

**DEWSBURY
EVANGELICAL
CHURCH**

**MEMBERS'
HANDBOOK**

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Dewsbury Evangelical Church

Members' Handbook: March 2013

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This members' handbook has been drawn up to serve four main functions:

1. To provide a clear statement of the fundamental teachings of the Bible, as we understand them.
2. To outline the Bible's teaching with regard to the organisation and life of the local Church.
3. To regulate procedure for the Church in its corporate life and conduct in areas where the Scripture only provides us with principles, so that everything in the Church be done in a fitting and orderly way.
4. To provide a practical guide to the responsibilities and privileges of Church Membership.

We make no claims of infallibility or unerring wisdom for our members' handbook, although we do believe that God has graciously heard our prayer for help and protection in its production. We commit ourselves to amend it if it can be shown to be *unbiblical* in any way (or if its directives governing life in the Church can be changed to better serve the needs of the Church).

All Church officers should read the members' handbook at least once a year (prior to the AGM of the Church) to ensure that its spirit and practice are being maintained.

SECTION 2: THE CHURCH

2.1 The nature of the church

The Church shall be known as Dewsbury Evangelical Church, and is to be a local independent evangelical Church.

We believe that the true Church consists of the whole number of God's elect, chosen before the foundation of the world from every generation and from every people and nation, who have been brought to trust in Christ alone for Salvation by the work of the Holy Spirit.

We also believe that the New Testament teaches that Christians in a particular locality should unite together in churches, in order to:

1. Worship God in spirit and in truth according to the principles of His word, and to pray together.
2. Hear the preaching of God's word, that they might obey it all, moulding every part of their lives in the light of the Bible.
3. Mutually support, encourage and build one another up in the faith and love of the Lord; and to that end to seek to use and develop the gifts and qualities of all the Members.
4. Administer correctly the two ordinances that Christ has established in the Church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
5. Recognise the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ over His Church, administered through His word, and under that word through Elders and the Church gathered.
6. Use every means to promote the spread of the good news of salvation through Christ (both locally and throughout God's world).

7. Support the needy, especially believers, both locally and elsewhere.

Passages for study: Isaiah 2:1-5; Ephesians 1:3-12; Acts 11:19-26; Acts 2:41-47; Acts 13:1-3; Matthew 16:13-20; Matthew 18:15-20; Ephesians 4:1-16; Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 5:9

2.2 The legal framework of the church

This handbook describes and details the government of the corporate life of the church – see sections 3.7 (Church government) and 3.8 (Members meetings). To allow the church to fulfil its legal obligations and provide a vehicle for the administration of the church's assets the church has formed a charitable company.

Dewsbury Evangelical Church is registered charity (no: 1147142) and Company Limited by Guarantee (no. 8026724) registered in England and Wales at Crackenedge Lane, Dewsbury, WF13 1RB.

A Charitable company brings together, church buildings, statement of faith and church governance under one legal charitable framework and one governance body. This legal framework document is known as 'Articles of Association'.

The articles of association specify that the elders and deacons are the members, trustees and directors of the charitable company, except where they are disqualified from being a charity trustee or company director. The trustees are required to meet at least twice a year.

The objects of the charitable company are specifically restricted to:

- The advancement of the Christian faith for the benefit of the public in accordance with the Statement of Faith (see section 2.3, which is also included in the articles of association, as article 93); and

- The relief of hardship, either generally or individually, of people through the provision of grants, gifts, goods or services.

The charitable company is granted power to do things which further the objects of the charity, including (see article 6 for full details):

- raising funds,
- hiring, buying, owning and selling property,
- employing and remunerating staff,
- engaging into contracts with suppliers.

The articles of association of the charitable company specifically make reference to this handbook (articles 80 & 81), and the regulations contained here for the running of the church, which are binding on the Trustees. These include:

- The admission of members to the church.
- The appointment of elders and deacons (who are the trustees)
- The procedure at church members' meetings, and meetings of the trustees.
- The buying and selling of property.
- The changing of the articles of association.

The purpose of this is to ensure the charitable company serves the needs and aspirations of the whole church membership, and restricts the trustees from acting without the consent of the church.

As a charitable company, Dewsbury Evangelical Church is required to prepare and submit annual accounts to the Register of Companies and the Charity Commission.

2.3 What we believe

We affirm and proclaim the foundational truths of the historic orthodox Christian faith as revealed in Holy Scripture. We believe in:

1 The Bible

The inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility of God's word, the Bible, as originally given by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Scripture has been faithfully preserved by God's Spirit, and so is both vital and clear, and all Christians must submit both individually and corporately to its supreme authority and sufficiency in every matter of belief and conduct.

*Passages for study: Psalm 19; Matthew 5:17-20; Luke 1:1-4;
Acts 1:15-22; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Hebrews 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:16-21*

2 God

The existence of one eternal and unchangeable God, the Holy Trinity, Creator and Lord of the universe who, in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – three Persons who are the same in substance, and equal in power and glory – governs all things according to His will, and is accomplishing his purposes in the world and in the church.

*Passages for study: Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6;
1 Corinthians 12:4-6; John 10:30; Acts 5:3,4,9; Psalm 104;
Daniel 4:33-37; Ephesians 1:1-14*

3 The Human Race

The inherent value of all human beings, made by God in His own image, and their sinfulness and guilt since the fall of Adam. This has rendered them unable to do right and subject to God's wrath and condemnation, and has resulted in their alienation from Him, from

one another and from His creation, yet he continues to show kindness to all he has made.

*Passages for study: Genesis 6:5; Genesis 8:21; Psalm 51;
Jeremiah 17:9,10; Matthew 15:17-20; Romans 1:18-32;
Romans 5:12-21; Ephesians 2:1-10*

4 God the Father

The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who is holy, righteous, and full of grace, mercy, compassion and love. He wishes that a free and sincere offer of his gospel be made to all people everywhere, that they may come to Him by faith in His Son and have eternal life. Those he loves in Christ Jesus, He unconditionally chooses, predestines to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, calls, justifies, sanctifies and glorifies.

