Pastoral Policy of Aldwick Baptist Church

Preliminary

- Aldwick Baptist Church recognises that we are a people of grace and compassion, and we are called to operate with grace and compassion to all those we meet, especially those who belong to our Church.

- For those in full time ministry, as well as those who pastorally care for those within the congregation, through meetings on a one-2one basis, through homegroups or other means, these values are primary. Indeed, our words, attitudes and how we act, must also convey these qualities. We are to be a people of faith; whose works demonstrate that faith in Christ, James 2v18-24. Our aim is to foster 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace', Ephesians 4v3, even when disagreements may emerge within congregational life. We are to always speak the truth in *love,* Ephesians 4v15.

- These principles are vital, especially with regard to areas such as sexual orientation, which will be discussed further below, as well as how we care for those of all ages. Every person matters, whoever they are, and whatever age. Discriminatory, critical, angry and harsh attitudes are unhelpful – respect must be honoured.

- We must be mindful to ensure that we must never abuse our positions of 'power', and to be careful that people under our care are never manipulated through inappropriate techniques. We are to try and love as Christ would love, in every situation.

Integrity

- Every person involved with pastoral care, needs to be a prayerful individual, a reader of the scriptures, and seeking the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. These are to be disciplines that engender spiritual growth and personal faithfulness to Christ - a commitment to personal truthfulness, based in continual and open self-examination and reflection.

- Commitment to the equal and proper treatment of all people, with special attention to issues of confidentiality; are very important, except when the 'law of the land' has been clearly breached, at which point further action may be deemed necessary.

- Self-management in regard to all sexual relationships, especially relationships to children, young people and vulnerable adults, as set out fully in our 'Safeguarding' documentation, is vital.

- A commitment to financial integrity is needed and to live in such a way as provides an example of godly living, and thus giving no cause for others to stumble - modelling good practice.

Training and Development

- It may be necessary that those who are particularly involved with pastoral care, might sense the need for further development through training and courses. This needs to be accommodated.

Personal Relationships

- It is important to recognise that full time ministers in particular, need space and time for themselves and for their families. Therefore, those who have oversight in the Church need to monitor the busyness of any such individual, minister or otherwise, in order to protect them from potential 'burn out.'

Availability

- Further to the above, especially in the case of the minister, it needs to be recognised that he/she does not work set hours as an employee, but is called as 'a way of life' to shepherd the flock of Christ. This does not mean that they are required to work beyond what is reasonable to expect, but flexibility and availability are principles of pastoral leadership. This must also be assessed and monitored by those with oversight.

Pastoral Care – general principles

- The overall responsibility for the pastoral care of the flock lies with the minister, although it is unlikely that they will be solely responsible for its delivery. Often this will include the visitation of the dying and bereaved and those seriously ill at home, or in hospital and the house-bound, although in congregations over a certain size, this will of necessity need to be shared with other individuals. Compassion and grace must be preeminent.

- As previously written, it is normally good practice to maintain strict confidentiality regarding matters of sensitive pastoral information. However, there is no absolute right to confidentiality. Safeguarding legislation will always require that where the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults is threatened, appropriate action should be taken to disclose harmful action. Indeed, there may be specific issues where it is clear that danger is present, at which point confidentiality may also not be possible.

- Ministers, like every church member, are subject to the will of Christ discerned by the gathered church and have a special role in maintaining their congregational, safeguarding, health and safety and pastoral policies.

Language and Communication

- Care should be taken in the use of language, avoiding that which brings ministry or the gospel into disrepute. Ministers are expected not to speak ill of other leaders or ministers in public settings, or in fact ill of any person in their congregation. Logically his applies to all those involved with pastoral care - indeed it is a general principle that all Christians should observe. Attention should be given to the appropriate media through which to communicate, with special care in the use of new electronic media – a code of behaviour and pastoral practice must always be maintained, even here.

Sexuality and ministry

- The issue of sexual orientation, transgenderism and related sexual matters are high profile. It is important to note that the Council of the Baptist Union has positively re-affirmed and still commends to the Union's churches, the Union's historic Biblical understanding of marriage as a union between one man and one woman, and calls them to live in the light of it. The Union has no power to enforce this commendation upon a given church, instead regarding it as a matter for the local church, its minister and congregation, to decide upon.

- The Council has also, whilst reflecting on the issue of churches registering their buildings for same sex marriage, recognised areas of genuine and deep disagreement within The Church nationally, and within local congregations, over the matter of sexual orientation. As that is so, they regard this as an area of tension, one of 'living with unity and diversity', and one that requires pastoral sensitivity.

- With regard to registering same sex marriages, and for churches considering conducting same-sex marriages, the Council asks them to refrain from doing so out of mutual respect. Under the provision of the new Act a religious organisation that wishes to conduct a same sex marriage must re-register their building. The current licence is not sufficient; thus a church will have to make a conscious decision to 'opt-in'. In order to re-register, the church must have the written permission of the 'appropriate governing authority', and for Baptists this must be the local church meeting.

- Please see the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 and Implications for Baptist Churches, https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=212480

Ministry and legality

- In relation to pastoral care, a pastor has wide latitude to express biblical positions on any controversial issue. Exemptions exist in the Equality Act for churches to define their own doctrine and conditions of membership. Exemptions further exist in the Public Order Act (Sections 21J and 21JA) for religious speech on sensitive issues like homosexuality and Islam. Moreover, the Human Rights Act places even further protection on the actions of a church, under Article 9 of the Convention and the legal principle of church autonomy.

- This legal advice is from the Christian Legal Centre, 70 Wimpole Street, London, W1G 8AX, christianlegalcentre.com, and from an email from 22nd August 2019.

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