

Hope Church Partnership

December 2020



The challenge during this season

During this season, when Church and society have experienced huge adjustments because of Covid-19, we have seen many things stripped away and heard phrases such as 'unprecedented' and 'new normal' as people try to describe this new landscape.



As a local church, we thank God that we have been able to adapt to many of these changes by harnessing the technology that is available. Many of our Life Groups have enjoyed being able to meet online and some have reportedly even thrived during this time. The front-led aspects of our Sunday gatherings have also been emulated via our livestream, with varying degrees of success. However, some things have not translated so

well online: the presence of God in corporate worship, the intangibles of in-person fellowship and, of course, day-to-day pastoral care. The latter has been the subject of much prayer and discussion of late.

One of the biggest challenges we've encountered, as we have gone through the large number of names on our database, is that there are so many people who we don't really know: some have been missional contacts through our outreaches, some have visited once or twice but not returned, others are non-church parents of our young people and still others have deliberately positioned themselves on the periphery. For whatever reason, we have discovered that Hope Church has quite a large 'fringe'.

The big question

The question we've been grappling-with as Elders is: *"For whom do we stand accountable before God as shepherds of His flock?"* That's a big one. To frame the same question another way – and please forgive the blunt language: when it comes to the Hope Church family, who's 'in' and who's not? It's a hard question to answer because the edges of a church community can sometimes be quite blurry.

So, as Elders, we believe that a renewed focus on Partnership will better enable us to fulfil our responsibility to shepherd the flock; it will help us know which sheep are in the sheep pen, so to speak. This will also help Sue (our Deacon with responsibility for Pastoral Care) and her emerging Pastoral Support Network to care more effectively for the church family.

What this doesn't mean, of course, is that others won't be welcomed into the Hope family and cared-for. We want *everyone* who visits Hope to be loved, experience community and grow as disciples of Jesus. However, for those feeling called to be part of the Hope Church family, we want to make the pathway to Partnership clearer and explain why we think it is important.

So, what exactly is Partnership?

Some churches use the term, '*Membership*,' to speak of making a commitment to a local church. This would usually involve the giving of time, talents and money to see the Kingdom come amongst and through a specific community of believers. In Hope Church, we prefer to call this commitment, '*Partnership*' – a term we think more closely communicates the '*partnership in the gospel*' (Phil 1:5) that the Apostle Paul so highly valued.

Partnership is not described in the pages of Scripture, per se. That said, it is certainly not *un-biblical* (i.e. it doesn't violate the truths of Scripture). It is probably more accurate to say it is *extra-biblical* (i.e. not specifically mentioned in the Bible but still adhering to the principles of Scripture). So why do we have Partnership at all? Here are a couple of reasons:

- 1. We are a charity.** Hope Church is an Elim Pentecostal Church. Every local church in the Elim movement is part of the same charity and shares a single charity number. As an Elim church, there is a constitutional requirement that we have a membership [we call it Partnership] and that we also hold an Annual General Meeting of Partners.

Therefore, since the church began back in 2008, we have had Partnership. We have encouraged those who feel God calling them to be part of the Hope family to formalise this by becoming Partners.



- 2. We celebrate commitment.** In the early Church there would have been only one church per town or city; today there are *numerous* churches. Then, church involvement and things like pastoral care and church discipline would have been exercised on the basis of a deep commitment to a group of Christians who, most likely, they would remain with for most of their life. Today things are very different; community is more fragmented, society is more mobile and, sadly, a



sense of consumerism has crept into aspects of the UK Church – i.e. “If one church doesn’t meet my needs, I’ll find another one that will!”)

So, Partnership says, “This is my church family. This is where I belong...and I’m all in!” Most churches have a variation of what we call Partnership for the same reasons.

“ *Partnership says, “This is my church family. This is where I belong...and I’m all in!”* ”

What does Partnership involve?



As a church we want to see all Partners committed to follow Jesus as Lord. That means living for His glory and for the good of those He loves. So, as a minimum, we expect all Partners in Hope Church to be actively engaged in these areas of church life:

1. **Gathering** weekly for our Sunday worship
2. **Participating** fully in a Life Group or Celebrate Recovery
3. **Serving** wholeheartedly in an area of ministry
4. **Giving** generously to support the work of God through Hope Church

What is the pathway to Partnership?

- **Being a Christian.** Hope Church partners must be born-again (and, ideally, baptised). Non-Christians cannot be Partners.
- **Sharing the same beliefs.** Partners will be expected to align theologically with our statement of Foundational Truths (see **Appendix 1**). People also cannot become Partners who are members of secret societies such as the Masons.

- **Attending the 'Connect Course'.** All Partners will have been through the 'Connect Course (previously, the 'Intro to Hope'), during which they will have heard about Hope Church's vision and values.
- **Filling-out an application form.** (See **Appendix 3**.)
- **Meeting with an Elder.** Once someone has decided to become a Partner, we will arrange a meeting with one of our Elders. This will be an informal 'getting-to-know-you' conversation and an opportunity to the above steps.
- **Being received into Partnership.** Once this meeting has taken place, we will receive people into Partnership during one of our Sunday services. This will be an opportunity to make a public commitment to the church family and be prayed-for by the Elders. (See **Appendix 2** for the words of our Partnership Commitment.)