*Passages for study: Exodus 34:5-7; Ephesians 1:3-8; Luke 13:34;
2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16-18, Titus 3:3-7; Romans 8:28-30;
Ephesians 1:3-14; 1 Corinthians 1:30*

5 The Lord Jesus Christ

The essential, absolute and eternal deity of the Lord Jesus Christ; His eternal pre-existence and glory as the Son of God; His conception by Mary of the Holy Spirit; His virgin birth; His real but sinless humanity; His voluntary humiliation and obedience, culminating in His death as a sacrifice for sin; His bodily resurrection from the dead on the third day; His ascension into heaven; His continuing ministry as Prophet, Priest and King; and His coming again in power and glory.

*Passages for study: John 1:1-2; Philippians 2:5-11; John 17:1-5;
Matthew 1:18-25; 1 Peter 2:21-24; John 8:28; Isaiah 53;
Romans 5:8-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10-21; Luke 24:36-52;
Romans 8:34; Acts 1:9-11; Matthew 25:31-34*

6 Salvation

Salvation from the guilt, penalty and all consequences of sin solely through the work of Jesus Christ – His perfect obedience, penal substitutionary death, bodily resurrection and exaltation as Lord. He alone is truly God and truly man, and therefore the only mediator between God and humanity, uniquely able to save completely those who come to God through Him. There is salvation through no other person, creed, process or power.

Passages for study: Rom 3:21-26, 2 Cor 5:21, John 14:1-6, Heb 7:25, Galatians 3:10-13, 1 Cor 15:1-11

7 Justification

The justification of sinners entirely through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to them and of the guilt and penalty of their sin to Him. It is appropriated by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Passages for study: Romans 3:21-4:5; Galatians 3; Ephesians 2:1-10

8 The Holy Spirit

The necessity and sufficiency of the work of the Holy Spirit for the individual's new birth to repentance and faith, union with Christ, assurance and growth to maturity, and for the church's continuous renewal in truth, unity, wisdom, faith, holiness, love, power and mission.

Passages for study: 1 Corinthians 2:12-14; John 3:1-7; Romans 8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; Acts 1:8

9 The Church

The universal church, the body of which Christ is the head, to which all who are saved belong. Its existence reveals God's

ultimate purpose to bring everything together under Christ. It is made visible both in local congregations and in the wider communion of those who profess the true faith. It comprises a people called to declare the praise of the God who saved them, to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, and to proclaim the gracious offer of salvation to those who are lost.

Passages for study: 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 2:4-10, Jude 1:3

10 Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Central to the life of the local church is the kind provision of the Lord Jesus Christ in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christ has given baptism and the Lord's Supper to the churches as visible signs of the Gospel. The baptism of believers is a symbol of union with Christ and entry into His Church but does not impart spiritual life. The Lord's Supper is a commemoration of Christ and His sacrifice offered once for all and involves no change in the bread and wine. All its blessings are received by faith.

Passages for study: Matt 28:18-20, Acts 2:38-39, 1 Cor 12:13, Rom 6:1-3, 1 Cor 11:17-34

11 Church Unity

The unity of the body of Christ, as expressed within and between local churches by mutual love, care, encouragement and corporate action in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. True fellowship between churches exists only where they are faithful to the apostolic gospel.

Passages for study: Philippians 4:14-20, 1 John 4:1-3

12 The Future

The personal and visible return in glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to raise the dead (bodily) and bring salvation and judgement

to final completion. He will grant eternal life to those who have believed the gospel, and consign those who have not to everlasting punishment in hell. God will then fully establish His kingdom in new heavens and a new earth, from which evil and evildoers, suffering and death will be excluded, and in which He will be glorified forever.

*Passages for study: Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:22-29;
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10;
Revelation 20:10-15*

2.4 What we believe - Notes

- i) This Basis of faith is a summary of what we believe is in substantial agreement with the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. The statement itself is based upon the one used by Affinity and the Yorkshire Gospel Partnership.
- ii) In accepting this statement as a summary of our faith, Dewsbury Evangelical Church is not setting up a standard above, or on a par with Scripture. We endorse fully the statement of *The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* that “the Holy Scripture is the all-sufficient, certain and infallible rule or standard of the knowledge, faith and obedience that constitute salvation. All religious controversies are to be settled by Scripture, and by Scripture alone. All decrees of Councils, opinions of ancient writers, and doctrines of men collectively and individually, are similarly to be accepted or rejected according to the verdict of the Scripture given to us by the Holy Spirit. In that verdict, faith finds its final rest”. (*Confession* Sections 1.1 and 1.10). The Basis of Faith above is the subordinate standard of our Church, and is binding only insofar as it is Biblical. It has no inherent authority, nor is it above revision or improvement. The Church binds itself to modify the Basis of Faith if it can be shown to be unbiblical in any way.
- iii) We believe that this Basis of Faith is necessary to the organisation of our Church. We accept it as a basis of fellowship between Christians

which repudiates the distortions of truth for which other men claim the support of Scripture. We also recognise its value as a standard for office bearers and for Members of the Church.

iv) The teaching of the Basis of Faith of this Church rests upon the whole truth of God's word, not upon a few selected proof texts. For this reason the texts of Scripture given under any particular section are intended to substantiate the general teaching of the section, rather than to prove every specific detail mentioned; the texts are included to aid Christians in their understanding of the matters contained in the Basis of Faith, and to show everyone that this Basis of Faith is based soundly and solely upon the word of God.

v) this basis may be added to upon agreement by the Church, so as to clarify our understanding of the truth and to counter heresy and error.

2.5 This is how we work

DEC, and all involved in the church, love Jesus Christ. Hence we want our lives, including our life together as a church, to be about getting him honour and praise. It's simple really. He has rescued us from the punishment we deserve for our wrongdoing; and he has done it through his death for us and his glorious resurrection from the dead. So we seek to live our lives for him. What does this mean in practice for us as a church? It means at least the following things.

1. We believe that God's honour matters more than anything else in life.

Everything God does he does for his honour, majesty and praise. For that reason he created this world, and for that reason he has rescued a people from that world which they have helped to spoil so that they can live for him. As those who have received God's grace in Jesus Christ, we desire to glorify and honour God in all that we do. We love to worship and praise God for all he has done for us. We love to live in

ways that please him. We love to tell the world not only of God's goodness to us but of how they too can share our blessings, and praise and serve him for themselves.

