SECTION 1 — INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Rules and Handbook

This Handbook outlines the vision, values, beliefs, membership expectations, and operational principles of the **Immersed Network**. It is designed to sit alongside the Network's Constitution as a guiding framework for:

- member churches
- affiliated ministers and leaders
- trustees
- partner organisations
- regional hubs and ministry teams

The Rules and Handbook expresses the theological identity, missional priorities, and organisational commitments that shape our life together as an evangelical Baptist family.

1.2 Who We Are

The **Immersed Network** is a growing movement of evangelical Baptist churches, leaders, and ministries seeking to strengthen one another in:

- prayer
- biblical faithfulness
- courageous leadership
- evangelistic mission
- church planting
- the renewal and health of local churches

We exist to provide a **clear, constructive evangelical voice**, rooted in historic Christian orthodoxy and committed to the mission of God in the United Kingdom.

The Network welcomes churches of *any denomination and none* who identify with our evangelical beliefs, Baptist distinctives, and shared commitments to mission and discipleship.

1.3 Why We Exist

In a rapidly changing culture and an increasingly complex ministry landscape, churches and leaders need:

- a trusted community

- doctrinal clarity
- prayerful encouragement
- practical support
- leadership formation
- missional equipping

The Immersed Network seeks to meet this need by providing:

- **Scripture-shaped partnership**
- **peer encouragement and accountability**
- **resources for evangelism and mission**
- **training for pastors, elders, and leaders**
- **support for planting, revitalisation, and renewal**

Our desire is to see churches strengthened, disciples formed, leaders supported, and Christ proclaimed.

1.4 Our Identity as an Evangelical Baptist Network

As a Network, we are committed to:

- historic, orthodox, conservative evangelical belief
- the supreme authority of Scripture
- believer's baptism by immersion
- congregational governance under Christ
- the autonomy of the local church
- mission as the joyful responsibility of every disciple

While Baptist in conviction, we welcome churches from a range of denominational backgrounds who share these core commitments.

1.5 Relationship to the Constitution

This Handbook does **not** replace the Constitution but:

- expands upon it
- provides clarity for practice
- outlines expectations for membership
- explains theological identity
- offers guidance to trustees, members, and leaders

Where any discrepancy arises, the **Constitution is the governing document**.

1.6 How This Handbook Should Be Used

This Handbook is intended to:

- guide member churches and leaders in understanding our ethos
- inform new applicants about membership expectations
- provide clarity for trustees and staff
- support the ongoing unity of the Network
- strengthen shared ministry and mission

It should be reviewed by the Trustees every **three years**, or more frequently if required.

SECTION 2 — VISION, VALUES & IDENTITY

2.1 Vision Statement

To see evangelical Baptist churches and leaders deeply rooted in Scripture, united in gospel partnership, and boldly engaged in God's mission—so that local churches are strengthened, new churches are planted, and the good news of Jesus is clearly proclaimed in our communities and beyond.

We long for churches and ministers who are immersed in God's Word, dependent on prayer, confident in the gospel, and courageous in mission, working together for the glory of God and the flourishing of the local church.

2.2 Mission Statement

Immersed Network exists to unite and resource evangelical Baptist churches—of any denomination and none—and their ministers for Scripture-shaped partnership in prayer, encouragement, leadership formation, and evangelistic mission, including church planting and the strengthening of local churches, providing a clear, constructive evangelical voice.

2.3 Core Values

Our values express what kind of network we aspire to be and what shapes our life together.

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1. Scripture-Shaped — Rooted in God's Word

We believe the Bible is God's living and authoritative Word, shaping our theology, practice, and partnerships.

- Scripture informs how we pray, lead, disciple, and engage in mission
- We resist trends that dilute biblical faithfulness
- We seek to be shaped by Scripture rather than culture

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable…" (2 Timothy 3:16)

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2. Gospel-Centred — United Around Jesus

We are united not by uniformity but by the gospel of Jesus Christ—his life, death, resurrection, and reign.

- The gospel is the foundation of our unity and mission
- We hold evangelical convictions with clarity and humility
- We major on what matters most

"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2)

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3. Prayer-Dependent — Relying on God, Not Ourselves

We believe lasting fruit flows from prayerful dependence on God rather than human effort alone.

- Prayer undergirds all our work
- We encourage personal, pastoral, and corporate prayer
- We seek God's guidance together

"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain." (Psalm 127:1)

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4. Relationally United — Partnership, Not Isolation

We believe churches and ministers are stronger together than alone.

