

CFUH GOVERNING DOCUMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

The following document (and its appendices) articulates some of the key elements of how the community of CFUH seeks to function.

This document is something of a hybrid – a cross between a constitution (or charter), a covenant, and a modus operandi. It reflects the unusual nature of CFUH – a large church that chooses to retain a relational culture instead of the more common corporate approach and structure.

Each element contributes to the overall flavour of the document and for this reason some aspects of the document reflect a particular element more closely than others.

Constitution/Charter

A constitution or charter is a set of fundamental principles and rules detailing how a specific ‘corporate body’ is governed and organized.

This document has many elements that would normally be found in a constitution. However, CFUH has no formal membership – and therefore no legal means to enforce such a constitution.

Covenant

More than any other image, the picture of a “family” is how CFUH views itself. This is the fundamental metaphor which informs the way we see ourselves.

Relational commitment to one another is the central driving force for our life together. It is covenantal in nature – that is, we pledge or promise with God’s help to walk with one another through all the challenges we face as a community.

Consequently, this document is a way for the family of CFUH (both leaders and congregation) to express its covenantal commitment to the body. It spells out our intentions regarding how we wish to live and serve together.

Modus Operandi

A modus operandi spells out the way that an organization works or functions (it’s mode of operation). While not all processes and procedures are stipulated in this document, some of the key elements are. It is therefore, a basic framework for our functional life and mission together.

Why such a document is necessary

For 30 years we have lived as a community of faith without a guiding written document and we have survived, and indeed flourished. However, as CFUH has grown numerically, the challenges of effectively organizing ourselves have

become more complex and demanding. It is for this reason that we've decided to articulate who we are and how we seek to operate, in print.

However, in doing so we affirm that CFUH is primarily a living organism and that its health and vitality depend more upon the existence of loving relationships and informal groups covenanting to serve God together, than on formalized structures and procedures. Nevertheless, the health of our life and mission together requires some fundamental organizational guidelines that will serve us in fulfilling our calling as a people.

This is therefore a guiding document to aid us in our journey as a community of faith. Two metaphors help to describe its function in our life:

A **compass** when things are unclear or stormy and the way ahead is not easily apparent. It is easy to lose our way as a people and this family document is one of the ways we can rediscover our way.

A **safety net** for when things don't go according to plan, when living and working together on the high wire of Christian life and mission brings us face to face with conflict and challenges. Relational breakdown and misunderstanding can easily breed mistrust and confusion sufficient to 'knock us all off the wire'.

This document is not fundamentally a legal one. Neither is it intended to be used legalistically – by either leaders or people. People should at all times seek to understand and interpret the intent or spirit of the document, and always act on it with Christian grace, humility and love, in the context of a covenantal family community.

Much of the document is by necessity brief. However, the accompanying appendices seek to give a much fuller overview of some of the critical elements of our life together. Specifically, they cover:

- History and heritage of CFUH (Appendix 1)
- What we mean by an eldership led church (Appendix 2)
- Why we believe in team (Appendix 3)

2. LEGAL STATUS

The Christian Fellowship in Upper Hutt is incorporated under the Charitable Trusts Act 1957. The Trust Deed is the foundational legal document of CFUH. For this reason this governing document must not be at variance with the Trust Deed.

(Note: A copy of the CFUH Trust Deed may be viewed at the CFUH offices.)

Appointment of trustees

At all times, a minimum of two-thirds of the trustees (i.e. at least four) must be current CFUH elders. The elders are free to select up to two non-elder trustees, if such persons offer particular skills and/or perspectives that are deemed useful to the governance of CFUH. Any such non-elder trustees must be regularly involved and committed to the life and mission of CFUH.

3. STATEMENT OF FAITH

We affirm the historical creeds of the Christian Church – in particular the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds (see Appendix 4). We also affirm that we are part of the universal Church, made up of followers of Jesus both globally and historically.

More specifically, we also believe that:

- The **Bible** is divinely inspired and is both trustworthy and authoritative in all matters of faith and conduct.
- **Water baptism** publicly expresses faith in Jesus and initiation into the community of God’s people.
- **Gifts of the Spirit** have been given to the Church for the equipping of believers for works of service and mission.
- Jesus inaugurated the **kingdom of God** through his life, death and resurrection and we, the Church, are now called to partner God in his ongoing mission of bringing his rule over all of life.

