

BUC GUIDELINES

C19 Help I'm a Church Secretary (07/2011)

These notes are offered as guidelines by The Baptist Union Corporation Limited to provide information for Baptist churches.

These notes can never be a substitute for detailed professional advice if there are serious and specific problems, but we hope you will find them helpful.

If you want to ask questions about the leaflets and one of the Baptist Trust Companies are your property trustees, you should contact them. They will do their best to help.

If your church property is in the name of private individuals who act as trustees they may also be able to help.

WHAT IS A CHURCH SECRETARY?

The function of Church Secretary is essential in the life of a Baptist church. The Secretary has often taken responsibility for much of the work that goes on 'behind the scenes'. It is a very demanding role particularly in terms of time—but not an impossible task!

The Secretary will usually know something about all the church's activities and fulfil a vital leadership and co-ordinating role.

The Secretary and Treasurer have traditionally been seen as key roles within the church. The nature of the tasks they have been given they will need to work closely with the Minister (if there is one) and provide a good foundation for church administration generally. This is a vital part of the mission of the church and a good Secretary can help others to work effectively and avoid problems before they happen.

Some churches choose somebody to deal with 'Administration' but do not give them the title Church Secretary. Other churches have made changes to the traditional 'set up' by employing an Administrator or by splitting the job between a number of people.

It is vital to have someone in the role of 'Church Secretary' even if some of the tasks are delegated to others.

The Church Secretary's name will be used by the local Baptist Association, the Baptist Union of Great Britain and others as the point of contact with the whole church.

This leaflet is intended to be a guide to the main tasks involved in being a 'Church Secretary'. Although one person may not do all the tasks someone does need to make sure they are being done! However, every church is different so not everything in this leaflet will be appropriate to your situation. (Care is needed in employing an Administrator. See the guidelines leaflets C06 *Charities Act 1993* and C17 *Help I'm a Charity Trustee* to check legal restrictions on appointing either a trustee or a member of the family.)

CHOOSING A CHURCH SECRETARY

Churches will have their own constitution that state how Church Secretaries are chosen.

Some churches always choose their Church Secretary from among the Charity Trustees. In other churches the Church Secretary will be chosen from among the whole membership. When this happens the Secretary will automatically become a Charity Trustee because they have such an important co-ordination and leadership role within the church. In addition the Secretary has an important task in helping to organise the Charity Trustees' (leadership) meetings, taking minutes and ensuring that agreed actions are carried out.

The selection process may vary from church to church. It is always important to check the local church Constitution. There are certain essential elements. It is necessary that the Church Secretary has the support of the church members. It is important that it is possible to effect a change of Church Secretary if this is felt to be necessary. Some churches review the appointment of Secretary annually; others may appoint a Secretary to serve for three years with the possibility of a further term of three years but then a compulsory period of 'retirement' before creating an opportunity for that person to be considered again.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN TASKS INVOLVED IN BEING CHURCH SECRETARY?

Belonging to the Church and Dealing with People

The Church Secretary should develop an overview of church life. The Church Secretary should be someone who gets to know the people within the church and listens to what they have to say. In addition, the Secretary should encourage others who lead activities. They will have their own hopes and needs. The Secretary will look out for people with gifts and skills that can be used in the church.

The Secretary needs a positive and prayerful attitude to the life and future mission of the church. This will 'rub off' on other leaders, members and those who attend the church. A Church Secretary with a negative attitude will quickly hinder growth.

Dealing with Mail

The name of the Church Secretary is recorded in the local Association records and Baptist Union directories (and usually other places too). The Church Secretary will receive mailing from numerous organisations. A helpful hint from a longstanding Church Secretary:

"The worst thing you can do is let all your mail and other paperwork pile up - try and deal with it as soon as you can. Divide it up as it arrives - binning some - setting others aside to take to a Deacons' meeting or to hand to someone more appropriate - then deal with the rest as soon as possible. Try not to file it all in the bin as some of it will actually be useful to your church!"

The Secretary should circulate not restrict incoming information. Although it is necessary to filter out the junk mail the Secretary must understand that mail is addressed to 'the Church Secretary' for the benefit of the whole church.

If information about youth events arrives - pass it promptly to the youth group leader! One local church never responded to invitations to joint events with other churches. There was a simple reason. Nobody attended because the Church members never heard about the events that were planned.

