

Welcome to -

Rehoboth Baptist Church

New Street, Horsham, West Sussex.



FAITH AND PRACTICE

Introduction

We believe that the final authority in all matters of Christian faith and practice is the Bible. This outline is not meant to replace it, but to provide a convenient summary of Biblical teaching. It expresses the beliefs on which the Church is founded. All elders and deacons must give wholehearted assent to it, as must any involved in regular speaking or teaching of any kind within the Church. This outline is intended as:

- a guide to the teaching of the Bible, especially helpful to new members of the Church;
- a standard to safeguard the teaching of the Bible, by which wrong teaching can be excluded and right teaching upheld; and
- a stimulus to live out the teaching of the Bible in a way which pleases God.

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Part 1 What we believe

God

1.1 We believe in one living and true God. He is infinite in his power, glory and wisdom, and perfect in his holiness, justice and love. He alone is to be worshipped and obeyed.

1.2 God created from nothing the entire universe; he upholds it by his power so that it continues to exist; and he sovereignly rules over all things for his glory, in a manner which expresses his infinity and perfection.

1.3 We believe that this one God exists eternally in three Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three persons are equal in nature, power and glory.

. Passages for study:

Genesis 1:1-2:4

Deuteronomy 6:4-19

Psalm 8, 104

Romans 11:33-36.

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2 Man and Sin

2.1 We believe that God created man in his own image, thus giving him a unique position and dignity within the created universe. All human beings share equally in this dignity. God created man to know and love him, and to rule over and care for the earth which he had made.

2.2 However, the first man Adam rebelled against the commands of God. Because of his rebellion, he forfeited the relationship with God which he had enjoyed, and evil and death began to affect creation.

2.3 Since then all men have inherited at birth a sinful nature, and an inbuilt bias towards sin and against God; therefore all share in sin's guilt. Every aspect of

human nature has been corrupted by sin. As man is unable and unwilling to free himself from his slavery to sin, he is subject to God's righteous anger and judgement. Yet he remains a morally responsible being, accountable to his Creator.

- **Passages for study:**

Genesis 1:26 - 3:24

Romans 1:18 - 3:20, 5:12-21

Ephesians 2: 1-3.

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3 Jesus Christ

3.1 We believe that, before the creation of the world, God chose and planned to save a vast company of people which no man can number. He did so solely because of his great love and mercy, and not because he foresaw any merit or faith in human beings.

3.2 At the right time in God's plan, the Father sent his Son into our world to secure the salvation of sinful human beings. Although sharing equally in the divine nature with the Father, he became a real man, like us in every way but without sin. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ the Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary. He lived a life of perfect obedience to his Father, and died a criminal's death on a cross, though he himself had done no wrong. As a substitute for sinners, he took on himself the full weight of God's righteous anger against sin. On the third day after he was put to death he rose again from the dead, as foretold by the Scriptures. By his resurrection he broke the power of death in order to give life to all who entrust their lives to him. He ascended into heaven, where the Father has given him honour as Lord over all things. Because of Jesus' work, the Father delights to grant his requests as he

intercedes in heaven on behalf of his pe

ople. One day he will return to this earth to judge every human being (See Section. 8).

- **Passages for study:**

- *God's plan:*

- Galatians 3:19 - 4:7

- Ephesians 1:3-14

- *Jesus' Nature:*

- John 1:1-18

- Philippians 2:5-11

- Hebrews 2:5-18, 4:14-16

- *Jesus' Birth:*

- Matthew 1:18-25

- Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-21

- *Jesus' Life:*

- Acts 2:23-36

- *Jesus' Death:*

- Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

- Romans 3:21-31, 8:1-4

- *Jesus' Resurrection:*

- 1 Corinthians 15:1-5

- *Jesus' Heavenly Ministry:*

4 Becoming a Christian

4.1 We believe that God commands each person to stop rebelling against him and his ways, and to receive the salvation which he offers. Before an individual can be reconciled to God in this way, it is necessary for the Holy Spirit to work in his life. God opens his eyes so that he understands the truth of God's word, changes his heart so that he welcomes it, and frees his will so that he can respond to it. Although this is God's work, becoming a Christian is a free and responsible action on the part of the individual in whom God is working.