2. We believe the 'gospel', the good news about Jesus.

God has rescued us from our foolish lives of rebellion against him which rightly made him angry. He did this by sending his own Son into the world to live the life we should have lived and suffer the death we deserved to die. Jesus rose to new life to demonstrate that he has defeated death, sin and the devil. When we rejected in shame the life of pleasing ourselves and put our trust in Jesus to save us, we were given both eternal life and God's Spirit to live within us. This is the core of our Christian belief, and is the great news we want to share with everybody.

3. We learn from the Bible which is God's book.

We know about God because he has spoken to us, most clearly and decisively through the Bible. It tells the great story of the outworking of his plan to undo the mess that men have made of the world he created, and to win a people for himself through the work of his Son. And it tells us how we should live as his people. So we love to read it when we are alone and when we meet together. Indeed, when we do gather much of our time is given over to studying God's authoritative word. This involves listening to God's word being proclaimed and explained by those whom God has gifted for the task and we encourage talking about it together to make sure we understand it and appreciate its significance for our lives. In this way we get to know God better and to understand what he wants from us.

4. We pray to God frequently.

Not only does God speak to us, but we also speak to him. That's because through Christ we are now God's children and God is our Father. He delights to answer our prayers, as a way both of blessing us

richly and completing his plans for the world. We each pray privately, for in that way we each express the wonder of our new relationship with him. We also regularly pray together as church family, and we hold at least one weekly meeting for that purpose.

5. We love to meet together.

Being a Christian isn't something you can do on your own. Indeed, becoming a Christian involves becoming part of God's people, both of the world-wide family of believers and of a local church. We love to meet together in order to worship God, to hear his word and to encourage one another in our Christian lives. We have big meetings on Sundays so we can all meet together, and smaller less formal gatherings at other times to study, share, pray with and support each other. We believe that both are vital to our life and growth as Christians. We aim that when we meet together it will be like a small foretaste of heaven, and of life in the gloriously renewed world which Christ will make when he returns.

6. We care for one another, and for people outside of the church.

God doesn't promise us an easy time when we become Christians – indeed life often gets harder! Yet he promises to be with us and help us in our troubles. He has also given us each other so that we might not lose heart. We can comfort, advise and even correct each other in love, in order that we may each stay faithful to Christ when life is tough. We also seek to be outward looking, trying to share what God has given us with our families, neighbours and the wider community in which we work and live. We want God to be known and honoured by our lives as individuals and as a church.

7. We enjoy our unity and diversity.

We seek to love each other in a way that both transcends and is sensitive to differences in age, gender, race, culture, background and life-experience. We don't think of ourselves so much as 'black' or

'white', 'English' or 'Asian', 'rich' or 'poor', but primarily as Christians, as God's children. We rejoice in the fact that our God is a God who delights in variety and has made us all different; so we do not try to make everybody the same. For us it is enough that we are all united by our common faith and convictions. Indeed, our unity demands that we are both respectful of, and thankful for, each other's differences.

8. We are fixed in our beliefs and flexible in the way we do things.

We seek, like the New Testament writers, to be solid and unmoving on the core truths that make up the gospel. Yet we seek to be flexible and creative in the way we go about things for the sake of the gospel and the good of the church. So while we are absolutely committed to the preaching and teaching of God's word, to prayer, to fellowship, to communion, and to spreading the gospel, we are happy to change the way we do these things to suit the needs of the church and the community we long to influence for our Lord. We are happy to try new things and then set them aside if they do not prove useful the Lord's work and his people.

9. We seek always to be mission-minded as a church.

God wants everyone to know about his Son Jesus, and to believe in him and so be saved. He has put us here in Dewsbury so that we can get to know our neighbours and speak to them of Jesus, backed up by a life of love and godliness. In that way we hope that people will be convinced of the truth of the message we share. We hope that our church will prove to be beacon for Christ in our town and beyond, as we seek to be a community of love and integrity. We are all involved in doing God's work, whatever our calling in this world. We thank God for our leaders, including those who work full-time for our church, but we recognise that we all have a role to fulfil with them in the building up of the church and the spread of the gospel. We are also involved in supporting missionaries in other parts of the world, for we want all people to hear of our great God and his message of mercy.

SECTION 3: CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The New Testament shows the Church to us as a company of believers bound to one another in Christ, and pledged together to see the advancement of spiritual life and the spread of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. When a believer joins this Church, his or her responsibility is to promote such fellowship. Membership involves giving ourselves to one another. We are to forgive each other's faults, bear each other's burdens and uphold each other in prayer. For these reasons it can be seen that Church Membership is desirable for mutual edification, encouragement and comfort of every child of God.

3.1 Qualifications for membership

Membership shall be open to those who:

1. Have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

*Passages for study: Acts 2:36-47; John 1:11-13;
Romans 10:9,10*

2. Show credible evidence in their lives that their profession is a real work of God's grace. That assessment must be made with charity, looking for some immediate evidences of saving faith, so as not unnecessarily to delay the baptism and Church Membership of the new Christian.

*Passages for study: Acts 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 3:9-16;
2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 John 3:7-10; 1 John 5:1-5*

3. Express their warm and complete agreement with the following simple statement of belief:

"I believe that Christ died for sins according to the Scriptures and that He rose again bodily on the third day. I

repent of all my sin and trust in Jesus Christ alone for my gracious acceptance before God, and recognise that it is only through trusting in Him that I can receive forgiveness and all the benefits of his sacrifice on the cross.”

The Elders of the Church must do all they can to make sure that every applicant for Church Membership fully understands and embraces this simple profession of faith.

Passages for study: Romans 10:1-13; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3

4. Express their agreement with the fundamentals of the Basis of Faith, insofar as they can understand its teaching. While an applicant may be admitted as a member if there is not as clear an insight into the Basis of Faith as may be desired, no man may be admitted to office who is not in total agreement with the Basis of Faith. Any member who has difficulties with the Basis of Faith at any time must share these difficulties with the Elders.