Clearly, the Church Secretary, Minister and Deacons (church leaders) will need to manage the church programme. Decisions will need to be taken whether all external events should be publicised - but generally the Secretary should be receiving information - and passing it on.

Dealing with Meetings

These could be Elders, Deacons, leadership and church meetings.

In advance of the meeting the Secretary will need to prepare, or help to prepare, agendas (lists of topics for discussion). It is sometimes helpful to distribute these lists in advance of the meeting. This will give people time to think and pray about the issues.

At the meeting the Secretary will need to ensure that notes (minutes) are made of the discussion and that decisions taken are recorded carefully. These can be written or typed and filed in a book or binder set aside for this purpose. Some churches have bound minute books and it is necessary to insert the minutes into the book.

As these minutes may be of historical interest the materials used to record them should be of sufficient quality to ensure that they survive for many years.

The minutes can be copied and distributed for people to read before the next meeting, or just read out at the meeting or posted on the church website. It is important that the minutes are checked by the whole group at the beginning of the next meeting so that they can be confirmed as an accurate record. The chairman of the meeting usually signs the minutes or notes before starting to work through the next list of topics for discussion.

It is a good idea to write the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting.

The Secretary should ensure that decisions taken at meetings are carried out. This will sometimes mean the Secretary taking the initiative. At other times it will be other people's responsibility to do the things that have been agreed.

Dealing with the Minister

Most Baptist churches have a Minister, lay-pastor or someone who fills this role. The relationship between this person and the Church Secretary is a crucial one. The Church Secretary can offer support and encouragement. Working as a group of Charity Trustees that usually includes the Minister, Deacons, Elders, Church Secretary and Church Treasurer is vital if the church's mission and ministry are to be fruitful. Although any relationship will take time to grow a Church Secretary should do everything possible to maintain a good working relationship with their Minister or lay-pastor, in the context of mutual accountability.

If relationships between the Church Secretary and Minister are good this will help communication. The Secretary will be able to help the Minister by dealing with some routine correspondence and tasks. The work can be shared.

The Secretary will have a very important role when the church welcomes a new Minister. The Secretary can help the Minister to get to know the local area and to learn the names of the people who attend the church.

The Secretary can encourage a Minister during the first months. The Secretary might have a particularly important role in helping the Minister to avoid mistakes (putting their foot in it!).

The Secretary may need to be wise and tactful when there are difficulties in the church but should always be working towards reconciliation and resolving, rather than ignoring any problems.

Dealing with other Baptists

Your church is probably a member of your local Baptist Association and the Baptist Union of Great Britain. These bodies regard the Church Secretary as a key contact. Information will be sent to you about events, prayer needs, the work of Home Mission and BMS world mission.

Each Secretary receives two copies of a magazine called *Transform* from the Baptist Union of Great Britain; one of these is for the Church Treasurer and needs to be passed on as soon as possible.

It is important that any changes of address are notified to the Association and the Baptist Union of Great Britain as soon as possible.

Dealing with a Pastoral Vacancy

The Secretary will have a heavier responsibility when there is no Minister. When a Minister decides to leave the church there are several things that should be done:

- Buy a copy of the Baptist Union of Great Britain publication '*Facing a Pastoral Vacancy*'.
- Invite your regional Minister to meet with the leaders of the church to talk about the future. You need to find out about something called the '*Settlement Process*'. These are the arrangements that are made to help churches with vacancies to find suitable Ministers.
- Spend time at your leaders' meetings to ensure that the work normally done by the Minister is shared out—and done.
- It is sometimes helpful to appoint somebody to help the church as difficult decisions are taken about the future. Sometimes it is possible to ask the Minister of a nearby church or a retired Minister living nearby to become the church's 'Moderator'. This will be somebody who will act like the church's 'best friend', offering good advice and usually taking responsibility for chairing important meetings at the church. This can be especially helpful if there are difficulties in deciding on a plan for the future of the church. Somebody outside can help church members to have a constructive discussion and reach a conclusion. The Moderator can be a source of advice if there are pastoral needs within the church that are complicated.

Dealing with 'all the rest'!

The Church Secretary will often 'take the initiative'. The Secretary will notice tasks that need to be done. Many Secretaries do their work effectively and quietly. The Secretary can be a problem solver as well as preventing difficulties.