4.2 Becoming a Christian involves four things which properly belong together: repentance, faith, responding to the Christian message through baptism, and receiving the new life which the Holy Spirit gives. (These are explained below).

4.3 Repentance begins when we see our life and our sin as God sees them, and we desire with all our hearts to turn away from sin and live under God's rule.

4.4 Faith recognises that we cannot save ourselves. All we can do is to receive with gratitude the provision which God has made for us to be reconciled to him through Jesus Christ, and to trust him to keep his promises to save all who turn to him. Through faith in Christ, believers are united with him so that when God looks at us, he sees the perfect righteousness of Jesus instead of our sin. God declares just (or 'justifies') those who trust in Christ in this way, pardoning their sin and counting them righteous. Those who are justified are adopted into God's family.

4.5 Baptism is the way in which we express outwardly our new-found faith. Those who have turned from sin to God and are trusting Christ to save them are immersed in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In being baptised, we identify ourselves with Christ in his death and resurrection for us, we are assured that through Christ our sin has been forgiven, and we commit ourselves to living God's way. Baptism normally leads to becoming a part of the local church.

4.6 When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit begins to live in us. He gives us a new heart, which desires above all else to please God. He opens our eyes to understand the message of the Bible, enables us to overcome sin, equips us with gifts and power to serve God and makes us more and more like Jesus Christ as we display the family characteristics.

4.7 This new relationship with God cannot be earned or deserved: it is due entirely to God's grace.

• **Passages for study:**

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Acts 2:37-47, 16:13-34

Romans 5:1-11, 6:1-14, 8:5-27

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Ephesians 2:1-10.

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5 The Christian life

5.1 God commands human beings to worship him alone. Therefore Christians should be exclusively committed to him. As members of God's kingdom, we are under God's rule. In presenting our lives to God and seeking to put him first, we express our worship.

5.2 Every aspect of daily life serves as an opportunity for us to demonstrate our love for God as Christians - work, family life, personal relationships, ethical standards, decision-making, involvement in society, and leisure. In all these, we seek to govern our lives by the teaching of the Bible; we depend on God to enable us to do so. The good works that result validate our claim to have become Christians.

5.3 Throughout the Christian life, the process of renewal continues. Although there are times when Christians sin and slip back in their relationship with God, this is not to be the norm, and the Bible assures us of the great power of God which can deal with long-standing sins and difficulties. Genuine Christians always return to God in the end; he will not allow them to fall away from him totally or finally.

5.4 Because Christians live for God, we should stand out from the rest of the world. Often this will lead to opposition, but God promises to enable us to remain faithful. The Holy Spirit assures us of our standing as Christians, and helps us to trust God to keep us.

• **Passages for study:**

John 10:25-29, 17:1-23

Romans 6:15-23, 12:1-13:14

1 Peter 1:13 - 2:12

1 John 1:6-10.

6 The Church

6.1 We believe that the Church is made up of all true Christians, from every race and every age in history. Christ is the head of the Church, and exercises authority over it.

6.2 According to the New Testament, Christians in a particular locality are to commit themselves to meeting together as a local church. A local church should be marked by teaching based on the message of the Bible, leadership which helps Christians mature spiritually, self-giving love between Christians who are part of it, and obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ.

6.3 The local church exists to make known the Christian message to all in its locality and to provide for the growth of its members through teaching, pastoral care and the exercise of the spiritual gifts which God has given them.

6.4 The church is to meet together regularly; each member should make it a priority to be present where possible, not neglecting this without good cause. Such meetings have the building up of one another as their purpose. This happens as members learn from the Bible, celebrate the Lord's Supper, have fellowship, and pray together. In this way they are enabled to live effective Christian lives.

6.5 The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus Christ before he died, and local churches should continue to celebrate it regularly as part of their meeting together until he returns. As Christians take the bread and wine together, they call to mind Christ's death which has reconciled them to God. In this way their

faith and hope are strengthened and they affirm their commitment to serve one another and to serve Christ.

