



EMMANUEL COMMUNITY CHURCH

CHURCH DOCTRINE, VALUES & CULTURAL ISSUES

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out the elders' doctrinal beliefs, the key church values that flow from them and our stance on some cultural issues impacting the church.

A key objective of this paper is to clarify and reaffirm the foundation for the elders' leadership of Emmanuel Community Church (ECC).

Our doctrinal beliefs are aligned with the FIEC Doctrinal Basis. For ease of reference we have set out (where applicable) the FIEC statement on a particular doctrine (in blue text) with our additional statements below.

Whilst it is essential for members to subscribe to the ECC Doctrinal Basis it is not a requirement of membership of ECC for believers to fully concur with the ECC Doctrine, Values and Cultural Issues document in its entirety. Whilst our hope is that the members of the church would be able to fully subscribe to our views, we recognise that some will not agree with our position on every issue.

Although members may not fully agree with everything written in the document, it does represent the basis on which the elders wish to lead the church forward in its gospel mission and as such, we are looking for all members to be united in supporting us in this task.

We would expect future pastors and elders of ECC to subscribe to the views expressed in this document since our future vision for ECC will be rooted in them.

Our prayer would echo the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 43,

“Oh, send out your light and Your truth!

Let them lead me;

Let them bring me to Your holy hill

And to your tabernacle.”

1 Doctrine

1.1 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.

God exists eternally in three distinct but equal persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son perfectly obeys the Father and brings glory to the Father through the salvation of sinners. The Holy Spirit is sent by both the Father and the Son to apply the work of salvation in uniting believers with the Son.

The Trinity means that God by nature is relational and loving. The self-sufficiency of the Trinity means that we do not need to bring anything to appease or satisfy God's needs because He is already fully complete and content with himself. This allows us to see Him as a generous giving God as He needs nothing from us. The Trinity allows us to describe God as eternal, unchanging and love simultaneously. Without the Trinity it would be impossible for God to have stood as both our judge and atoning sacrifice.

We believe God is in control of all things, at all times working out His eternal purposes and the salvation of His elect. It means that He is worthy of our worship; that prayer is a right response and an effective exercise; that assurance is possible; that trials and sufferings have a good purpose as God works everything out for the good of those who love Him. God has, does and will triumph over all other rules and authorities. God is sovereign over all circumstances and will ultimately use all circumstances to bring about His salvation plan. Circumstance alone does not reveal the perfect will of God. God uses circumstance for His ultimate plans, but this does not necessarily mean that our immediate experience of that circumstance will be good. God's sovereignty in no way undermines human responsibility. God is Lord over all.

1.2 The Bible

God has revealed himself in the Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments alone. Every word was inspired 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 that The Bible is clear to all who seek God's will and are willing to live by it, even though the human mind is finite and fallen in its reading of it. The final authority of The Bible means that the Bible must interpret culture and culture must not interpret the Bible.

1.3 Creation

We believe that God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, and called them “good”. Nothing that now exists, exists apart from the fact that God created it. God the creator therefore deserves our worship.

1.4 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.

1.5 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.

The Lord Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, came as mankind’s perfect, long awaited Prophet, Priest and King. He lived sinlessly in perfect obedience to his Father and He spoke truthfully at all times. He lived, died, was buried and rose again in order to bear God’s punishment for sin as an atoning sacrifice; to redeem sinners from the hold of sin and death; to reconcile human kind to God and to bestow His righteousness on all those who trust in Him. In His resurrection body He ascended into heaven where He is exalted as the Lord of all and all people will one day bow the knee to Him. He is the Head of the church. He intercedes for His people in the presence of the Father and He will come again to judge the living and the dead. Salvation is in and through Christ alone.

1.6 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.

We hold a reformed view of the doctrine of salvation. God alone chooses, elects, calls, justifies, sanctifies and glorifies his people. The gospel is offered to all and humankind must call on the Lord to be saved (Joel 2:32) but only those who are elect will respond to the call. God calls us to Himself by His word and calls us to respond to His word (Romans 10:17). Salvation is in Christ alone, through faith alone and through grace alone as He lives our righteousness and dies our death. He exchanges our debt of sin for a wealth of righteousness, raising us to new life and adoption as the Sons of God, promising to one day complete our salvation by

giving us His inheritance and restoring us to a new heaven and earth in the presence and glory of God. We believe in both the total depravity of humankind and irresistible grace.

We believe that we are all under the judgement of God and God has revealed himself to all humankind. As Romans 1 says, "What can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them... so they are without excuse." We believe that 'salvation is found in no one else other than Christ as there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12).