- We foster trust-filled, supportive relationships
- We value encouragement, accountability, and mutual learning
- We honour local church autonomy while pursuing gospel partnership

"Encourage one another and build one another up." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

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5. Leader-Forming — Investing in People for the Long Term

We are committed to developing healthy, resilient, and theologically grounded leaders.

- We invest in ministers at every stage
- We encourage character, calling, and competence
- We support leaders for the sake of the churches they serve

"Entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2)

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6. Evangelistically Focused — Sharing Christ Clearly and Courageously

We believe the gospel is good news meant to be shared.

- We encourage confident, compassionate evangelism
- We equip churches to engage their communities faithfully
- We long to see people come to faith in Jesus

"How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?" (Romans 10:14)

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7. Church-Strengthening & Church-Planting — For the Health and Growth of the Local Church

We believe the local church is God's primary means of mission in the world.

- We support churches to become healthier and more missional
- We encourage new church plants and fresh expressions
- We seek renewal as well as expansion

"So the church… was strengthened; and it increased in numbers daily." (Acts 16:5)

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8. Evangelical with Grace — Clear, Constructive, and Christlike

We seek to offer a clear evangelical voice that is confident but not combative.

- We speak with conviction and humility
- We pursue faithfulness without harshness
- We engage cultural and theological challenges constructively

"Speaking the truth in love." (Ephesians 4:15)

2.4 Orthodox Evangelical Identity Statement

Immersed Network understands **evangelical Christianity** in its historic and orthodox sense. By this we mean a theological tradition rooted in the authority of Holy Scripture, centred on the gospel of Jesus Christ, and committed to faithful proclamation of that gospel in every generation.

In particular, we affirm the historic evangelical convictions often summarised as:

- **The supreme authority and trustworthiness of Scripture** as the written Word of God.
- **The uniqueness and lordship of Jesus Christ**, fully God and fully human.
- **The saving work of Christ through His atoning death and bodily resurrection.**
- **The necessity of personal repentance and faith for salvation.**
- **The calling of the Church to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of all nations.**

We therefore seek to remain within the **historic, orthodox stream of evangelical Christianity** that is faithful to the teaching of Scripture and the great confessional traditions of the Church.

While we seek to engage graciously with all Christians, the Network is intentionally shaped by **orthodox evangelical convictions rather than the broader or more revisionist expressions of contemporary evangelicalism**.

For this reason, membership in the Network is reserved for churches and leaders who affirm the doctrinal commitments outlined in this handbook and who desire to uphold the authority of Scripture and the historic gospel.

2.5 Baptist Distinctives of the Immersed Network

As an evangelical Baptist network, we affirm:

Believer's Baptism

Baptism is for believers by immersion, symbolising union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Congregational Governance

Local churches discern Christ's will together under Scripture and the Spirit.

Local Church Autonomy

Each church governs itself under Christ while joyfully partnering with others for mission.

Priesthood of All Believers

Every Christian is called and gifted for ministry and witness.

Freedom of Conscience

We honour liberty of conscience under Scripture and the Spirit.

Mission at the Centre

Every disciple is called to bear witness to Christ in word and deed.

2.6 Theological & Cultural Ethos

We aspire to cultivate a network characterised by:

- doctrinal clarity
- gracious orthodoxy
- spiritual renewal
- mission urgency
- encouragement and accountability
- courageous leadership
- joy in Christ
- a constructive evangelical voice in the nation

We seek to be a network that embodies faithfulness to Scripture, unity in the Spirit, and devotion to the mission of God—strengthening churches and advancing the gospel.

2.7 Our Commitment

As Immersed Network, we commit ourselves to:

- faithful partnership grounded in Scripture
- prayerful dependence on God
- generous encouragement of churches and ministers
- courageous participation in God’s mission

All for the glory of God, the good of the church, and the advance of the gospel.

SECTION 3 — Our Convictions, Principles & Commitments

3.1 Our Doctrinal Foundations

The Immersed Network is joyfully rooted in historic evangelical Baptist belief. Our shared convictions unite us in mission while honouring the autonomy of each local church. These convictions shape our identity, our leadership expectations, our partnerships, and our mission practice.

Alignment with the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) Declaration of Principle

Purpose of this Section

This document demonstrates how the vision, mission, and values of Immersed Network align with the **Declaration of Principle of the Baptist Union of Great Britain**, and how those principles shape the Network's theology, ethos, and governance.

The BUGB Declaration of Principle

The basis of the Baptist Union is.

1) That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God 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 liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.

2) That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the 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'.

3) That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.

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1. The Lordship of Christ

BUGB Principle:
Jesus Christ is Lord and sole authority in all matters of faith and practice.

Immersed Network Alignment:
Immersed Network affirms the lordship of Jesus Christ as foundational.