4. HERITAGE

The historical roots of CFUH are set out in the attached Appendix 1. We acknowledge and appreciate the rich foundations that have been laid by previous leaders. While recognizing the freedom to explore new ways of expressing communal life, we are committed to significant continuity with the key foundational features and values of the history of CFUH. These include:

- Operating as an “eldership-led” church (see Appendix 2)
- Genuine plurality of leadership (see Appendix 2)
- A kingdom-based theology (see Appendix 1)
- Generational transfer - investing across generations (see Appendix 1)
- Providing an environment for every member to contribute and serve in (see Appendix 3)
- Proactive relationship-building with Christian leaders outside of CFUH who can provide insight, perspective, guidance and support in our journey as a community

5. MISSION AND PURPOSE

CFUH does not exist for its own benefit. As a community of God's people we are called to participate in God's mission to the world. Our communal life together is therefore not an end in itself, but rather a springboard to the community and world around us.

This is reflected in our mission statement, which states:

Christian Fellowship in Upper Hutt is a church family committed to and calling others to a journey of faith, in which God's Kingdom life and power transforms individuals and families as they work together building a community.

Worship, community and mission are therefore all fundamental to our reason for existence.

How we seek to outwork our mission is shaped both by the passions, dreams and gifts God has birthed in all who choose to belong to CFUH, and by the needs and opportunities identified around us.

While our primary mission field is the city of Upper Hutt, we also recognize and embrace our responsibility to contribute to building God's kingdom nationally and globally.

The leaders of CFUH have an important role to play in discerning, training and releasing the church to fulfil its mission. However, the goal is the development of a *shared vision* – one that all members of the family can own and participate in.

6. LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

The eldership is the governing body of the church, responsible for oversight, discipline and direction. A more specific list of responsibilities is contained in Appendix 2.

Minimum number of elders

There should be a minimum of **six** serving elders at any one time. If there are insufficient suitable and available people to fulfil the role of elder, the eldership may continue to function for a period not exceeding twelve months, while making every necessary step to actively and prayerfully seek out a new elder/s. Where this is not possible within twelve months, an interim, strictly temporary arrangement may be made by the existing elders until the additional appointment(s) are confirmed.

Qualifications for elders (Who is eligible?)

Fundamental to the role of eldering is the qualification of good character and maturity (See Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

Gifting is also important but should be subservient to that of character.

The capacity to work well in team and to understand the role of governance are also critical requirements.

Eldership is not restricted by gender or ethnicity. In this, Galatians 3:28 is our guide.

Appointment of elders

Elders are to be appointed by the existing eldership. However, recognition is given of the need to obtain a 'mandate' or 'endorsement' from other appointed leaders within CFUH (in the first instance) and the wider congregation (in the second instance). In the light of this, the eldership will seek to communicate clearly with these groups regarding intended new appointments. In the case of such appointments the eldership will bring the name/s of the person/s to the attention of the congregation, inviting responses of affirmation/support or concerns, which the eldership will be responsible to consider and weigh up, before deciding about the appointment.

The period for such submissions would not normally be less than **four** weeks.

Where a submission is made raising a concern about a proposed eldership appointment, this will be considered through the following process:

The governing elders will initially consider the submission. They may then either respond directly to the individual(s) making the submission, or arrange to facilitate a discussion between the proposed elder and the individual(s) raising the concern. The purpose of this process is to discuss issues openly in a safe way and promote understanding of each party's perspective (with the hope of resolving any concerns).

In either case, once the governing elders have talked with those raising the concern and/or facilitated a satisfactory discussion between the relevant individuals, the matter will rest with the governing elders for evaluation and final decision.

Length of appointment

Appointment to eldership is not in perpetuity (forever). However, neither is it for a fixed term. The length of service of individuals will be determined by the individual elder in consultation with the wider eldership.

Functioning of eldership

The eldership is free to determine how they make decisions. However, no one elder will have the right to veto any decision made.

All elders are considered equal and their perspectives will be listened to and weighed by the eldership. However, because God gifts us in unique and varied ways, individual elders' perspectives on particular/specific matters will be given extra weight according to their recognized strengths, giftings, wisdom and experience.

If they so wish, the eldership may appoint a particular elder to chair or facilitate the team. In such a situation this elder will have no more decision-making power than any of the other elders.

Resolving conflict

Conflict and disagreement are inevitable within a group of leaders.