1.7 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 Holy Spirit is at work in the regeneration and sanctification of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe that every Christian receives the Holy Spirit at the moment at which they are born again and brought to true faith in Christ. Every believer is therefore filled with the Spirit and is urged in Scripture (Ephesians 5:18) to go on being filled by Him each day as they increasingly yield to His power, influence and control. *We do not accept theologies/worldviews that a) deny the power of God or b) divide believers on the basis of receiving a "second blessing".*

The heart of the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit lies in His bringing us into a living relationship with Jesus Christ so that we share in His redemption and all its blessings. God's people, united with Christ, are encouraged by Paul to know more of the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that they may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19).

The Holy Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will and as the deposit of our faith He works inwardly to bring assurance in the life of the Christian.

God's usual means of working is through his Spirit-empowered Word. The Holy Spirit in the life of the believer helps us to understand the word of God and rightly apply it to our lives. When the word of God is faithfully taught and preached we will have appropriate, heartfelt emotional responses. Our theology of the Spirit is not to be seen as dry and lacking experience.

The Holy Spirit also equips God's people for works of service using His gifts in the life of the church and the believer. The exercise of the gifts must always be in accordance with and in submission to the Scriptures. In the life of the church, the exercise of the gifts must be orderly.

1.8 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.

We believe that the local church must be accessible to all. However, to belong to the Church is to be a professing Christian. To be a member of ECC we would usually look for a person to have attended regularly for 6 months. They must assent without reservation to the ECC Doctrinal Basis and be willing to accept our doctrinal distinctives and values as outlined in this paper. Members will submit themselves to the leading and God-given authority of the elders as they lead in accordance with the Scriptures and church rules and will submit themselves to church disciplinary practices. They should be personally involved in mission and evangelism, use their gifts for the good of the church, pray for the church fellowship regularly and give financially for the work of the church where they are able to do so.

1.9 Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Baptism 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 blessing are received in faith.

1.9.1 Baptism

We believe, teach and practice believers' baptism. This is our understanding of the Biblical position and we would actively encourage all who have a credible profession of faith to be baptised in obedience to Christ's command.

We acknowledge that Christians from other traditions, eg Anglican or Presbyterian, may embrace a covenant theological position and favour infant baptism. We do not consider that differing views on baptism should be an issue that divides believers or bars them from membership of ECC.

1.9.2 The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a continued sign of God's grace to us. It is a faith meal and should be taken regularly by all who are in good standing with Jesus and His church. It is a meal which unifies God's people and ought to demonstrate this in its administration. The removal of the invitation to participate is a key part of church discipline as it signifies broken communion with Christ and his church.

1.10 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.

For those who are in Christ, eternity is an everlasting bodily reality where the heavens and earth are once more reconciled and recreated. Jesus reigns and we will live in a perpetual state of fellowship, worship and delight in God. For those outside of Christ, they remain under God's righteous anger and wrath and will experience eternal conscious punishment in Hell.

2 Church Values

Doctrine ought to shape our values. It is important that we allow what we believe to lead us to consistent practice. In this section we set out the values that shape our leadership of Emmanuel Community Church.

2.1 Truth Matters

We believe that Truth matters. As elders, we should preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort. We should hold fast the truth of God's word in the knowledge that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness.

The gospel of salvation by grace is so precious to us that we desire to stand together with all who believe and preach it. For the same reason, we cannot express Christian fellowship with those who reject it. The New Testament warns us repeatedly to guard the church against the influence of false teachers who deny the truth. Therefore, we cannot partner in evangelism or activities of Christian fellowship with those who are unable to affirm the essential doctrines of the faith as described in the FIEC Doctrinal Basis. We are unable to affiliate formally to groups which exist to express unity between churches naming Jesus as Lord, but without concern as to whether they hold to the core doctrines of the gospel.

We recognise the place for good relations with other local churches, but we will not formally partner with churches that do not accept or teach the truths as outlined in the FIEC Doctrinal Basis. Instead we will seek gospel partnerships with churches and mission organisations who share our core beliefs, across Greater Manchester and beyond, to fulfil our Global Vision commitment.

2.2 Knowing God Matters

We believe that the Christian's knowledge of God matters. Through this knowledge our inward being is being renewed day by day and we are being transformed into the image of Christ.

Holiness is a key work of God Spirit's by whom believers are sanctified, qualified for service and led to their eternal destiny. The inward working of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer will result in putting to death the sins of the old nature and being quickened by the Spirit towards good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do. Knowing God impacts the whole person.