- All authority exercised by trustees, leaders, and ministers is understood as delegated and accountable to Christ
- The Network seeks to serve the purposes of Christ, not institutional self-interest
- Leadership is exercised in a servant-hearted and accountable manner

This conviction underpins all governance, strategy, and public engagement.

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2. Authority of Scripture

BUGB Principle:
Christ's authority is revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Immersed Network Alignment:
Immersed Network affirms the Bible as the inspired, authoritative, and sufficient Word of God.

- Scripture shapes doctrine, mission, leadership formation, and ethical decision-making
- Teaching, training, and resourcing are intentionally Scripture-shaped
- Trustees are responsible for safeguarding biblical faithfulness

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3. Liberty of the Local Church

BUGB Principle:
Each local church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer Christ's laws.

Immersed Network Alignment:
Immersed Network fully affirms the autonomy of the local church under Christ.

- The Network has no authority over local churches
- Participation is voluntary and relational, not juridical

- Churches remain responsible for their own governance, ministry, and practice

The Network exists to support, encourage, and resource churches, not to direct or control them.

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4. Freedom of Conscience

BUGB Principle (implicit):
Individual believers and churches are accountable to God and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Immersed Network Alignment:
Immersed Network respects freedom of conscience under the authority of Scripture.

- Unity is sought without coercion or enforced uniformity
- The Network encourages theological conviction combined with humility and charity
- Differences are approached through prayerful dialogue rather than division

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5. The Believers' Church

BUGB Principle (historic Baptist conviction):
The Church is a gathered community of believers responding in faith to the gospel.

Immersed Network Alignment:
Immersed Network supports churches that understand the church as a community of professing believers.

- Discipleship and spiritual maturity are central concerns
- The Network encourages churches to form communities shaped by the gospel

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6. Believers' Baptism

BUGB Principle (historic Baptist practice):
Baptism is for believers upon profession of faith.

Immersed Network Alignment:
Immersed Network affirms believers' baptism as an act of obedience and public witness.

- Responsibility for baptismal practice rests with the local church
- The Network does not impose uniform practice beyond Baptist conviction

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7. Voluntary Association for Mission

BUGB Principle (historic and contemporary):
Baptists associate freely for mission while retaining local church autonomy.

Immersed Network Alignment:
Immersed Network exists precisely as a voluntary association.

- Churches and ministers freely choose to participate
- Partnership is based on shared gospel conviction rather than structural control
- Mission, evangelism, and church planting are pursued collaboratively

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8. Mission and Evangelism

BUGB Principle:
The Church is called to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Immersed Network Alignment:
Immersed Network prioritises evangelistic mission and church planting.

- The Network equips churches and leaders for faithful, contextual evangelism
- Mission is understood as both proclamation and presence
- Church planting and renewal are central strategic concerns

3.2 Our Ethical Commitments

In all matters of conduct and character we seek to live under Christ's lordship and Scripture's authority. This includes commitments to:

- Personal and corporate holiness
- Integrity, transparency, and accountability
- Safe, healthy, prayerful church cultures
- Compassion, justice, and Christlike love
- Unity that avoids coercion and harshness

We aim to embody **clarity without cruelty, conviction without combativeness, and grace without compromise**.

3.3 Our Commitment on Human Sexuality

(Incorporating the Evangelical Alliance Statement on Human Sexuality)

Immersed Network affirms the **Evangelical Alliance's Biblical and Pastoral Response to Human Sexuality** as part of our shared theological and ethical foundation. This forms expectations for leadership, partnership, pastoral practice, and discipleship.

We Affirm:

1. We affirm the goodness of creation and the dignity of all people as those made in God's image. We recognise that all of us are sinners, and that the only true hope for sinful people – whatever our sexuality – is in Jesus Christ. Our prayer is that His love, truth and grace would always characterise evangelical responses to debates on sexuality
2. We affirm God's love and concern for all human beings, whatever their sexuality, and so reject and condemn all attitudes and actions which victimise or vilify those whose affections are directed towards people of the same sex. We are encouraged that many Christians now recognise and deeply regret the hurt caused by past and present failures in their responses to those who experience same-sex attraction.
3. We affirm that marriage is an institution created by God in which one man and one woman enter into an exclusive relationship for life and is the only form of partnership approved by God for sexual relations. Any sexual practice outside of this is incompatible with God's will as revealed in scripture. Holding these theological and ethical views on biblical grounds is neither harmful nor homophobic. Rather, they are views to be held and expressed with Christ-like love and grace, since they reflect the teaching of Jesus Himself.
4. We encourage evangelical congregations to be communities of grace in which those who experience same-sex attraction and seek to live faithfully in accordance with biblical teaching are welcomed and affirmed. Such Christians need churches which are healthy communities where they are able to share and explore their stories with fellow believers for mutual encouragement and support, as we help each other grow together into maturity in Christ.
5. We believe the acceptance by certain churches of same-sex marriage and other forms of sexual relationships outside monogamous heterosexual marriage, and permitting the ordination to ministry of those in such relationships, is incompatible with biblical teaching. We stand prayerfully with those in such churches who are seeking to resist these moves on biblical grounds.
6. We believe church services that institute or bless same-sex marriages, same-sex civil partnerships and any other forms of sexual relationship outside monogamous heterosexual marriage are unbiblical. We believe that no church leader or congregation should be compelled to perform or participate in such services.
7. We commend and encourage all those who experience same-sex attraction and have committed themselves to chastity by refraining from same-sex sexual practice. We believe they should be eligible for ordination and leadership within the church, recognising that they can bring invaluable insights and experience to the sphere of Christian pastoral ministry.
8. We affirm the work of those helping Christians who experience same-sex attraction and who want to live in accordance with biblical teaching. Such pastoral support may involve prayer and counselling and must be done in a responsible, consensual, and non-coercive way. We acknowledge that some people have experienced changes in their sexual attractions, with or without such support, though this outcome is not necessary for Christian faithfulness and should not be promised.
9. We believe that sexual relations outside marriage without repentance, and public promotion of such activity, are inconsistent with faithful church membership. While

processes of membership and discipline differ from one church context to another, we affirm that churches should be free to follow these processes in relation to those who engage in, or promote, sexual relationships outside heterosexual marriage

10. We encourage evangelical congregations to love and welcome all people, whatever their pattern of sexual behaviour. We are called to be communities of gentleness, patience and ongoing pastoral care in which all of us who are living outside God's purposes will come in due course to see the need to be transformed and live in accordance with biblical revelation and orthodox church teaching.

Leadership & Partnership Expectations

- Leaders within the Network are expected to teach, uphold, and model biblical sexual ethics.
- Churches partnering with the Network commit to uphold these convictions in their doctrine and practice.
- Membership and leadership alignment maintain unity around evangelical conviction and pastoral integrity.

3.4 World Baptist Alliance – Statement of Belief

Immersed Network also subscribes to the **World Baptist Alliance Statement of Belief**, recognising it as a broad, global, and relational expression of Baptist faith.

In summary, we affirm the following:

The Hope of a New Heaven and New Earth

1. Renew our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, our guide and friend, in the power of the Holy Spirit and we affirm our life together as a community of faith looking forward in hope to Christ's return and God's New Heaven and a New Earth;

Our Triune God

2. Believe in the one eternal God who revealed Himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit;

3. Rejoice that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, revealed in the Scriptures as fully God and fully human, and whose life shows us the way of true discipleship, was crucified for us and was raised from the dead on the third day to save us from our sins;

Scripture

4. Declare that the divinely inspired Old and New Testament Scriptures have supreme authority as the written Word of God and are fully trustworthy for faith and conduct;

The Church and the Kingdom

5. Believe the Christian faith is best understood and experienced within the community of God's people called to be priests to one another, as these Scriptures are read and studied together. We thank God for all those who study God's word and seek to put its teachings into practice individually and collectively through congregational polity;

6. Understand that our worship, mission, baptism and celebrating of the Lord's Supper, joyously witnesses to God's great purposes in creation and redemption;

7. Believe our gathering churches, with other true Christian churches, are called to be witnesses to the Kingdom of God. To that end we pray, work and hope for God's Kingdom as we proclaim its present and coming reality;

8. Declare that through the Holy Spirit we experience interdependence
with those who share this dynamic discipleship of the church as the people of God. As such, we affirm Christian marriage and family life;

9. Repent for not having prayed and worked hard enough to fulfil the prayer of Christ for the church's unity. We commit ourselves to pray and work to further the unity of Christian believers;

10. Affirm that Believers' Baptism by immersion is the biblical way to publicly declare discipleship for those who have repented of sin and come to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour;

The Work of Christ: Atonement and Redemption

11. Affirm the dignity of all people, male and female, because they are created in God's image and called to be holy. We acknowledge we are corrupted by sin, which incurs divine wrath and judgement;

12. Confess the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross, dying in our place, paying the price of sin and defeating evil, who by this love reconciles believers with our loving God;

Stewardship of God's Creation

13. Proclaim our love of God's created world and affirm our commitment to the stewardship of God's creation.

Our Mission

14. Declare that God gives spiritual gifts to believers who are called to live a life of worship, service and mission. These gifts are discerned and confirmed by the believing community together;