6.6 The Church is ultimately governed by Christ, but he does so through calling individuals to lead local churches (The manner in which this happens and the responsibilities of leaders are dealt with in 'Our Practice in Church Life'). Leaders do not exercise authority on their own account, but as they obey the leading of the Holy Spirit. This comes as they study and obey the Bible. Members of the church are to submit to such leadership and to support their leaders in whatever way necessary. In a local church, leaders normally include elders (also known as pastors) and deacons.

6.7 Just as Christians within a church are to love and accept one another, so true Christian churches within a particular locality are to demonstrate their unity in Christ by their relationships (More is said on this in 'Our Practice in Church Life').

• **Passages for study:**

Local Churches:

John 13:34-35

Acts 2:38-47, 4:32-37

1 Corinthians 11:19 - 14:40

Hebrews 10:19-25

The Church's Task:

Matthew 28:16-20

The Lord's Supper:

Matthew 26:17-30;

1 Corinthians 10:14-22, 11:17-34,

Church Leadership:

Ephesians 4:11-16

1 Timothy 3:1-13.

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7 The Bible

7.1 Although God reveals his glory and power in the universe, this is insufficient of itself to lead man into a personal relationship with him. Therefore, God has revealed himself and his plan of salvation to man, in order that man might come to know him.

7.2 God has revealed himself through word and deed in history as he has fulfilled his plan of salvation, leading up to the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. God has also revealed himself by causing the Bible (comprising the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments) to be written, as a permanent record and explanation of his revelation in history.

7.3 Although human authors wrote the Bible, God ensured that they wrote the very words which he wished to be recorded as his revelation to man. Because this is so, the Bible is entirely trustworthy in all its teaching; therefore it is the only sure and complete guide to knowing and serving God today. Christians and Churches are to live by the teaching of the Bible. No other book, person, or tradition has such authority. All that they say must be tested against the teaching of the Bible.

7.4 In order to understand the message of the Bible, we depend on the Holy Spirit to enlighten us. He does so as we study the Bible humbly and reverently, as we benefit from the ministry of those whom the Holy Spirit has gifted as teachers and preachers in the Church, and as we seek to obey God's will expressed in his Word.

- **Passages for study:** Psalm 19:1-14 Romans 1:18-20
1 Corinthians 2:6-16
2 Timothy 3:10-17
Hebrews 1:1 - 2:4
2 Peter 1:16-21.

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8 The Future

8.1 We believe that history is moving towards the time when all whom God has chosen will have been saved, and Jesus Christ will return visibly and in person. The dead will be raised, and everyone who has ever lived will be judged. Those who do not know God will be eternally separated from the presence of God in Hell, as God's just punishment for their sin. Those who know God will be welcomed into the presence of God in Heaven, where they will enjoy eternal and perfect life with Christ. All creation will be made new, and all evil destroyed, and so God will be honoured for ever. Christians long for this time; they are to prepare themselves for it by the way they conduct their daily lives.

- **Passages for study:**

Psalm 96:1-12

Matthew 24:1 - 25:46

Acts 1:6-11

Romans 8:18-25

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Revelation 1:4-8, 21:1-22:6.

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Our Practice In Church Life

Introduction

Because the Church is founded by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, it is not like other organisations and groups of people. It is God's family, and rules alone are not enough to ensure that it functions as God intends. However, in order that we conduct ourselves in a consistent and honourable manner and avoid misunderstanding, we seek to govern our Church life by the following guidelines, in the light of the Bible's teaching in 'What We Believe'.