It is important that the Secretary understands how the church should function. Many churches have rules about calling meetings and arranging elections of Charity Trustees, Deacons, Elders and the Minister. Although the church Constitution should be available to everybody it is important that the Church Secretary understands the details so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

A Church Secretary will want to ensure that publicity about church events - rotas for various tasks and the church notice boards are managed well.

Baptist churches and church buildings are held in the name of Holding Trustees. Many churches have one of the Baptist trust corporations as trustee of the property and it is useful to know who this is. They will need to be involved if major repairs or alterations are being considered and will certainly need to be involved if any land is to be bought and sold.

Other churches might have a group of private individuals as their Holding Trustees.

The Secretary will need to complete Annual Return Forms for the Baptist Union and Association.

If the Minister is on holiday or away from the church for some other reason it is usually the Church Secretary who makes arrangements for someone else to lead the service. This can be a visiting preacher but there maybe somebody within the church that can do this. Whatever is arranged the details need to be sorted out properly - and in good time. If there is a visiting preacher and, for example, you are celebrating Harvest Festival, please tell them. They will also need to know how to find your church, the time of the service, the song book that is generally used and other practical details.

WHERE CAN I GET SOME HELP?

Some local Baptist Associations run training days or other events aimed at Church Secretaries. Even if there is no training event your local Baptist Association will be able to offer guidance as to how the various tasks can be organised.

CHARITY TRUSTEES

Baptist churches are charities and, as such, are subject to the general requirements of charity law, the main provisions of which are brought together in the Charities Act 1993. Although, in a Baptist church, the church meeting has ultimate authority with regard to any decisions taken by the church, when it comes to the law the church's leaders including the Church Secretary are held responsible for the church's decisions – because they are the Charity Trustees.

A church's Constitution usually defines who in the church the Charity Trustees are. It is the Charity Trustees that have legal and financial responsibility for the effective management of the church.

This is because the law regards the people who actually have the general control and management of the administration of a charity as the 'Charity Trustees'. In the case of a Baptist church, these Charity Trustees are usually the Minister and Deacons. If the church has Elders then they are included as well. If the church has a 'Leadership Team' instead of Deacons and/or Elders, then this group would be regarded as the Charity Trustees.

Charity Trustees should at all times act:

- with integrity;
- in the best interests of the church;
- without regard to their personal interests.

More information can be found in the BUC Guideline leaflet "C17 Help I'm a Charity Trustee."

It is vital that you read that leaflet alongside this leaflet to make sure that you understand your responsibilities as a Charity Trustee.

This leaflet is about Church Secretaries – it is not a complete guide to all your responsibilities.

The other leaflets in this series are:-

- C17 *Help I'm a Charity Trustee*
- C18 *Help I'm a Deacon*
- C20 *Help I'm a Church Treasurer*

These are available from the Baptist Union Corporation.

AVAILABLE FROM BUGB PUBLICATIONS

Nothing Spiritual about Chaos

by Rachel Tole

A practical guide for Baptist church secretaries and administrators

This is a very helpful book. It is packed with useful information that would help anybody involved in the leadership of a Baptist church.

If you have access to the internet you can order through the BUGB website

www.baptist.org.uk click on **Resources** and then **BUGB Online Store**.

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This is one of a series of *Guidelines* that are offered as a resource for Baptist ministers and churches. They have been prepared by the Baptist Union Corporation Limited and are, of necessity, intended only to give very general advice in relation to the topics covered. These guidelines should not be relied upon as a substitute for obtaining specific and more detailed advice in relation to a particular matter.

The staff at the Baptist Union Corporation, at Baptist House (or your regional Trust Company) will be very pleased to answer your queries and help in any way possible. It helps us to respond as efficiently as possible to the many churches in trust with us if you write to us and set out your enquiry as simply as possible.

The Baptist Union Corporation staff also deal with churches that are in trust with the East Midland Baptist Trust Company Limited, the North Western Baptist Association (Incorporated), and Yorkshire Baptist Association.

If your Holding Trustees are one of the other Baptist Trust Corporations you must contact your own Trust Corporation for further advice. A list of contact details has been included.

If you have private trustees they too should be consulted as appropriate.

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