15. Know that in the Great Commission, every believer, empowered by God, is called to be a missionary, learning and sharing more of Christ that the world might believe;

Religious Freedom and Justice

16. Confess that faith in Christ entails a passionate commitment to religious liberty, freedom, peace and justice;

17. Affirm that in Jesus Christ all people are equal. We oppose all forms of slavery, racism, apartheid and ethnic cleansing and so will do all in our power to address and confront these sins;
Now, at this centenary gathering these things we declare, affirm and covenant to the Lord Jesus Christ and to each other, believing the truth found in Him and revealed in the Scriptures. We, recognising that this is a partial and incomplete confession of faith, boldly declare that we believe the truth is found in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Because we have faith and trust in Him so we resolve to proclaim and demonstrate that faith to all the world.

Amen and Amen.
Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

3.5 Summary Statement

Immersed Network operates in clear alignment with the **Baptist Union of Great Britain's Declaration of Principle**, affirming:

- the lordship of Christ
- the authority of Scripture
- the liberty of the local church
- the dignity of all people
- the call to holiness
- the centrality of the gospel
- voluntary partnership for mission
- a biblical sexual ethic expressed with clarity and compassion

We seek to be a Network that is **faithful, prayerful, relationally united, leader-forming, evangelistically focused, church-strengthening, and graciously evangelical**—for the glory of God and the advance of the gospel.

SECTION 4 — Governance, Decision-Making & Network Structure

4.1 Introduction to Governance

The Immersed Network is constituted as a **Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)**. Our governance structure exists to:

- Ensure the Network operates legally and transparently
- Safeguard our theological and ethical commitments
- Protect the autonomy of local churches
- Enable collaborative decision-making that reflects Baptist convictions
- Support spiritual, missional, and organisational health

Our governance principles are rooted in:

- The **Lordship of Christ**
- The **Authority of Scripture**
- The **Liberty of the Local Church**
- The **Priesthood of All Believers**
- The **Voluntary nature of Baptist associations**

4.2 The Role of the Members of the CIO

Members of the CIO include:

- Partner churches
- Recognised ministers
- Approved individual leaders
- Other partner organisations (where appropriate)

Members are not passive observers but full partners in the mission, direction, and safeguarding of the Network.

Members have the responsibility to:

- Uphold the Network's Vision, Values, Doctrinal Commitments, and Covenant
- Participate in Network gatherings and prayer
- Support the mission through prayer, involvement, and financial subscription
- Hold trustees accountable to the constitution and charitable objectives
- Engage with major decisions affecting the direction of the Network

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4.3 The Board of Trustees

The Trustees serve as the primary governing body of the Network. They exercise delegated responsibility under Christ and under charity law.

The Trustees Are Responsible For:

1. **Safeguarding the charitable purpose**
   Ensuring all activities advance the mission of the Immersed Network.
2. **Maintaining theological integrity**
   Governing in line with the Vision, Values, Doctrinal Commitments, and Evangelical Alliance statements.
3. **Oversight of policy and practice**
   Including safeguarding, finance, risk management, and compliance.
4. **Strategic leadership**
   Setting priorities, approving budgets, and discerning long-term direction.
5. **Guarding the culture**
   Ensuring the Network remains relational, prayerful, evangelical, and missional.

Trustees Do *Not* Have Authority To:

- Interfere with the governance of local churches
- Appoint or remove local ministers
- Direct local church mission, strategy, policies, or discipline

Trustees serve the Network; they do not rule over it.

4.4 Network Structure

The Immersed Network operates through:

1. The Members (Churches & Leaders)

The foundational body of relational and missional partnership.

2. The Board of Trustees

Responsible for governance and legal accountability.

3. The Network Leadership Team (NLT)

Appointed by Trustees to oversee ministry, resourcing, training, events, and relational support.

4. Regional Hubs (as established)

Serving churches through mutual encouragement, training, and mission collaboration.

5. Task Groups / Working Teams

For specialist areas such as:

- Prayer strategy
- Church planting
- Leadership development
- Family Camp
- Theology and training
- Youth & children's ministry support

4.5 Decision-Making in the Network

Decision-making follows a **Baptist ecclesiological model**:
shared, prayerful, participatory, and under Christ's authority.

We combine:

- Relational discernment
- Trustee accountability
- Member engagement
- Scripture-shaped wisdom

Two Types of Decisions:

1. **Ordinary decisions** — routine governance, operations, programmes
2. **Special decisions** — matters requiring member approval (see below)

4.6 How Members Make Decisions (CIO Model)

Members may take decisions in two ways:

(1) Decisions at a General Meeting

- Members gather in person or online
- Decisions are made by **simple majority vote**
- Votes may include **email ballots** if permitted in the meeting notice
- Trustees prepare agendas and proposals for member approval
- Meetings include prayer and discernment

(2) Decisions by Written Resolution

Members may approve an ordinary written resolution if:

- It is sent to all eligible members
- A **simple majority** of all members return authenticated agreement
- Responses are received within **28 days**

This allows the Network to act efficiently between meetings while retaining accountability.