Where significant conflict (ongoing or disruptive disagreement) occurs that cannot be easily resolved within the eldership, they will nominate and agree to involve a person or persons to mediate. The eldership will identify individuals who could perform this role *and agree on these in advance*, (before any conflict of this nature arises). Where necessary, each elder will also be encouraged to have a 'support person' or 'advocate' with them.

Relationship is paramount and all reasonable steps to maintain healthy, open dialogue and resolve conflict relationally, will be made. (Matthew 5:23-24 and 18:15-17.)

Serious misconduct

The eldership may request and enforce the resignation of one or more elders if significant ethical failure occurs (such as adultery, illegal activities, dishonesty etc).

Where accusations are brought to the eldership about one of the elders, or from within by another elder/s, every effort will be made to seek to confront the elder in grace and without prejudice, in order to establish the truth. If such misconduct is admitted and the offending elder resigns, the eldership will take all reasonable steps to ensure that repentance, restitution and restoration are able to occur within a culture of grace, forgiveness and transparency. If illegal activities are suspected, the elders will report matters to the police as appropriate.

If serious misconduct is proved, and the elder concerned does not resign willingly, the eldership is free to remove the offending elder from eldership by a two-thirds vote.

Appointment of other leaders

The eldership may, as they see fit, appoint both paid staff and unpaid leaders for specific roles within the life and mission of the church. Where this occurs, the elders should communicate clearly with other key leaders (in the first instance) and the wider congregation as appropriate. The elders will use their discretion in

involving either or both groups of people in the decision making process. Generally, the more critical a role is to the life and mission of the church, the more consultation should occur.

Eldership is a voluntary role. However, this does not preclude one or more elders being appointed to a paid staff position. Such appointments, if they occur, will be clearly identified as non-eldering leadership roles.

Where any appointments are made (either paid staff and/or key unpaid leaders) the elders will take all necessary steps to ensure that such appointees are well supervised/mentored, cared for and valued. This may also involve arrangements for outside 'supervision'.

Where appointments to staff positions are made of persons from outside of the CFUH community, great care will be taken to ensure that there is genuine compatibility. Any such appointed staff will be clearly informed of the distinct heritage, vision and values of CFUH and of their requirement to work in harmony with the distinctives of the community. All employment agreements will reflect such concerns.

Relationship between elders and staff

The elders will appoint a person to act as the Team Leader of the staff. This person may or may not be an elder. They will report directly to the eldership and be responsible for ensuring that the tasks of staff members are consistent with the direction and intentions of the elders.

7. SHARED OWNERSHIP AND INVOLVEMENT

CFUH does not have a formal membership. However, as a family, we welcome and encourage the participation of all congregational members in the life and mission of the church. Wherever possible we will seek to provide opportunities for training, discovering one's own passions and giftings, mentoring, and service.

Regular "family gatherings" will be held to share, discuss and pray about important matters. Opportunity will be given for people to voice/contribute perspectives, concerns and questions. Where feasible, such environments will foster shared ownership in decision making and direction.

While no formal membership exists, informally, commitment to CFUH is primarily expressed (and recognized) by some or all of the following:

- Development of strong, covenantal relationships with a small network of other members
- Active involvement in a small group
- Service in an aspect/s of the church life
- Contribution financially to the life and mission of the church

- Active commitment to partnering God in building His kingdom wherever one is involved - the workplace, community, friendship and family networks, neighbourhoods, interest groups, civic and political spheres, specific mission agencies etc.
- Regular participation in community activities and meetings.

Commitment to the ‘family’ of CFUH is reflected more in the quality of relationship, contribution, and connection, rather than through legalistic measurements. Fundamentally, a “member” of CFUH is more likely to think in terms of what they can contribute to the life and mission of the church, than what they can receive.

8. AFFILIATION AND EXTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY

We are an autonomous body with the freedom to make decisions independent of any individual or organization.

However, while we have no formal or legal accountability, we will seek to develop and nurture relationships with a small number of other Christian leaders who can assist us to faithfully become the community of faith we feel God is calling us to be.

We will look to build such relationships with people who are (a) readily accessible to us, (b) understand and respect our heritage and culture, and (c) have the necessary gifts, maturity and style to bring perspective and speak into our situation appropriately.