*Passages for study: Romans 6:17; Hebrews 5:11-14;
1 Timothy 3*

5. Submit to the rule of the Elders insofar as this is outlined in the Scriptures, being willing to give heed to their ministry, advice, reproof and discipline in matters of faith and conduct.

Passages for study: Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13

6. Seek to be regular and diligent in the worship and fellowship of the body of Christ; to be continually concerned for her welfare and to promote the spread of the gospel. Membership can never be a matter of mere attendance at meetings, but is a participation that makes real and continuing claims on our time, strength, gifts and life.

*Passages for study: Acts 2:41-47; Hebrews 10:25;
Colossians 4:2-6*

7. To accept the responsibilities and discipline of Membership set out in section 3.5. The New Testament pattern is for believers to be added to the Church through the outward confession of faith in baptism. Therefore all new converts and unbaptised applicants will be encouraged to be baptised (usually by immersion – see section 3.3) before entering Membership.

Passages for study: Acts 2:37-42; 1 Corinthians 16:3

3.2 Applying for Membership

Application should be made to an Elder of the Church who will arrange an interview with the applicant. The Elders, in their pastoral care, must do their best to ensure that no one joins the Church lightly or unaware of their responsibilities and privileges. If the interview provides satisfactory evidence of the applicant's Christian belief and experience, and an acceptance of the doctrinal position of the Church (albeit with the limitations of understanding that are often found in new converts), the Elders will recommend acceptance of the applicant to the Church at the next Church Meeting. If that is deemed to cause an unnecessarily long delay, the recommendation can take place at a Church prayer meeting. (In either case the Elders shall endeavour to make sure that Members providentially hindered from being present are informed of the application).

If any Member has grounds for believing that the applicant may be unsuitable for Membership, he or she can raise the matter at the Church Meeting in question or, if appropriate, to an Elder within five days of that Church Meeting. If no valid objection is raised to an application, the applicant shall be publicly received into Membership and their names added to the Membership roll.

No Member will be received automatically by transfer from another Church but a letter of commendation will be sought in addition to the procedure outlined above.

3.3 Baptism

Baptism is designed by Christ to reassure us that acceptance with God belongs to those who trust in Christ's death. Baptism does not convey regenerating grace, but is a sign of union and fellowship with Christ in His death and resurrection.

As the Baptism of believers by immersion in water is closely linked with 'adding to the Church' in Acts 2, it shall not normally be considered apart from application to Membership, the spiritual requirements being essentially the same. New converts in the Church will be encouraged to be first baptised before receiving the Lord's Supper.

A person who holds to Infant Baptism may become a Church Member but may not hold office and should fully respect the conviction of the Church in regard to believers' baptism. Although baptism is to be by immersion in normal circumstances, due allowance should be made for the well-being of the candidate who is being baptised (consult the principle of Mark 2:27).

3.4 Junior Membership

In deference to their natural immaturity, those under 16 years of age will be regarded as Junior Members, and only such responsibilities will be pressed upon them as are deemed appropriate by the Eldership in conjunction with their parents. They shall not, for example, be encouraged to attend the private meetings of the Church which discuss policy and discipline. Nevertheless, the same great care must be taken in assessing the desires of the young to join in the Membership of the Church, and those accepted shall be regarded as sharing the full dignity of Membership in God's family. On reaching the age of 16, Junior Members shall be instructed by the Elders in the full responsibilities of Church Membership, and shall be admitted to full Membership

providing that they are in agreement with and committed to the whole basis of Membership set out above.

3.5 Responsibilities and Privileges of Membership

Members and would-be Members are reminded that being a Member of a local manifestation of Christ's body brings with it many responsibilities and privileges, among which are the following:

1. To devote your life in service to Christ in response to His great love for you. (2 Corinthians 5:15)
2. To attend regularly the main meetings of the Church, unless to do so would result in neglecting other God-given responsibilities. (Hebrews 10:25)
3. To be present at and contribute to the members' meetings of the Church. (1 Corinthians 5:4)
4. To endeavour to maintain the loving unity of the Church, which the Holy Spirit produces, and to avoid causing division. (1 Peter 3:8)
5. To enjoy the fellowship and love of other Members. (1 John 3:14)
6. To seek at all times to serve and edify the Church by the use of all the gifts that God has given you, and by taking active steps to grow in grace. (1 Corinthians 12:7, 12-27)
7. To pray much for the Church; its Elders, Deacons and Members. (2 Thessalonians 1:11, 12)
8. To honour and obey those in authority in the Church. (Hebrews 13:17)

9. To listen carefully to the preaching of God's word, and to seek to understand, believe and obey all that is taught, providing that it is in harmony with Scripture. (Acts 17:11,12 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17)
10. To share the privileges of pastoral care. (1 Samuel 12:23)
11. To honour the sacraments of the Church; Baptism (Acts 2:38) and the Lord's Supper. (1 Corinthians 11:24,25)
12. To support the Church financially, according to ability. (2 Cor 9:6-8)
13. To maintain a constant witness and testimony to Jesus Christ in the place He has set you. (1 Peter 3:15)
14. To be concerned for the Church world-wide. (1 John 3:14)

All Christians are reminded that Church Membership is a responsibility laid by Christ upon all Christians.

3.6 Lord's Supper

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the gifts of Christ to His Church. The New Testament teaches that the receiving of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are very important and solemn occasions in the life of believers. They are both signs of our faith and means of grace to strengthen us in our Christian lives. Baptism being initiatory and the Lord's Supper a continuing means.

The Lord's Supper is designed by Christ to keep His death central as the source of life and hope in the Christian. The Supper is not a sacrifice for sin, nor does it involve any change in the bread and wine but is a remembrance (or memorial) of Christ's offering of Himself as a sacrifice upon the cross, once for all.

The Lord's Supper shall normally be celebrated at least twice a month, the spiritual requirements being essentially the same as application for Membership. It is not to be celebrated lightly or unworthily, there being the command to self-examination beforehand and the solemn warning of 1 Corinthians 11. All Members are to do their utmost to be present when the Church is met together for the Lord's Supper. In expression of the unity of Christ's Church, visitors in good standing with other churches who share a like faith shall be welcomed to join with us.