1 Belonging to the Church

1.1 Becoming a Christian and joining a church is a serious and life-changing commitment, and should not be undertaken lightly. Commitment to a church as a member involves:

- living a life which is under God's rule, fulfilling our responsibilities at home and at work in a manner which pleases God;
- submitting to and learning from the teaching and practice of the church, as far as it is in agreement with Scripture;
- giving priority to being present at (and taking part in) the regular meetings of the church (without neglecting our duties at home and at work);
- loving support of the church and its members by prayer, mutual encouragement and correction, giving (in proportion to income - 10% is recommended as a guideline found in the Bible), practical involvement, and submission to the pastoral care of its leaders;
- participating regularly in the Lord's Supper (we invite to the Lord's Supper those who are baptised members of this church, and, at the discretion of the elders, visitors who are members in good standing with other Bible-based churches);
- witnessing to our faith in Christ as opportunity arises, and sharing in the church's evangelistic work;
- using the spiritual gifts which God has given us to build up the members of the church;
- breaking with any secret societies (such as the Freemasons) or non-Christian religious groups and practices (such as the occult) in which we have been involved.

2 Joining the Church

2.1 Any individual who wishes to join the church should speak to one of the elders. They then arrange for the applicant to meet one of them (and, if appropriate, other spiritually-mature members) to discuss the request. The elders seek to ascertain:

- whether the individual is a Christian, repenting of all known sin and trusting in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord;
- whether he is seeking to live a consistent Christian life in dependence on the Holy Spirit's help;
- whether he is prepared to commit himself to the responsibilities of membership outlined above;
- his grasp of Christian teaching, and in particular of the contents of 'What We Believe'. Elders may at their discretion recommend that the applicant has several small sessions of instruction before or after becoming a member, perhaps in a small group, so that he may gain a basic understanding of Christian teaching and lifestyle.

2.2 If the applicant has recently been a member of another church, commendation will also be sought from them as an act of fellowship. Individuals who are under the discipline of another church, or who have chosen to resign from it, will not normally be received as members, but will be encouraged where possible to return to their own church.

2.3 If the elders are satisfied, at the next Church Meeting the applicant is invited to testify of his Christian faith and experience so that the church may rejoice with him in what God has done. This testimony may be given in written form if preferred. He then leaves the meeting briefly so that the members may ask any relevant questions and hear a report from the elders or other members who have met with the applicant. The elders may then propose that the applicant be welcomed as a member of the Church (subject to baptism if this has not already taken place), and the members signify their approval. The applicant then returns to the meeting and is informed of the church's decision. All members have a responsibility to care for those who join the fellowship, and one way of expressing this is for the church to welcome new members formally at the next meeting which celebrates the Lord's Supper.

2.4 Members remain under the pastoral care of the church when sent out by the church to engage in Christian work elsewhere, though they are encouraged to join another local church where possible (on occasion, they may in addition retain their membership with us as the sending church). It is recommended that members undertake all their Christian service in a spirit of fellowship and discussion with the church, and give priority in this sphere to the work of the local church.

2.5 Members who move home are encouraged to join another Bible-based church as soon as possible. In considering a move, they should guard against the temptation to seek financial, social or other advantage at the expense of spiritual welfare.

2.6 Any member wishing to resign from membership should discuss this with the elders; resignation is not normally accepted, and it is best for the health of the church and the member that a reconciliation be sought, or an amicable solution reached.

3 Church Discipline

3.1 The practice of discipline is essential to the well-being of the church. Mutual encouragement and correction is part of this discipline in its broadest sense, as is pastoral care. Formal church discipline is necessary when a member neglects his responsibilities towards the fellowship or acts in a divisive manner within it, commits serious sin, or embraces serious doctrinal error. Its purpose is to restore the erring member to fellowship with God, to mend the broken relationships between the erring member and the Church, and to demonstrate the fact that Christ calls his people to be holy.

3.2 Its practice is seen in Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5 and 1 Timothy 5. In the first place, any member who sees another member acting in a manner contrary to the teaching of Scripture should speak with them privately and attempt in love to restore them. Failing this, he should take another member with him for that purpose. As a last resort, he should bring the matter to the elders for the church's consideration (though discretion demands, on occasion, that the church trust the judgement of the eldership in matters which it is not fitting to discuss publicly). Members are not to gossip about the failings of others, but to care for them and pray for their restoration.