(3) Decisions Requiring Special Procedure

Certain decisions (listed in the Constitution) require:

- A higher majority
- A special resolution
- Or approval exclusively at a General Meeting

This may include:

- Amendments to the Constitution
- Appointment or removal of trustees
- Doctrinal, ethical, or structural changes
- Dissolution of the CIO

4.7 Decision-Making by Trustees

The Trustees meet regularly to:

- Make operational and strategic decisions
- Review financial statements and risk
- Oversee safeguarding
- Appoint Network staff or volunteer roles
- Approve ministry initiatives
- Ensure compliance with charity legislation

Trustee decisions are made by:

- Simple majority
- With a quorum present
- Following prayer, Scripture reflection, and discussion

4.8 Honor for Local Church Autonomy

Immersed Network operates **with full respect for Baptist church governance**, therefore:

- Network-wide decisions **do not bind** local churches
- Churches remain self-governing under Christ
- Network decisions relate only to Network activities, membership, policies, and mission initiatives

Local autonomy is not a footnote but a defining principle.

4.9 Transparency & Accountability

The Network commits to governance that is:

- Open
- Transparent
- Scripture-shaped
- Legally compliant
- Communicated clearly
- Reviewed regularly

Annual reports and financial statements will be provided to members.

4.10 Summary

The governance of the Immersed Network is shaped by the:

- **Lordship of Christ**
- **Authority of Scripture**
- **Liberty and autonomy of local churches**
- **Baptist tradition of voluntary association**
- **CIO legal framework**

Decision-making is:

- Prayerful
- Participatory
- Accountable
- Relational
- Legally robust
- Mission-oriented

This approach ensures that we remain a Network that is:

- Trustworthy

- Faithful
- Evangelical
- Baptist
- Collaborative
- Focused on gospel mission

SECTION 5 — Membership Framework

5.1 Purpose of Membership

Membership in the Immersed Network exists to:

- Strengthen gospel partnership among evangelical Baptist churches and leaders
- Encourage faithful mission, prayer, and discipleship
- Provide mutual accountability, resourcing, and leadership support
- Uphold the doctrinal and ethical commitments of the Network

Membership is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is **voluntary**, relational, and covenantal, reflecting our commitment to shared mission and unity in the gospel.

5.2 Categories of Membership

1. Church Membership

Churches may join the Network if they:

- Are evangelical in conviction (orthodox, conservative)
- Affirm believer's baptism by immersion
- Uphold the Immersed Network Vision, Values, and Beliefs
- Affirm the **Evangelical Alliance Statement on Human Sexuality**
- Commit to prayer, partnership, and participation
- Agree to the annual financial subscription

Responsibilities of Member Churches:

- Participate in Network events, prayer initiatives, and training opportunities
- Share insights, experience, and resources for mutual encouragement
- Abide by Network policies, including safeguarding and ethical standards
- Respect the autonomy of all churches while engaging relationally and missionally

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2. Individual Membership (Ministers and Leaders)

Individual ministers and leaders may join the Network if they:

- Are active in pastoral or ministry leadership within a church
- Uphold the Network's Vision, Values, Beliefs, and Covenants
- Commit to prayer, mutual support, and theological formation
- Agree to model biblical sexual ethics in line with the Network's standards
- Contribute to the Network through participation, encouragement, and financial subscription

Benefits of Individual Membership:

- Access to leadership formation, training, and resourcing
- Participation in peer networks and support groups
- Opportunities for mentoring, teaching, and collaborative ministry

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3. Non-Denominational Church Membership

Non-denominational churches are welcome if they:

- Align with the Network's **orthodox evangelical convictions**
- Uphold the Vision, Values, and Beliefs of the Network
- Commit to voluntary partnership without ceding church autonomy
- Participate actively in prayer, mission, and relational support
- Contribute via financial subscription

The Network encourages diversity of expression **without compromising doctrine or ethical integrity**.