Passages for study: Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 14:17-25; Acts 2:38-47; Romans 6:1-5; 1 Corinthians 11:23-4

3.7 The Government of the church

The Lord Jesus Christ alone is the Head of the Church. He governs His Church by the word of God (the Bible) and through the presence, leading and instruction of the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is the all-wise author of the Scriptures, His leading of the Church will always be in complete harmony with the teaching of the Scriptures. Therefore it is to the Scriptures that the Church must turn, in dependence upon the Lord, for the commandments, principles and illustrations by which its corporate life must be ordered.

Christ has given two complimentary aspects of authority in Church – Elders whom He prepares and equips, and the Church Members' Meeting. The authority of both is derived from Christ, and they are to function in harmony under the word of Christ.

3.8 Members' Meetings

1. The Church shall be called together by the Elders to discuss matters of mutual concern, in private, at least four times a year. Every effort shall be made by the Elders to give adequate notice to

Members of such meetings, and to give Members opportunity to raise matters for discussion at these meetings. Whenever possible the matters for discussion must be made known to the Members at least one week prior to the meeting. The Elders shall have final say as to what matters be discussed at the meeting but must not stifle discussion on issues of widespread concern within the Church.

2. Every Member will be expected to make all reasonable effort to attend Church Members' Meetings.
3. The required number of Members to form a Quorum at the Church Members' Meeting must be at least 40% of the Eligible Membership. ('Eligible Members' are full Members who are normally resident locally; it excludes missionaries and students living away). If the number of Members present at that time is less than the required percentage, the meeting may proceed with the preliminaries including the reading of the Minutes of the last meeting. If, however, when the time arrives to commence the 'Business' the 40% has not been reached then the meeting cannot proceed further. If a Quorum is not reached or drops below the required percentage during a meeting so that the meeting cannot continue then another Church Members' Meeting may be called after no less than two weeks. If at this meeting a Quorum is not reached or drops below the required percentage during the meeting then a further Church Members' Meeting may be called after no less than two weeks without the Quorum applying.
4. The Church Members' Meeting has the right to:
 - consider the appointment of Elders and Deacons;
 - deliberate in matters regarding admission to the Membership of the Church and the discipline of Church Members;
 - consider changes to the members' handbook and articles of association of the charitable company limited by guarantee;
 - consider changes which if implemented would significantly change the life and practice of the Church.

5. In these matters the Church is to be guided by its Elders, and is not to lightly set aside their advice, especially in a matter they deem to be one of principle.

If a conflict arises between the Elders and the people, or between Members within the Church, every effort is to be made to resolve it speedily by considering the different viewpoints expressed with humility and mutual love, and by seeking to see the issue in its Scriptural perspective. Where there is no resolution of the disagreement, that matter should be held over to the next meeting if at all possible. In which case all Members should be exhorted to consider prayerfully, seriously and unselfishly the area of disagreement.

If the conflict continues, help must be sought from the Eldership of another (preferably local) Evangelical Church, of similar doctrinal persuasion (one that is not directly concerned with the issue of disagreement); their mediation and direction must be accepted and acted upon.

6. All Church Members' Meetings shall be chaired by one of the Elders. When the chairman of the meeting deems it necessary a vote or secret ballot shall be taken to determine the views of Members on the issue under discussion.
7. All proceedings at Church Members' Meetings are confidential, and must not be discussed outside the Membership unless the opposite is agreed at the meeting.
8. Church Members' Meetings are held in the presence of the risen Lord. Therefore all proceedings need to be conducted with seriousness, mutual love and a real desire to know His will. Prayer is to be the hallmark of the Church before and after such meetings, and the meetings themselves carried on in a spirit of prayer.
9. All details of procedure not set out in this handbook and not governed by Scripture shall be decided by the Elders.

10. If a situation arises where there are no longer any Elders in the Church, the Deacons (if any) shall call a Church Members' Meeting within four weeks. If there are no Deacons the Members shall meet together to determine a date for the meeting, and the Church Members' Meeting should be responsible to determine all the procedures regarding Membership, appointment to office and other relevant issues. This should be done in accordance with the general principles and spirit laid down in the Members' Handbook.

3.9 Church Discipline

The purpose of Church discipline is fourfold:

1. To uphold the glory and rule of Christ in His Church.
2. To reclaim and restore those who err.
3. To maintain the purity of the local Church.
4. To further the sanctification of all the Members.

All disciplinary action must be carried out in a spirit of Christian love and humility, and with prayerful concern for the full restoration of the offender. Matters of moral and spiritual failure must never become a matter of gossip in the Church, but of private grief and personal watchfulness.

Matters of personal offence should be settled by Members in accordance with the procedures laid down by the Lord of the Church in Matthew 18:15-18.

The following behaviour will result in church discipline:

1. A persistent rejection of any of the fundamental teachings of the faith.

2. Unspiritual behaviour which is seriously inconsistent with a Christian profession or sound doctrine or damages the Church's loving unity in Christ.
3. Persistent failure to fulfil the responsibilities of Membership (including attendance) without good reason.

The following methods of church discipline will be employed:

1. Private conversation and discussion.
2. Admonition and rebuke, at first in private and then, only if both necessary and appropriate, in public.
3. Suspension from Membership. In this case a Member may not partake of the Lord's Supper, attend Church Members' Meetings or undertake any formal responsibility in the Church. They will be encouraged, however, to attend the preaching services and to be open to teaching and help from the word of God by the Elders. Suspension must be lifted if there is obvious evidence of true repentance, in which case it is vital that all Members show forgiveness to the restored Member.
4. Exclusion from Membership. This is the situation that results when there is no adequate response to the Church's call to a Member for repentance from fundamental doctrinal error, or serious ungodly behaviour. In such circumstances the Church must meet together to remove the offender's name from Membership. Even if a person's name is removed from the Membership roll, the Church Members must continue to pray and, if possible work, for the offender's repentance and restoration.

In some cases of discipline, great discretion is required. Therefore, the Elders are not obliged to give the Church all the details in the case, although they must be careful to make the Church aware that serious misconduct has taken place.

The member concerned shall be entitled to make appropriate representations to the elders when his or her possible suspension or removal from membership is being discussed.