3.3 Discipline may take the form of:

- correction and rebuke, whether private or public;
- suspension from membership for a set period (in this case the individual may not share the Lord's Supper, attend Church Meetings, or undertake church work, although he is encouraged to attend other meetings of the church);

- exclusion from membership. This step should only be taken when all attempts at restoration have failed, and is an occasion of great sorrow.

3.4 As soon as there is clear evidence of repentance, the church is publicly to restore the offender to membership and to welcome them in love, offering all necessary assistance as they seek to rebuild their life.

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4 Church Business

4.1 The Church is to hold Business Meetings (also known as Church Meetings) as often as necessary, and at least once a quarter. At such meetings the elders lead the church in:

- prayer and waiting on God, especially for God's blessing on the church;
- the appointment of elders, deacons and other officers;
- dealing with pastoral matters such as setting apart members for particular aspects of Christian work, church discipline, and other concerns relating to the church's spiritual health which the elders may have or which are brought to their attention;

- considering church policy and relationships with other Churches and groups;

- planning for the work of the church (all departments of the church are to communicate regularly with the members via the Business Meetings, and to raise major issues with the whole church for prayer and consideration);

- financial matters (accounts are to be presented to the church at a Business Meeting quarterly and major items of expenditure discussed, while annual accounts for all departments of the church are to be prepared in accordance with the law of the land, circulated to members, and available for public inspection);
- discussing reports and major proposals relating to church property.

4.2 All Business Meetings require the presence of at least one third of the members (except for cases outlined in sections 5.5 and 7). Notice of such meetings should be given to the church at its meetings on the two preceding Sundays (except where the elders wish to notify members of applications for membership, in which case no notice need be given). They are normally chaired by an elder, and minutes are taken by an individual appointed to do so. Members are to exercise discretion and caution in their conversation with non-members concerning matters discussed at Business Meetings. Non-members are only permitted to be present by invitation from the elders, and may only speak when permitted to do so.

4.3 Members are encouraged to raise items for possible consideration at a Business Meeting. They should notify the elders, who discuss all items before bringing them to the church.

4.4 The object of each Business Meeting is to discern the will of God. Although each member is involved in this process, it may or may not be achieved by formal voting. Members who have not attained the minimum school-leaving age are not entitled to vote, though they are encouraged to attend where possible, and may also speak. The elders normally bring a recommendation on each issue to the church and members consider this, dissenting only when there is good reason (such as a conscientious objection grounded in Biblical teaching). However, elders are to listen carefully to any objections since these may be a sign that

the matter needs to be considered further before action is taken.

4.5 It may on occasion be felt best to allow postal or proxy votes to be cast by members unable to attend the meeting. For each issue on which such a vote is felt necessary, the procedure and the closing date for receiving such votes should be agreed at the previous Church Meeting and made known to all members.

4.6 An Annual General Meeting should be held at which reports from all departments are received and discussed, accounts are presented and the recognition of officers such as Secretary and Treasurer reaffirmed. Such a meeting also provides a valuable opportunity for the elders to outline their convictions regarding God's will for the church.

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5 Recognition of Elders and Deacons

5.1 Local churches are normally to be led by elders (of which it is desirable that at least one is supported by and serves the church in a full-time capacity) and deacons. Elders serve the church by:

- giving themselves to prayer;
- directing the affairs of the church, planning its meetings, and leading it in fulfilling its task of evangelism;
- interviewing those who wish to join the church;

- teaching the members of the church, individually and together;
- ensuring that each member receives the pastoral care which they need;
- spiritual ministry to those who are sick;
- leading the Church in the exercise of discipline;
- developing members' gifts and enabling them to use these to serve God.

5.2 Deacons are to assist the elders, freeing them to undertake their particular responsibilities by:

- efficient administration of church affairs and finances (a Treasurer and a Secretary should be appointed from the membership to serve as deacons);
- ensuring that Church property is properly maintained and prepared for meetings and activities which take place on the premises;
- assisting in pastoral care of those in need (including, where possible, the meeting of any practical needs).