The continued work and experience of God's Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is of vital importance. The apostle Paul prays that we will be strengthened with might through the Spirit in our inner being that we might know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that we might be filled with all the fullness of God. Knowing God more personally and intimately matters and our experience of God should be daily as we seek for God to do in us abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.

2.3 Community Matters

We want to be a church where community matters. We believe that the Church of God should be a family of support and love where we bless and disciple each other through our lives. We want outsiders looking into our church to see a people who love one another and who are committed to the Lordship of Jesus and the glory of His name, throughout every sphere of life.

Our church should be one that is actively involved in showing the love of Christ to the local communities in the Heatons and Reddish, understanding and seeking to serve their social, personal and spiritual needs. ECC should be at the very heart of the community, not on the fringe of community life.

2.4 Unity Matters

In John 17:20-26 Jesus prays for all believers, that we His people might be known by four characteristics, namely truth, holiness, mission and unity. We want to be a church where unity matters.

First, he prays that we might enjoy unity with the apostles (verses 20 and 21) as we remain loyal to their message and mission recorded for us in the New Testament.

Secondly, Jesus prays that we might enjoy unity with the Father and the Son.

It is this kind of unity (a shared apostolic truth and more divine life through the Holy Spirit) which will bring the world to believe in Jesus (verses 21 and 23).

2.5 Mission Matters

We serve a missional God and must therefore be a missional church.

In God's sovereignty He has decreed that the agency of mission is His body, the Church. Whilst we want to celebrate the work of many para-church organisations, our belief is that the church ought to be the primary agent in God's mission. As such this means that it is the responsibility of the entire church to be involved in mission. We are called to a life of mission; it is not something we do but rather as Christians and a church it's something we are.

Our desire is that our church enlarges through conversion growth, with new converts being disciplined to bear much fruit to God's glory. As an eldership we want to see the church grow both numerically and spiritually.

Geographically our mission field is the Heatons, Reddish, Stockport, South East and East Manchester and our ambition is to plant other churches as we grow.

We believe that God has led us to Houldsworth Mill and we see tremendous opportunity for mission work to take place at the Mill to complement the work that already exists at Green Lane. We see a direct connection between the church being at the heart of community, the Mill premises and our missional drive.

Our mission strategy will be relational in its focus. This will include 'come to' mission based events and community action as we reach out with the love of Christ into our

community. We fully recognise that ultimately mission is only mission if the gospel is proclaimed. Whilst there may be much that we could do that leads to mission and evangelism, until salvation through Jesus alone is actually proclaimed, it cannot be described as evangelism.

2.6 Church Matters

Below we have set out what we believe regarding the operation and practice of church life at ECC.

2.6.1 Church Government

We believe that the local church ought to be led by the elders and not governed by the congregation, with the whole church supporting and trusting its leaders as they seek to lead in accordance with the Scriptures and the church rules. Without such trust leadership can become ineffective and burdensome. Maintaining trust requires good communication between elders, deacons, trustees and members.

2.6.2 Leadership Roles

2.6.2.1 Trustees

Trustees are responsible for ensuring that we complete our required aims and governance as required by the Charity Commission. They are not actively responsible for the day to day running of the church although a trustee may have an active role in church life as an elder or deacon.

2.6.2.2 Elders

We believe that the scriptures are plain in saying that men are to hold the office of elder. Elders must teach and pray for the church, leading by example and guard the church from doctrinal error and from those who would seek to deceive and destroy. Elders should be an example of godly living to the church and wider community. The elders serve alongside the pastor(s) in shaping the vision and leading of the church in mission and discipleship. Elders are ultimately responsible for all aspects of church life, though they may seek to assign some responsibilities to deacons under their oversight.

2.6.2.3 Pastor(s)

The lead pastor, first among equals on the eldership, must busy himself teaching the Bible, praying for and pastoring the people and being passionate for mission. He should be able to lead the elders and the wider church leadership in setting a biblical vision and strategy for ministry and mission. He with the other elders and ministry leaders should seek to identify and deploy church members to fulfil the church's vision and use their gifts for the good of the church.

2.6.2.4 Deacons

Deacon means servant. There is no biblical job description for a deacon, rather a deacon will serve at the request and under the oversight of the elders to implement the vision and strategy of the elders as their gifts allow and for the good of the whole church.

2.6.2.5 Staff

Whilst in an ideal world we would delight in a church that can be fully staffed by volunteers, there is a disconnect between our desire to grow and the number of available volunteers to make such growth a reality. As such, some ministry areas of ECC may require paid staff in order that they might flourish. Members of staff (volunteers and salaried) will work with the pastor(s) and elders in the day to day ministry of the church to implement our vision, mission and values.