In difficult cases of discipline, the Elders of the Church are at liberty to seek advice from other Eldershops, provided the matter is handled with great discretion.

3.10 Leaving the Church

Whilst Membership of the Church is a serious commitment, the Church recognises that there are valid reasons why Members may need to withdraw from the Membership of the Church:

1. If a Member deems that God's providence is directing him or her to a new sphere of life, he or she is to be encouraged to seek fellowship with a faithful gospel Church in the locality to which he or she is moving. Members should take account of their spiritual needs when considering moving to another area.
2. If a Member becomes seriously at odds with the beliefs and/or practices of the Church, and that unease lasts in the face of instruction by the Elders, he or she should be encouraged to seek fellowship with other Christians holding to that position. This is preferable to risking division within the Church by propagating views in opposition to the Basis of Faith of the Church.
3. If a Member ceases to hold fast to his or her profession of faith, he or she will no longer be eligible for Membership in the Church. People in that situation must be exhorted to see the great danger of their new position, and warned to examine themselves to see whether some particular sin has led to their spiritual deadness. They must also be encouraged to seek for God and not to withdraw from the preaching services of the Church, for it is by hearing the word of God that faith is restored.

Members may also be removed from the Membership of the Church through disciplinary action by the Church.

SECTION 4: ELDERS

4.1 Qualifications

Only men can be appointed to the office of Elder in the Church. No man can be appointed to the office of Elder who does not, in the view of the existing Eldership and the Church, fulfil all the requirements of Eldership laid down in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

4.2 Responsibilities

Christ gives Elders to the Church to perform three tasks:

1. To govern the local Church. Authority in every aspect of Church life (so far as Scripture determines it), is committed to them. Nevertheless, they are not to be lords over God's people; they are themselves part of the flock and are to be examples to it. In their governing they must be ruled by Scripture and sensitive to the mind of the Lord (which will often be reflected in the convictions of the Membership).

Passages for study: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-5; Acts 16:4; Mark 10:35-45

2. To shepherd the flock. They are to guard the local Church from error and false teaching, to feed and strengthen the Members with the word of God, caring for each individual soul, and to encourage all Members to develop and use all their gifts for the good of the Church.

Passages for study: Acts 20:28-30; Ephesians 4:11,12

3. To teach the word of God. All Elders must have a clear understanding of the faith and be in complete agreement with the Church Basis of Faith. They must be able to instruct others

in the truths of the faith. However, not all Elders need to have evident gifts of public instruction. The regular exposition and application of the word should be undertaken only by those Elders with recognised preaching gifts. The possession of responsibility for public teaching does not give an Elder a higher authority than those Elders who do not have such responsibility, as all Elders have equal authority.

Passages for study: 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9; Titus 2:1

All Elders are also trustees of the charitable company limited by guarantee, unless specifically prevented from being so by the articles of association (article 61).

4.3 Number

1. The number of Elders in the Church shall be determined both by the availability of men with the scriptural qualifications for the office, and the spiritual and pastoral needs of the Church. The Biblical pattern is for a plurality of Elders, where possible.
2. No one may be admitted to the Eldership who does not measure up to the requirements laid down in Scripture, however urgent the needs for an (extra) Elder may seem.
3. If at any time the Church is without Elders, the Members should consider seeking the help of another like-minded Church and submit to the care of their Eldership.
4. The charitable company limited by guarantee requires a minimum of three trustees, and the trustees are the elders and deacons, therefore the church needs to have at least three church officers at all times. If suitable men cannot be found from within the congregation the church shall consider borrowing church officers from other like minded churches on a temporary basis to allow the church to continue to function.

4.4 Appointment

It is clear from Scripture that the whole Church (both Elders and Members) must be convinced about the suitability of any candidate for the Eldership before that person can be recognised as Christ's gift to the Church for the office of overseer (ie Elder). To ensure that this is the case, the following procedure will be followed in the appointment of an Elder (or Elders).

1. Since the office of Elder is to be regarded as a lifetime calling, great care should be taken in the appointment of such. No election shall take place without the Church uniting in times of special prayer and being instructed from the Scripture in the work of an Elder and the necessary qualifications for that task.
2. Existing Elders shall be continually on the look-out to discern whether Christ is equipping men for this office within the Church. Since such men will already be exercising their gifts and evidencing their godliness and maturity within the Church, each Member is encouraged to recognise such men and commend their names to the Eldership. If, after careful consideration the Elders are happy with the commendation they shall make diligent enquiry within the Church to judge whether that man has the support and confidence of the Church to be recommended as an Elder. If they discover that he has, they shall approach him to determine whether he is willing to take up the pastoral oversight and can subscribe to the whole Basis of Faith.
3. If that brother is in whole-hearted agreement with the Basis of Faith and is willing for his name to be put to the Church as a potential Elder, that shall be raised at a full Church Meeting. In the absence of the man and his wife (if married), he shall be discussed more openly, the Elders seeking to deal with any questions or objections. No final decision shall be taken at that meeting.

4. If at that meeting there seems to be a general support for making that man an Elder, and no serious objections are raised, the Church shall be asked to reflect further on the appointment. This is to give opportunity to any Member who feels he or she has relevant but sensitive reasons to question the suitability of the man for the office of Elder to make those reasons known to the Elders. That must be done within ten days. Unless the Elders deem any such objections of sufficient weight to disqualify the prospective Elder, they shall within three months of the original meeting hold an election so that the Church membership can express their judgement.
5. The election shall be by secret ballot, with a ballot paper being distributed to every Eligible Membership ('Eligible Members' are full Members who are normally resident locally; it excludes missionaries and students living away). A minimum of one week shall elapse between the sending out of the ballot papers and the published return date. For the election result to be considered a valid expression of the whole church membership, at least 80% of the Eligible Members must return a ballot paper by the return date. On that date, the ballot papers shall be counted. At least 80% support of the returned ballot papers shall be required for the appointment of any prospective Elder before he can be confirmed in the office.
6. When a man is received by the Elders and Members as a gift of Christ to His Church for the work of an Elder, he shall be publicly set apart by the laying on of the Elders' hands and with the prayer of the whole Church.