5.3 Membership Covenant

All members—churches or individuals—enter into a covenant with the Network, affirming that they will:

1. Uphold the **Vision, Values, and Beliefs** of Immersed Network
2. Submit to **Scripture-shaped partnership** and the authority of Christ in mission
3. Respect the **autonomy of local churches** and promote unity in diversity
4. Support Network initiatives in **prayer, encouragement, leadership formation, and mission**
5. Model **biblical ethics**, including adherence to the Evangelical Alliance statement on human sexuality
6. Commit to the **annual financial subscription**, ensuring sustainability of the Network's work

Covenant Statement:

“By joining the Immersed Network, we commit to live and work in partnership with other churches and leaders, to be Scripture-shaped, gospel-centred, prayer-dependent, and mission-focused, all for the glory of Christ and the good of His Church.”

5.4 Membership Process

1. **Application** – Churches or leaders complete a formal application form.
2. **Reference/Endorsement** – A current Network member or trustee provides recommendation.
3. **Review** – Trustees review alignment with Vision, Values, Beliefs, and covenant commitments.
4. **Approval** – Membership is formally granted by a simple majority of Trustees.
5. **Onboarding** – New members receive:

- Handbook
- Covenant agreement
- Guidelines on participation, training, and subscriptions

5.5 Financial Subscription

Membership requires an **annual financial contribution** to support:

- Network administration and staff
- Leadership formation programs
- Prayer initiatives
- Church-planting and mission support
- Events, conferences, and Family Camp

Principles for Subscription:

- Contributions are set according to church size or leader status
- Payments are voluntary but expected as an expression of covenant partnership
- Financial transparency and accountability are maintained by the Trustees

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5.6 Rights and Responsibilities of Members

Church Members:

- Vote on Network matters as defined in Section 4
- Participate in Network initiatives and strategic planning
- Provide input and guidance to leadership teams

Individual Members:

- Access training, mentoring, and support
- Contribute to decision-making processes where appropriate
- Serve in working groups, advisory roles, or event teams

All Members:

- Must respect governance structures
- Support trustees in maintaining ethical, theological, and legal integrity
- Commit to relational unity and gospel partnership

5.7 Membership Review & Renewal

- Membership is **reviewed annually** in light of participation, covenant adherence, and financial subscription.
- Trustees may recommend remedial support, additional training, or, in rare cases, suspension or withdrawal if members seriously breach covenant or ethical commitments.
- Withdrawal of membership may be voluntary or trustee-initiated, with opportunities for reconciliation and dialogue.

SECTION 6 — Policies and Practice

6.1 Purpose of Policies and Practice

The Immersed Network maintains a clear set of policies to:

- Ensure the Network operates safely, ethically, and legally
- Promote a culture that reflects the character of Christ
- Protect children, adults, churches, and leaders
- Support transparent, good governance
- Provide clarity for all members
- Safeguard unity and trust within the Network

These policies apply to:

- Trustees
- Staff and volunteers
- Individual members
- Ministers and leaders
- Member churches when participating in Network activities

Local churches remain responsible for their **own internal policies**, but are required to meet the minimum standards outlined in this section.

6.2 Code of Conduct

All members—churches, leaders, and trustees—are expected to uphold:

1. Christian Character

- Integrity, humility, servant leadership
- Avoidance of behaviour that dishonours the gospel or harms unity
- Respect for other churches and leaders

2. Scriptural Ethics

- Conduct that aligns with biblical teaching
- Full adherence to the Evangelical Alliance statement on human sexuality
- Commitment to orthodox evangelical conviction

3. Communication Standards

- Truthful, courteous communication
- No bullying, harassment, manipulation, or spiritual abuse
- Confidentiality where appropriate

4. Ministry Accountability

- Avoidance of inappropriate relationships
- Transparency regarding finances, safeguarding, and pastoral boundaries
- Accountability to local church leadership and the Network

6.3 Safeguarding Policy (Summary)

Immersed Network is committed to:

- Providing a safe environment for children, young people, and adults at risk
- Promoting a culture where safeguarding is understood as everyone's responsibility
- Preventing abuse and responding promptly to concerns

Requirements for Member Churches:

- Must have an up-to-date safeguarding policy
- Must appoint a Safeguarding Coordinator
- Must ensure DBS checks for relevant workers
- Must report serious safeguarding incidents according to legal requirements

Network Responsibilities:

- Safeguarding policy and designated lead
- Training for leaders in safeguarding awareness
- Risk assessments for events, gatherings, and Family Camp
- Reporting procedures for safeguarding disclosures

A full Safeguarding Policy will appear in the **Policy Appendices**.

