

## Henley Baptist Church Culture Statement

This document should be read in combination with the HBC Safeguarding Policy and relevant Codes of Conduct for different groups (e.g. employees, those working with children and adults at risk). We are aware of the risks and challenges posed by being a church family open to everyone, and of the potential for spiritual abuse in evangelical/charismatic settings and hopefully are learning the painful lessons provided in our settings over recent years around the world. The document aims to describe the culture and atmosphere we want to set in HBC focusing on key attributes including transparency, kindness, and clarity of communication.

Our expectation is that all paid staff, volunteers in leadership roles, volunteers in general, and regular congregation members are aware of these cultural guidelines. We discuss these issues in Church Membership courses, so people understand the culture of the community they are joining. These messages will be reinforced in our teachings and general communication.

### Power

We are aware of the potential for spiritual abuse with our church family, particularly with abuse of trust placed in leaders. So, we have put in place structures to minimise this risk. These include:

- **A team leadership structure** – where members of the church leadership team are free to challenge each other on their conduct, and church members are encouraged to voice any concerns with members of the team.
- **Corporate decision making** – the paid church staff and leadership team will make corporate decisions on all important areas of church life. Items dealing with finances, senior staffing changes and significant shifts in church policy will be raised at quarterly church family nights for discussion and consensus.
- **A strong trustee body** – in line with Charity Commission guidelines. Trustees meet quarterly to review all aspects of charity life including finances, buildings, Health & Safety and safeguarding.
- **A clear policy on whistleblowing** – if church members are concerned about the behaviour of the leadership team, paid employees or volunteers in leadership positions, they can communicate these to others outside the church (OpenGate and Advance leadership). The Whistleblowing policy can be found in brief in section 6 of the Employee Handbook, and as a separate policy available on our website.
- **Accountability** via leadership support and mentoring links with the Advance sphere of Salt & Light Ministries, and the Southern Counties Baptist Association. These organisations also provide support to church members if there are any concerns with local leadership.
- **Regular teaching** on servant leadership, transparency, kindness and other attributes in line with Biblical instruction. Areas of confidentiality will be dealt with sensitively.
- Our safeguarding policy, and other policies are audited annually.
- **For paid employees**, we have specific guidelines on tackling bullying, banter, intimidation and discrimination in Section 6 of our Employee Handbook. Please read these and act accordingly.

## **Relationships**

We are aware of the challenges of issues such as grooming and developing inappropriate relationships. Sexual misconduct is damaging to individuals and the church family (particularly when leaders are involved) and means we must build and maintain a culture of honour, respect, kindness, and purity.

We aim to build a church culture which considers us all as an extended family where people care and look out for others. We encourage peers to be like good brothers and sisters, younger people to respect and honour the older, and seniors to be patient and kind to the younger. It is a good principle for everyone, married or single, to maintain transparency and accountability in all relationships. The same face-to-face standards should be maintained in the virtual world. We recommend Biblical standards of kindness and purity in all online communications including avoiding sending suggestive or ambiguous messages or emojis.

## **Finance**

Henley Baptist Church has structures that aim to reduce the risks of financial abuse taking place.

These include a corporate team leadership decision-making process on major financial decisions (over £1000), strict confidentiality on individual giving, a finance officer managed and mentored by a Finance Trustee and the Church Team Leaders, and an annual auditing process with independent accountants/auditors. Church accounts are presented at an AGM.

A salaries committee meets annually and makes recommendations on staff salaries to the trustees and church leaders.

In addition, church pastors have limited access to church bank accounts. They have a monthly hospitality budget which is managed by the Finance Officer. Monthly top-line accounts are sent to the Trustees. The church end of year accounts are open to be seen by any church member and are available on the Charities Commission and Companies House websites.

We will maintain a biblically based teaching programme and culture of good stewardship, honesty, transparency, and generosity.

## **Safeguarding**

We have a particular concern to ensure the safety of everyone involved with the church and community centre activities, particularly children, young people and adults at risk. Our church and community centre safeguarding is managed by a Designated Safeguarding Officer with support from one of the trustees. We have a safeguarding policy that is reviewed annually with supporting policies. All relevant staff and volunteers attend training provided through the Baptist Union, alongside a helpline for any enquiries. All church members are reminded to take responsibility for safeguarding within our context.