The Church may consider it wise to strengthen the existing leadership of the Church by calling in a new Elder from another congregation. Before such an appointment is made the Church must implement all the following procedures:

1. The Church that the man is presently serving must be informed of any serious interest or desires that this Church has in that man. That Church must give its permission before that man can be called to serve Dewsbury Evangelical Church.
2. Testimony to the man's godliness and usefulness must be obtained from respected friends of our Church and from his present Church before any serious consideration by the Church to call him.
3. If that man is being considered by the Church for a preaching ministry, he must preach in the Church before any decision is made. If at all possible he must preach in the Church on a number of occasions, and all the Members must be given opportunity to meet him.

All the procedures for the appointment of Elders from within the Church must also be followed in appointing any man from another Church to office in Dewsbury Evangelical Church. No man who is not, without good reason, in a Membership of another gospel-preaching Church, can be called to the office of Elder in Dewsbury Evangelical Church.

4.5 Term of Office

1. There is no indication in Scripture that appointment to Eldership is for a temporary period. Therefore men shall only be accepted to the office of Elder who recognise that the task is of great importance, and that it will involve considerable sacrifice. However, the Church must recognise that God's providence may bring upon an Elder such circumstances as call for him to be either temporarily or permanently released from office. Suspension or termination of office in such circumstances shall not be considered failure in any sense.

2. The Church must regard thoughtfully and sympathetically any approach by another evangelical Church for the transfer of any of our Elders to work elsewhere. Such a man will only be released from his role in Dewsbury Evangelical Church if that seems, to both Elders and Church, to be in line with the wisdom of Christ. In this matter great care must be shown to avoid either serious weakness in this Church or undue selfishness regarding a man that Christ has given to us.
3. In recognition that eldership is a serious responsibility, elders shall not be expected to continue to serve after reaching age 70, and will normally retire from office by age 75.
4. Those elders that are paid by the church shall not be expected to continue in church employment beyond the normal age of retirement. This shall be a matter that is discussed by the elders at that time to consider the needs of the paid elder and the church.

4.6 Removal From Office

Whilst the office of Elder is to be regarded as a lifetime calling there are failings which the Church must view as disqualifying for office. If any Elder shall cease to hold the doctrines in the Basis of Faith, or be found guilty of dishonesty, immoral conduct or any other serious moral failure, or show a serious lack of concern for the flock, he must be relieved from office.

Such accusations must be handled sensitively, biblically and speedily by the existing Elders, and no decision to relieve a man from office must be taken without the consent of the Church Members' Meeting.

SECTION 5: DEACONS

5.1 Qualifications

Although the task of Deacons is concerned with practical issues, the qualifications required are no less spiritual than those required for Eldership, and are set out in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. No man should be appointed to this office without such qualities, notwithstanding the needs of the Church or the talents he may have.

5.2 Responsibilities

1. To relieve the Elders of work which would otherwise distract them from their primary calling.
2. To exercise a ministry of mercy on behalf of the Church towards those in physical and material need, especially such as are within the Church.
3. To administer the business and practical affairs of the Church. (All accounts are to be properly audited, and all finances handled with obvious integrity.)
4. To maintain any property belonging to the Church.

The spiritual authority of the Deacons is the same as that of other Church Members. However, the Church must give the Deacons such authority and assistance as is required for their various responsibilities. Where considered appropriate the Deacons may seek the assistance of other Church Members (men or women) in carrying out their tasks.

They are accountable to the Church for their work and should report regularly to the Church Members' Meeting. Significant matters should normally be brought to the Church Members' Meeting for discussion and decision.

The office of Deacon is not to be considered as a stepping stone to that of Elder.

All Deacons are also trustees of the charitable company limited by guarantee, unless specifically prevented from being so by the articles of association (article 61), in which case their individual responsibilities will not include handling finances or auditing accounts.

5.3 Number

The size of the Diaconate shall be determined by the number of scripturally qualified men available and the practical needs of the Church. The existing Deacons should report to the Elders if they feel there is a need to expand the Diaconate. If the Elders are in agreement with that, the Church should be asked to consider whether there are additional men in the fellowship with the qualifications necessary to carry out the task of Deacon.

Responsibility for the functions of the Diaconate belongs collectively to the Diaconate. However, it is wise that each of the Deacons should be assigned to a specific area (or areas) of responsibility.

The charitable company limited by guarantee requires a minimum of three trustees, and the trustees are the elders and deacons, therefore the church needs to have at least three church officers at all times. If suitable men cannot be found from within the congregation the church shall consider borrowing church officers from other like minded churches on a temporary basis to allow the church to continue to function.

5.4 Appointment

Every three years nominations for the office of Deacon shall be invited by the Elders from Church Members. Such an invitation is to be accompanied by clear exposition by the Elders from Scripture of the role of Deacons and the qualifications necessary for the office as outlined in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. There shall also normally be a Church Members' Meeting that shall involve an open discussion of the role of deacons and the needs of the church at the present time. The number of Deacons required may also be determined at this meeting.

Subsequent to this meeting, the Elders will invite the Eligible Membership to submit nominations for the office of Deacon. The nomination period shall normally last two weeks. Nominations with the names of the proposer and one seconder should be given in writing to the Elders. Wives may not propose or second their husbands. Nominees shall be asked by the Elders if they can subscribe to the whole Basis of Faith, and if so whether they are willing to stand. After the nomination period, the Elders shall publish the list of candidates willing to stand for the office of Deacon.

Members shall be given at least ten days to pray over their choice. During that time, if any Member has serious misgivings about the suitability of any of the men being considered by the Church for the Diaconate, they should endeavour to discuss it with the nominee(s) concerned. If the matter is not resolved then they should discuss it with an elder.

Within three months of the closing of the nomination period, the Elders shall hold an election so that the Eligible Membership can indicate their support for as many of the nominees as they believe fulfil the qualifications.