5.3 For a person to be recognised as an elder or deacon, he or she must be known to possess the appropriate gifts and character (these are laid down in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9), as well as having a personal awareness that this is what God wants him or her to do. He or she must also have a clear grasp of the church's outline of belief, and accept it wholeheartedly. Deacons may be men or women, but only men may serve as elders.

5.4 The whole church is involved in discerning who should serve the church as elders or deacons, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Any member may nominate another member for consideration as elder or deacon, having first discerned that person's suitability as set out above and having secured his or

her consent to this action. The nomination should be put in writing to the existing elders, who discuss it with the member and with the nominee (Alternatively, the elders themselves may make the initial approach). They should consider such matters as the nominee's Christian faith and life, his or her beliefs, approach to Church practice, and spiritual gifts. If the elders believe that the nominee is gifted and spiritually fit to undertake the work, they then inform a Church Meeting of the nomination. Any members with reservations about the nominee's fitness for the work should make their feelings known to the elders, who will consider the reasons given and take action as necessary.

5.5 Not less than a month later, the elders remind the members at a Church Meeting of the Scriptural requirements for leaders so that the members may assess the nominee's suitability against those standards. The nominee is given opportunity to express their convictions on the matter and answer questions (the nominee and his or her immediate family will be requested to leave the meeting for a time so that the members may discuss the nomination). After prayer together, a secret ballot should be taken. For a nominee to be appointed he or she should receive the favourable votes of at least 75% of those members present and entitled to vote, provided that the total of favourable votes received is not less than 50% of the membership entitled to vote (the nominee and his or her immediate family are not entitled to vote).

5.6 Appointment of elders and deacons in this way is with immediate effect, but formal recognition should be arranged as part of a regular Sunday meeting. At this meeting, teaching should be given regarding responsibilities of the members and of those being appointed towards each other. The church then publicly affirms its confidence that those being appointed are called by God, sets them apart as elders or deacons and prays that the Holy Spirit will equip them (as a symbol of this, while prayer is offered the elders may lay hands on them).

5.7 It may be necessary on occasion to seek full-time elders from outside the church. In such a situation the above procedure should be followed, but fellowship is desirable at each step with the nominee's home church.

5.8 Elders and deacons are to make the church's work their primary responsibility in the sphere of Christian service, and not take on other Christian work which would have an adverse effect on this. Both groups are to meet regularly, together and separately; in particular, each group should meet before a Business Meeting. If an elder or deacon wishes to step down from office, he or she should not do so unilaterally but should discuss this with the other elders and deacons, in order that together they may seek God's will.

5.9 If an elder or deacon should fall into serious sin or depart from his or her acceptance of the Church's outline of belief, the Church should engage in discipline as necessary (1 Timothy 5:19-21), suspend him or her from office, and seek restoration to fellowship.

5.10 Elders and deacons are responsible for ensuring that those employed by the church are adequately provided for, and that clear terms of service are observed (including an agreed period of notice on either side). They are also responsible for ensuring, as far as it is in their power, that this is the case for members serving with other Christian agencies.

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6 Inter-Church Fellowship

6.1 The Church recognises its responsibility to maintain close relationships with other Bible-based churches, both locally and further afield. One way in which this is expressed is through membership with the Association of Grace Baptist Churches (South East).

6.2 The Church also seeks to support those who are engaged in evangelism at home and overseas, and shares in the work of Grace Baptist Mission. Information about GBM and AGBC (SE) is readily available, and prayer for their work is a regular feature of our meetings.

6.3 However, in order to avoid confusion, the church will only co-operate with other churches or groups where there is clear agreement as to the basic truths of the Christian message. Each opportunity or request for such co-operation is to be considered by the elders as necessary.

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7 Amendments to this Statement

7.1 Since the Bible is the final authority for faith and practice, amendments may be made to 'What We Believe' or 'Our Practice in Church Life' if they can be shown to be justified. This may only take place at a special Church Meeting convened for the purpose. For proposed amendments to be adopted, at least 75% of the members present and entitled to vote must be in favour, provided that the total of favourable votes is not less than 50% of the membership entitled to vote.

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