

## Ethos Statement

### 1. Our Christian Identity

Langley Free Church is a community of Christians who: love to worship God; aim to grow in our understanding and experience of God; share the good news about Jesus Christ and to work for the common good. It is this Christian identity, our covenant with the Baptist community and Langley Free Church's agreed beliefs and values that are the foundation of all we are and do.

### 2. Our Commitment to the Wider Baptist Community

Langley Free Church has chosen to covenant with the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) and its member churches and organisations. Therefore, BUGB's Declaration of Principle, Vision and Culture all inform our ethos as a Baptist Church.

### 3. The Declaration of Principle

The three parts 'Declaration of Principle' forms the basis of understanding for all who belong to the Baptist Union and Langley Free Church affirms this declaration prayerfully and wholeheartedly.

- a. That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, made manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has the liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.
- b. That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who 'died for our sins according to the scriptures; was buried and rose again the third day'.
- c. That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelism of the world.

### 3. Our values and Vision Statement

Langley Free Church, in recognition of the Baptist principle that each church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer God's Holy word, the church has discerned and agreed the following convictions.

While these values are a sound basis for our unity in Christ, individual members are free to hold differing views providing they are not at variance with the statement of belief laid out in our Constitution.

In a spirit of prayer and loving care, we affirm God's love and concern for all human beings, whatever their sexuality and so repudiate all attitudes and actions which victimise or judge others.

Our aim is to be faithful to biblical truths, socially just and pastorally generous.

We recognise that we are all sinners and that there are many ways in which we as individuals and collectively can displease God, which can significantly affect our church life.

We must remember how Jesus taught us in Matthew 7 v 5 to 'first remove the plank from our own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.'

### *Women in Leadership*

Langley Free Church holds to the view that God created man and women in the image of God and that he calls both men and women into a vast array of roles, including all forms of church leadership.

### *Marriage and Divorce*

Langley Free Church holds to the understanding that neither divorce or remarriage are necessarily barriers to church leadership or full participation in the life of the church.

### *Sexual Orientation, Same Sex Marriage, Gender reassignment, LGBTQ+*

Langley Free Church has spent a considerable amount of time in 2024 praying, reflecting and considering where the church stands on the matter of same sex relationships and marriage. After much dialogue we have discovered that amongst the leaders, members and congregation of the church, there are roughly equal numbers of people who wish the church to be fully inclusive of those in same sex relationships, and those who have a more orthodox understanding that sexual expression is for marriage as defined as being between one man and one woman. There are others in the church that are undecided.

We believe that Christ holds us together despite our differing views and we long to express Christ's love and humility through our respect for, and acceptance of one another.

We have therefore concluded that, at this time, our membership is open to all who express faith in Christ, whatever their views, identity or personal practice on this matter. People who are in active same sex relationships are not restricted from applying for roles of leadership and ministry within the church, but we must be clear and honest that the discussions that will inevitably take place around these appointments could be difficult and painful to be at the centre of, and that it is likely such potential appointments would attract a significantly split vote. Furthermore we confirm that all appointments will be made in accordance with our Constitution, of which this statement forms part.

It is our heart's desire that the church is experienced as a safe place by all members of the community, hence our decision to be transparent in our ethos statement about where we are on this matter right now. We do not believe that this is a fixed position that must be defended indefinitely, rather an expression of the church, in a time of pastoral vacancy, in 2024.

There are no restrictions in membership or leadership for those who are exploring or who have completed gender reassignment, or who are living a gender-fluid life.

The church will be free to discuss these matters again after a period of three years has elapsed (so 2027 at the earliest), should the request be made to do so by Elders, Deacons or at least six church members.

### *Statement of inclusion*

Langley Free Church holds that all people are loved by God and invited into his kingdom life.

We are therefore called to become a church community where all are loved. We recognise that we all fall short of how God wants us to be and, although Jesus has shown us the way to live, none of us come close to it.

We welcome people regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, physical and mental ability, neurodiversity, education, class, economic status and political outlook.

As a church our aim is to include and welcome people to be eligible to participate in as many areas of mission and ministry within the church as possible. These include baptism, communion, church membership, child dedication and positions of leadership.

There are three exceptions.

Firstly, we cannot accept within our church community those who have an issue which presents a safeguarding threat to us.

Secondly, we also do not wish to engage any preachers who give false teaching that is not based on the biblical truths which underpin our faith and our existence within Christ's body.

Thirdly, we recognise that we all are vulnerable to varying degrees. We would not wish to force anyone into an unsuitable role or position that would further expose their vulnerability.

Revised May 2024

Approved 15.7.24