The election shall be by secret ballot, with a ballot paper being distributed to every Eligible Membership ('Eligible Members' are full Members who are normally resident locally; it excludes missionaries and students living away). A minimum of one week shall elapse between the sending out of the ballot papers and the published return date. For the election result to be considered a valid expression of the whole church membership, at least 80% of the Eligible Members must return a ballot paper. On that date, the ballot papers shall be counted. Normally, only the number of men required by the Church for office shall be appointed by the ballot. The men who most have the confidence of the Church shall be deemed to have been chosen provided they have the support of 80% of the returned ballot papers. If insufficient men have the appropriate support the size of the Diaconate shall be reduced.

After the ballot, the Deacons shall report to the Church the names of the men chosen. Those chosen by the Church shall be set apart to their task by the Church with prayer and a united commitment to support the men in their work.

5.5 Term of Office

Deacons shall normally be elected to serve the Church for a minimum time of six years, although the Church shall handle a request to be relieved from the duties of office before that period is up with understanding and compassion. Elections for the Diaconate shall normally take place every three years, with half the places on the Diaconate being reconsidered, in order to maintain a measure of continuity. Men may stand for a further period of service but no stigma is to be attached to men who do not feel they can.

The Church may also appoint men as temporary Deacons to deal with a situation that arises if this is deemed wise by the Elders and Membership.

5.6 Removal From Office

Whilst Deacons are normally elected for a minimum period of six years, there are failings that the Church must regard as disqualifying from office within that period.

If any Deacon shall cease to hold the doctrines in the Basis of Faith, or be found guilty of dishonesty, immoral conduct or any other serious moral failure, or be found to have consistently failed to have carried out the responsibilities of his office, he must be relieved from office. Such accusations must be handled sensitively, biblically and speedily by the Elders and no decision to relieve a man permanently from office must be taken without the consent of the Church.

SECTION 6: RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER CHURCHES

The Church has a duty to:

1. Remember that Dewsbury Evangelical Church is just one amongst a number of true local churches in our area. Therefore we are to pray for other gospel Churches or Christian organisations and to seek meaningful fellowship with them, especially with those who share our understanding of the faith. No fellowship or co-operation is to be undertaken with bodies claiming to be Churches or Christian organisations who deny any of the fundamentals of the faith expressed in the 'Basis of Faith'.
2. Respect the discipline of the other gospel Churches, unless there is good reason to believe that discipline has been carried out contrary to the express wishes of the Lord of the Church revealed in His word.
3. Remember that we are part of the Lord's world-wide Church. It is vital for us to pray for the Church throughout our nation and overseas and to take active steps to be more informed about the Church elsewhere. It is also vital for us to recognise our part in the Church's responsibility to take the gospel to all the human race.

SECTION 7: CHANGES TO THIS HANDBOOK

Amendments and additions to this members' handbook and the articles of association shall be discussed at the Annual General Meeting of the Church or at an extraordinary Church Meeting. All Members must be given one month's notice of the amendment in detail.

If at that meeting there seems to be a general support for making the proposed changes, and no serious objections are raised, the Church shall be asked to reflect further on the matter, providing a further 10 days for members to raise concerns with the elders. Unless the Elders deem any such objections of sufficient weight to discount the proposed changes, they shall within three months of the original meeting hold an election so that the Church membership can express their judgement.

The election shall be by secret ballot, with a ballot paper being distributed to every Eligible Membership ('Eligible Members' are full Members who are normally resident locally; it excludes missionaries and students living away). A minimum of one week shall elapse between the sending out of the ballot papers and the published return date. For the election result to be considered a valid expression of the whole church membership, at least 80% of the Eligible Members must return a ballot paper by the return date. On that date, the ballot papers shall be counted. The proposed changes shall be deemed to have been passed provided they have the support of 80% of the returned ballot papers. After the ballot, the result shall be reported to the Church.

APPENDIX 1: DATA PROTECTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

As part of the ordinary activities of the Church, the Church maintains various records including personal information about members, attenders and employees of the church and its various groups, including youth groups.

The Church is not legally required to be registered under the Data Protection Act, however, the Church takes seriously its responsibilities in relation to data protection and confidentiality, in particular, the church officers and leaders responsible for these records make every effort to ensure that the records are both accurate and secure.

The Church does make certain information (for example: a list of members' names, addresses and telephone number available to members of the Church and these should be either kept or disposed of confidentially).

Any members who prefer that their personal information is not distributed within the Church membership should advise one of the Church officers, who will ensure that appropriate action is taken.

APPENDIX 2: GIVING TO THE CHURCH

A1.1 Gift Aid Scheme

The Church is supported financially by the regular giving and donations from its members.

As a registered charity, the Church is entitled to take advantage of the Gift Aid Scheme (originally introduced by the Government in 1990 to assist charities), which is operated by HM Revenue & Customs. The Gift Aid Scheme allows the Church to periodically claim back any Income Tax paid by its members on the money which they have given to the Church.

The amount which the Church can reclaim is related to the basic tax rate, which may change from time to time as announced by the Chancellor in the Budget. Currently, for every £100 given by a member who is also a taxpayer, the Church can reclaim £25.

The advantage of the Scheme is that it increases the Church's income at no extra cost to the donor, however, in order to benefit, the Church must claim the tax and the donor must complete a written Gift Aid Declaration form. If you are a taxpayer and you would like to make regular or one-off donations and would like the Church to reclaim tax, please ask for and complete a 'gift aid declaration' form.

If you have completed a gift aid declaration you will need to notify the church if you:

- Want to cancel the declaration
- Change your name or home address
- No longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

A1.2 Bank Details

At our Sunday meetings a box is available to place gifts in. Cheques should be made payable to 'Dewsbury Evangelical Church'.

Alternatively gifts can be made directly to Dewsbury Evangelical Church via the following CAF Bank Ltd accounts:

	Gift Aid Payments	Non Gift Aid Payments
Name	Dewsbury Evangelical Church Gift Aid Account	Dewsbury Evangelical Church
Sort Code	40-52-40	40-52-40
Account number	00093608	00017074

Please put your name as the reference for the payment.

Notes:

This members' handbook was first published in March 2013, and replaces the church constitution, published in 1999.

Dewsbury Evangelical Church is a registered charity (no: 1147142) and a company limited by guarantee (no: 8026724) registered in England and Wales.

Registered office: Crackenedge Lane, Dewsbury, West Yorks. WF13 1 RB