council having wider responsibility	S1(2)(a), 1(3), 2(1)(vi), 2(3), 2(4), 2(6) and 5
e) provides for consultation in decision-making	S4
f) contains (in the Basis of Union) a statement concerning the Faith of the United Reformed Church	B10, 12-18
g) provides for the celebration of the Gospel sacraments	B14, 15; S2(2)(ii), 2(4)(A)(xx)
h) provides for the ministry of Word and Sacrament, for the ministry of other Elders, and for Ministers' and Elders' ordination and induction	B19, 20, 21, 23, 25; S2(1)(vii), 2(2), 2(4)(A)(vii)
i) provides for the ministry of Church-related Community Workers and for their commissioning and induction	B19, 22; S2(1)(vii), 2(2), 2(4)(A)(vii)
j) provides for the admission of baptised persons to the full privileges and responsibilities of church membership	B14; S2(1)(ix), 2(2)(vi)

Appendix 2 – The functions of the Elders

The functions of eldership in the United Reformed Church have been laid down in the Basis of Union as follows:

i. to foster in the congregation 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;

ii. to see that public worship is regularly offered and the sacraments are duly administered, and generally to promote the welfare of the congregation;

iii. to ensure pastoral care for the congregation, in which the minister is joined by elders having responsibility for groups of members;

iv. to nominate from among its members a church secretary (or secretaries), to be elected by the church meeting, to serve both the church meeting and the elders' meeting;

v. to arrange for pulpit supply in a vacancy; 2 Called to be an Elder – is this for you?

vi. to keep the roll of members … lists of names of adherents and children attached to the congregation, and in consultation with the church meeting to maintain standards of membership and to advise on the admission of members on profession of faith and by transfer, on the suspension of members, and on the removal of names from the roll;

vii. to be responsible for the institution and oversight of work among children and young people and of all organisations within the congregation;

viii. to call for the election of elders and advise on the number required;

ix. to consider the suitability of any applicant for recognition as a candidate for the ministry, and to advise the church meeting about its recommendation to the synod;

x. to recommend to the church meeting arrangements for the proper maintenance of buildings and general oversight of all financial responsibilities of the local church;

xi. to act on behalf of the church meeting and bring concerns to the wider councils of the United Reformed Church;

xii. to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the church.