2.6.3 Preaching

The church family receives teaching, direction and leadership through the preaching of God's word. Whilst topical and thematic preaching have their place, the main approach to preaching ought to be expositional, allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible, understanding the scriptures in their original context before applying them to our contemporary context. This allows the word of God to set the agenda for God's people as the elders preach through the whole council of God.

2.6.4 Pastoral care

Pastoral care is caring for the whole person. The scriptures are sufficient for speaking into all areas and aspects of life. Pastoral care should be rooted in applying the word of God into the life and situation of those being pastored. Our primary understanding of pastoral care is that it should be undertaken at various different levels, by every member ministry, home groups, organisational and ministry deacons and the elders.

2.6.5 Prayer

Prayer is the bedrock of Christian living. It is simply speaking and listening to God. The primary mode of prayer is to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. In this way, prayer is rightly Trinitarian. Prayer is God's given means by which we can partner with Him in the outworking of His plans as we pray according to His will. Prayer is effective; it is always answered but not always as we would like or expect. Prayer ought to be done at all times, corporately and individually with proper reverence but also with childlike reliance and persistence. The church family prayer meeting ought to be a key building block of our church and prayer ministry should be developed throughout all aspects of the life of the church.

2.6.6 Corporate worship styles

We favour a more contemporary sung worship style using hymns and old and new songs. We believe that corporate worship ought to be rooted in the word and truth and be neither disconnected from these nor be simply cerebral. We seek to choose songs and liturgy that use and emphasise Bible truth in order to praise God and to build up the church. Our aim would be that our corporate worship arouses love and adoration to the King of Kings.

2.6.7 Discipleship

Discipleship along with mission is one of the two key primary purposes of any church. Both discipleship and mission are the principle criteria by which we may assess the effectiveness of any ministry of the church.

Discipleship is teaching and equipping people to live under the lordship of Jesus. It helps them to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness and gentleness. The Christian should 'fight the good fight of faith and take hold of the eternal life to which they have been called' (1 Timothy 6). A life of discipleship is part of God's work of sanctification as we grow to know and love God more. It is done through opening up, expounding, and applying the scriptures to all aspects of our lives. It can be done corporately, in small groups and in a one to one context. All Christians are called to a life of discipleship. Discipleship, not age nor longevity of faith, is the key to Christian maturity. It is possible to have been a Christian for a long time or have had much life experience and still be immature. Full maturity cannot be attained this side of the second coming. Until Christ returns no one is able to say "I am complete" rather they should be constantly seeking after God's will.

Discipleship done well will mean that mission and evangelism will follow. In fact, discipleship is the bedrock of mission. It is as people understand the life-giving gospel, the heart of God and the plight of people that they will be compelled to speak. It is as they are taught the incarnational coming of Christ, the gift of the Spirit and the call of God that they will be compelled to go, and it is as they understand the fullness of the gospel, the depth of doctrine and the hope of heaven that they will have the power of transformation on their lips.

We want to equip all disciples for a life of mission after God's heart. As disciples then go on mission under God, we pray that they will make disciples, who will make disciples, who will make disciples. Discipleship is the Bible's strategy for mission (Matthew 28).

2.6.8 Global Vision

God is a giving God and so there is a mandate for his church to be a giving church. ECC has always had a mind-set of generous provision toward Global Vision.

God is also a sending God and so we believe that the church ought to be at the front line of sending. Our long-term desire would be that our mission partners are home-grown and sent. Given that the church is the primary agent of God's mission to the world, we want to seek partners who share with us in prioritising the local church, either through church planting or training pastors and who have a desire to see people disciplined in order to make disciples. We want those who we support through Global Vision to be an extension of ECC to the wider world sharing our mission, vision, values and core doctrine.

Mission partners ought to be genuine partners where there is a two-way relationship between church and partners and partners and church. It is more than a financial relationship. We want to be able to have genuine friendship, love and fellowship with them.

Practically speaking we believe that we should give to mission partners based on the percentage figure of the previous year's actual income. This will mean that we can cut our cloth accordingly and what we have promised to our partners is what they will receive without need for us to access our reserves.

2.6.9 Home groups

Home groups are a way in which a smaller community of believers can connect to the wider church family. We believe that every member should be an active part of a home group and all regular attenders ought to be invited to join one. They are a place where people can be more personally disciplined and pastorally cared for, where mission can be more targeted and where, the vision, doctrine and mission of the church can be effectively communicated. We recognise the need to have regular training of leaders and good communication links between the elders and the home group leaders.