What are the benefits of becoming a Partner?

These are a few benefits to becoming a Hope Church Partner:

1. **It is good to do good.** The Bible teaches that a person reaps what they sow (Gal 6:7-9). There is something intrinsically good about making a commitment to others and serving them in Jesus' name for no other reason than because it is good.
2. **It says, "I'm all in!"** Hope Church has a large periphery of people, some of whom may visit our gatherings but not feel particularly committed. Partnership puts a stake in the ground and says publicly, "I am committed to this church family."
3. **It provides spiritual covering.** The Elders are called to oversee the church and provide the spiritual environment where people can grow as disciples of Jesus. Partnership enables the Elders to identify who are the people they stand accountable before God to oversee and shepherd. If you are a Partner, you can be assured that the Elders will regularly pray for you by name, encourage you to grow as a Christian and provide pastoral oversight.
4. **It is a doorway to leadership.** We do not have a two-tier church made up of Partners and non-Partners – people can serve on most teams, take part in our gatherings and attend a Life Group without being a Partner. However, only Partners can take on leadership positions in the church.
5. **You'll be 'in the loop'.** Partners are often privy to information from the Elders ahead of announcements being made to the wider church family. We might also invite Partners to be involved in praying through an issue and being part of the decision-making process. We tend to call Partners meetings when making significant decisions that affect the direction of the church.
6. **You'll have a vote.** Although we are not a congregationally-led church – like Baptist churches, for example – our Partners do vote when votes are required (i.e. in the past when we adopted a constitution and more recently when we re-appointed Elders).



Appendix 1: Foundational Truths

Hope Church, and all Elim churches, share a statement of those things that we consider to be foundational truths. These truths outline our theology and what we believe as a church:

- **The Bible.** We believe the Bible, as originally given, to be without error, the fully inspired and infallible Word of God and the supreme and final authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
- **The Trinity.** We believe that the Godhead exists co-equally and co-eternally in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and that these three are one God, sovereign in creation, providence and redemption.

- **The Saviour.** We believe in the true and proper deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His real and complete humanity, in His sinless life, in His authoritative teaching, in His substitutionary and atoning sacrifice through His blood shed, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, in His heavenly intercession and His second advent to receive His Church.
- **The Holy Spirit.** We believe in the deity of the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son and the necessity of His work in conviction of sin, repentance, regeneration and sanctification, and that the believer is also promised an endowment of power as the gift of Christ through the baptism in the Holy Spirit with signs following. Through this endowment, the believer is empowered for fuller participation in the ministry of the Church, its worship, evangelism and service.
- **Mankind.** We believe in the universal sinfulness of all men since the Fall, rendering man subject to God's wrath and condemnation.
- **Salvation.** We believe in the necessity for salvation of repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by which the sinner is pardoned and accepted as righteous in God's sight. This justification is imputed by the grace of God because of the atoning work of Christ, is received by faith alone and is evidenced by the Fruit of the Spirit and a holy life.
- **The Church.** We believe in the spiritual unity and the priesthood of all believers in Christ and that these comprise the universal Church, the Body of Christ.
- **The Ministry.** We believe in the ministries that Christ has set in His Church, namely, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers and in the present operation of the manifold Gifts of the Holy Spirit according to the New Testament.
- **The Ordinances.** We believe in the baptism of believers in water in obedience to the command of Christ and the commemoration of Christ's death by the observance of the Lord's Supper until His return.
- **The Commission.** We believe that the Gospel embraces the needs of the whole man and that the Church is therefore commissioned to preach the Gospel to the world and to fulfil a ministry of healing and deliverance to the spiritual and physical needs of mankind.
- **The Coming King.** We believe in the personal, physical and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to reign in power and glory.
- **The Future State.** We believe in the resurrection of the dead and in the final judgement of the world, the eternal conscious bliss of the righteous and the eternal conscious punishment of the wicked.

Appendix 2: Church Partnership Commitment

These are the commitments we ask people to make when they come into Partnership with Hope Church:

As a follower of Jesus, do you believe that the Holy Spirit is leading you at this time to unite yourself with the Hope Church family and align yourself with the vision and values of this church?

YES

Do you commit, with God's help, to be a **passionate disciple** by worshipping Him, praying to Him, serving Him, and obeying Him?

YES

Do you commit, with God's help, to build a **loving community** by stewarding your gifts and talents, by serving in humility, by giving with generosity, and by jealously protecting unity?

YES

Do you commit, with God's help, to **live missionally** by showing mercy, acting justly, and sharing the Good News with friends, family, neighbours and colleagues?

YES

Do you commit, with God's help, to be spiritually accountable to the Elders and to pray for them regularly?

YES



Appendix 3: Church Partnership Application

As a committed Christian, I feel that God is calling me to be a full and active part of the Hope Church family.

I understand that Partnership involves a commitment to:

- **Gathering** weekly for our Sunday worship
- **Participating** fully in a Life Group or Celebrate Recovery
- **Serving** wholeheartedly in an area of ministry
- **Giving** generously to support the work of God through Hope Church

I also understand that Partnership involves making myself spiritually accountable to the Eldership and aligning myself with the vision and values of the church.

NAME:

EMAIL:

TEL:

ADDRESS:

DATE:

SIGNED:

When completed, please return to admin@hopecorby.org.