

THE INDISPENSABLE CHURCH HANDBOOK

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At one stage our church handbook was equivalent to the Lamb's Book of Life. It only contained the names of the 'elect', i.e. the church members. Furthermore, its contents were deemed confidential and were not for the eyes of any non-members!

All that has now changed. Our present church handbook contains the names of all the members and friends of the church, together with their addresses and telephone numbers – in addition, before every name is a letter and a number indicating the pastoral area to which people belong. The only difference between members and friends is that the former have a special 'asterisk' (*) after their name. Most of the friends are members of the congregation. However, we also include the names of people's spouses, whether or not they attend church.

In addition, we now include the names of the children. It is a nonsense not to include them, especially if at a dedication service we promise to pray for them. All the children of a family are included – whether or not they still come to church. However, where children no longer come to church, then once they reach the age of 18 their names are normally removed. To help us in our pastoral care, after the name of the child, we list the month and year of their birth.

With all the comings and goings the church handbook quickly gets out of date. We therefore have to issue a new edition every year. This is quite a task. Once the new handbook is produced, copies are delivered personally to every person in the church. In this way we seek to ensure that everybody receives at least one pastoral visit a year!

In addition to the annual publication, we find it necessary to produce updated versions on a termly basis for our leadership team as also for those involved in pastoral care. Thank God, with modern computers the production of these termly revisions is relatively simple.

It is important to say that this book is more than a list of names, addresses, and phone numbers. It is a church handbook, in the sense that it gives a good deal of information about the church. It contains, for instance, not just a list of the leaders of the various organisations and activities, but also the rationale for our church structures. Along with our mission statement, there is a copy of the church covenant and of the Baptist Union 'Five Core Values For A Gospel People' adopted by the church. There is a one page summary of 'the Baptist way of being the church'. Another page is devoted to 'mission beyond Chelmsford', with the names and addresses of our link missionaries (we also list the names and addresses of those whom we have sent out into ministry, as also of previous ministers). The final page explains the various ways in which people can give to the church. With new people coming into the church, this is an indispensable guide to church life – and to those who are longstanding members, it is a useful reminder.

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