2.6.10 Children and Youth

The salvation and discipleship (following conversion) of the church's children and youth are vitally important so that they mature into adults prepared to live their lives for Christ. ECC should strive to work in partnership with parents recognising that the primary responsibility for teaching, training and pastoral care of children and young people should start and continue in the home. Our overreaching objective is that our children and young people as they trust Jesus as their Saviour and Lord will reach out to their friends with the gospel of Christ.

We recognise that many people come to faith in Christ in their early years. The Children's and Youth work is therefore important in the life of Emmanuel Community Church. The work is missional and must be outward looking seeking to engage with unchurched children and youth to proclaim the good news of Christ. Increasingly it is necessary to be innovative in our missional outreach to the children and youth of our community.

3 Cultural Issues and the Church

We believe that the Gospel speaks to all cultures and generations throughout the ages. There are issues that impact each generation and our generation is no different. Below we have set out our position in respect to three current issues: women in ministry, marriage, divorce and remarriage and same-sex marriage. As a church, we are aligned to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) and we support its doctrinal position on these issues.

3.1 Women in Ministry

We believe that men and women are equal but with different roles. The Bible describes male headship both in the church and family. This stems from an understanding of the pre-fall created order seen in Genesis 1 and 2. The example par excellence of this headship model is that of the Trinity, where the Son, whilst being fully God and therefore fully equal with God, submits in all things to the Father. The model is also seen in the way the church is called to submit to Christ as our head. Christ is the example of loving sacrifice for the good of His bride, the Church, thus illustrating how husbands are to love their wives and children, elders are to sacrificially serve the church and all believers are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

We also agree with this extract from the recent “Women in Ministry” statement from the FIEC (01.11.2016) and this has been the position of ECC (HMEC) since its inception:

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

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

With regard to preaching, the pastor and the elders (the male primary leaders and teachers of the church) have always been responsible for delivering most of the preaching at Sunday services and will continue to do so. Evangelical Christians who accept the Bible as their sole and sufficient authority may however reach different conclusions as to how the role of women may be exercised in preaching, and our practice has varied over the last twenty years. Both views are represented in the membership and whilst some from both sides of the debate have left the church (citing this as a reason) during the tenures of our last two pastors, others have not considered that this is a difference which should divide the church and have remained, united around the church’s mission.

We believe that the scriptures are plain in saying that men are to hold the office of elder and pastor. Women, however, may hold and actively participate in all other offices and roles in church life. We believe that women, along with men outside of the eldership, can preach under the authority of Scripture and the oversight of the elders. However, the elders recognise that at this current time women preaching

can divide opinion and for the sake of church unity have decided to retain the current practice of male only preaching.

The FIEC have advised that the position stated above is in line with their position.

3.2 Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

Marriage is a creation ordinance, established by God before the fall. It is by definition heterosexual and monogamous, a God ordained institution to be celebrated. We want to proactively encourage and disciple men and women both prior to marriage and as their marriage goes on acknowledging that it is a lifelong commitment of two sinners uniting as one. It will bring challenges and struggles as well as joys and blessings.

With regard to divorce we would wish to consider each situation on a case by case basis. The Gospel is a Gospel of reconciliation. Our concern is always to pastor toward reconciliation wherever possible (acknowledging that there may be times where this may not be wise or appropriate). If all attempts at reconciliation have been exhausted we believe that Scripture does leave room for divorce. Remarriage may be permissible in certain circumstances.

3.3 Homosexuality and Same-sex Marriages

We believe that there is a clear distinction between same sex attraction and homosexual practice. The former is not a sin issue whilst the latter is. All people (homosexual or not) ought to be treated with grace, compassion, respect and dignity. Life is messy and people are saved from all sorts of backgrounds and lifestyles and we should pastor practicing homosexuals in the same manner (although recognising different issues) as we would co-habiting couples, etc.

The Bible is clear that as humans our primary identity derives from the fact that we are made in the image of God. As Christians, we have a new identity secured in the perfect image of God - Jesus Christ. As such we find our identity and our created purpose in God and not in our sexuality.

In both the Old and the New Testament, marriage is painted in a positive light. Homosexual activity, along with all other sexual intimacy outside of heterosexual marriage, is declared by God to be sinful. Nowhere in the Bible is there an expectation that marriage can exist between two or more people of the same sex. Marriage is by definition heterosexual and monogamous.

Summary

The doctrine, teaching and values set out above are intended to provide a platform for the leadership of the church by its elders.

Our prayer is that God will use our human endeavours to his glory and the church which we are honoured to lead will flourish through the lives of the church family devoted to His service.

The Elders

March 2017