Alternatively or in addition to this, the elders may, at their discretion, invite up to five people to be part of an “advisory board”. Such a board will have no decision making power, but will be looked to for counsel and support. Members of the advisory board will have the freedom to raise issues with the elders at any time. Such an advisory board may consist of Christian leaders from both within and outside the CFUH family.

Alongside the nurturing of these specific relationships, we acknowledge that CFUH is a small part of the global Body of Christ. Where feasible we will actively nurture relationships with other churches and leaders for the purposes of mutual support and for working in unity to help bring God’s kingdom.

9. CORRECTION AND DISCIPLINE

As with any family, clear and just disciplinary processes are central safeguards for the health and growth of the community. Despite the discomfort it brings, correction and discipline are not an optional choice within Christian community; they are a matter of obedience to God’s Word.

Scripture requires the church to judge the members of its body (1 Corinthians 5:12). Wilful sin affects the whole community and, when unchallenged, can spread like a cancer and jeopardize the very health of the church.

Ensuring appropriate discipline in the community is the responsibility of the eldership. While they may not be the ones who address each issue, they will ensure issues are addressed appropriately. The New Testament outlines several specific areas of behaviour that require correction and discipline within the community. These are: broken fellowship (Matt 5:23), idleness or laziness (2 Thess 3:6-15), divisiveness (Titus 3:10, Rom 16:17-18), sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, slander, drunkenness and dishonesty (1 Cor 5).

We are told to rebuke persistent sin publicly (1 Tim 5:20), severely reprove those who teach falsehood (Titus 1:10-14), and also, after adequate warning, withdraw from those who cause division (Titus 3:10).

Process

Matthew 18:15-17 outlines the process we are expected to use for addressing issues and bringing correction to each other. If an issue of personal grievance is brought to the church leadership for support, the first question we will ask is whether or not the person bringing it has sought to address it with the offending party first. In extreme circumstances (where there are risks to personal safety) we appreciate this may not always be possible, but these should be rare exceptions rather than the norm. It is not to be used as an avoidance clause.

Imposed discipline

If an issue of correction or discipline arises that is not able to be resolved following the Matt 18 process, then the elders may place the individual concerned under discipline within the congregation. This may involve the withdrawal or limitation of some or all privileges and involvement in CFUH community life, until it is agreed they may be fully reinstated. Where such discipline is imposed, the congregation will be appropriately informed.

In cases where illegal practice or behaviour threatens the safety of anyone involved, immediate steps will be taken to preserve the wellbeing of those concerned. This will include the notification of appropriate external authorities.

Restoration

Christian discipline must always be restorative and redemptive in nature. Individuals placed under discipline are to be treated with love and grace. Guidelines will be set for relating to disciplined individuals while they are being disciplined and restored to the community.

10. FINANCE AND ASSETS

The elders are ultimately responsible for the good stewardship of the assets and finances of the church. They will appoint suitable paid and/or unpaid workers to manage the day-to-day aspects of both finances and assets. These workers will also be delegated the responsibility of ensuring that all legal requirements are fulfilled (though the eldership retains fundamental accountability).

The eldership will ensure that financial accounts are completed and audited annually, within six months of the end of the financial year.

The eldership will also ensure that the church's financial situation is reported back to the congregation biannually (twice yearly), with opportunity for questions of clarification and the freedom to raise concerns.

Where assets include property, the elders will ensure that the financial statements clearly differentiate the cost/profit analysis of the property from the general church finances.

On significant items of expenditure (such as purchase, development or disposal of facilities, hiring of staff etc) the elders will ensure that leaders and congregation are consulted in the decision making process.

11. DISSOLUTION

If for any reason CFUH as a legal entity is determined by the trustees to be dissolved, this should only happen by means of a 75% majority decision by both the trustees and the eldership, and with consultation of those who remain part of the congregation.

Dispersion of assets

CFUH is a charitable trust and all its assets have been accumulated for charitable purposes. Therefore, in case of dissolution, no part of the income or assets of CFUH shall be to the personal benefit of any private person. After all debts and liabilities have been provided for, the remaining assets will be distributed to one or more non-profit entities, organized and operated exclusively for charitable purposes (and who also carry tax exempt status under New Zealand law).

The elders and trustees will determine the specifics of such a distribution of assets in consultation with those who remain part of the congregation.

In all such decisions we will strive for a unanimous agreement (Acts 15:28 "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"). However, if several attempts to gain unanimity fail, we will then proceed by agreement of a 75% majority.