6.4 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (Biblical Framework)

The Network affirms:

- The dignity of all people made in the image of God
- Equality in worth and salvation, without denying biblical distinctions
- Opposition to racism, abuse, discrimination, and injustice

We reject:

- Any ideology that contradicts biblical anthropology
- The redefinition of sexuality, gender, or marriage
- Coercive approaches to diversity or inclusion

We embrace:

- True unity in Christ
- Mutual respect among believers
- Justice and compassion shaped by Scripture

6.5 Financial Integrity Policy (Summary)

The Network commits to:

- Transparent and accountable stewardship
- Annual reporting to members
- Proper budgeting, auditing, and financial scrutiny

Expectations for Members:

- Annual financial subscription
- Honest disclosure of any conflict of financial interest
- Stewardship shaped by gospel generosity

6.6 Ministry Ethics and Conduct

The Network expects all leaders and churches to uphold:

1. Doctrinal Integrity

- Orthodox evangelical faith
- Adherence to the Network's Beliefs
- Fidelity to Scripture

2. Sexual Ethics

- Sexual intimacy reserved exclusively for heterosexual marriage
- Ministers/leaders to model biblical purity in personal life
- Prohibition of practices inconsistent with the Evangelical Alliance statement on human sexuality

3. Pastoral Ethics

- Avoiding spiritual manipulation or authoritarianism
- Maintaining healthy boundaries
- Responsible use of authority and influence
- Accountability to local church structures and the Network

4. Social Media Conduct

Leaders and churches must use social media responsibly:

- No public attacks or divisive commentary against other members
- No sharing harmful, untruthful, or inflammatory content
- Communications should be gracious, truthful, and Christlike

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6.7 Complaints & Grievance Procedure (Summary)

A clear process exists for:

- Raising concerns
- Reporting misconduct
- Dealing with conflict
- Ensuring fairness and confidentiality

Steps:

1. **Informal resolution** wherever possible
2. **Formal written complaint** submitted to Trustees
3. **Independent review or panel** if necessary
4. **Outcome communicated** clearly and promptly
5. **Right of appeal** where appropriate

Church autonomy is respected throughout, but Network policies apply to any Network-run events, roles, or partnerships.

6.8 Conflict of Interest Policy (Summary)

Trustees, leaders, and volunteers must:

- Disclose any conflict of interest
- Remove themselves from decisions where a conflict exists
- Operate transparently and without personal gain

A register of interests is maintained and reviewed annually.

6.9 Data Protection & Privacy (Summary)

The Network complies with UK GDPR and data protection law.

We commit to:

- Storing data securely
- Using data only for its intended ministry purpose
- Not sharing data without consent
- Clear privacy notices for all events and memberships

6.10 Health & Safety Framework (Network Activities)

For all Network events (Family Camp, conferences, regional hubs):

- Risk assessments are mandatory
- First aid provision is required
- Clear incident reporting procedures

- Emergency and evacuation guidelines
- Food handling checks (if applicable)

Member churches remain responsible for their own health and safety policies.

6.11 Partnership & Public Engagement Policy

The Network will:

- Speak publicly with clarity, grace, and biblical conviction
- Engage culture faithfully as an evangelical voice
- Cooperate with like-minded organisations (e.g., EA, Affinity, Christian Concern)
- Avoid partnerships that compromise doctrinal integrity

6.12 Review & Accountability

All policies are:

- Reviewed triennially by Trustees
- Reported to members in summary form
- Updated in line with changes in charity law and safeguarding legislation

Members are expected to remain familiar with Network policies and comply with all requirements.

SECTION 7 — MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

7.1 Purpose of this Covenant

This Membership Covenant outlines the shared commitments, responsibilities, and expectations of all Member Churches and their recognised delegates within the Network. While each Member Church remains self-governing and congregationally autonomous, this Covenant expresses the mutual promises we make before God and one another as a fellowship of orthodox evangelical churches united in mission, doctrine, and accountability.

7.2 Covenant Commitments of Member Churches

By joining the Network, each Member Church affirms the following commitments:

7.2.1 Commitment to Christ

Each Member Church commits to:
a. Confess and proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.
b. Submit to the authority and sufficiency of Holy Scripture in all matters of faith, doctrine, ethics, and practice.
c. Encourage the spiritual formation of its members through preaching, prayer, worship, discipleship, and obedience to Christ.

7.2.2 Commitment to Fellowship within the Network

Each Member Church commits to:
a. Participate actively in the shared life, collaboration, and mission of the Network.
b. Contribute people, wisdom, resources, and prayer as able.
c. Pursue unity, peace, and mutual support while respecting church autonomy.
d. Engage in mutual accountability, including being open to counsel, correction, and support from the Network where doctrinal or ethical concerns arise.

7.2.3 Commitment to Mission and Witness

Each Member Church commits to:
a. Bear faithful gospel witness in its own local context.
b. Uphold and promote evangelism, mission, church planting, and gospel-based community engagement across the region.
c. Serve the common good, with particular concern for the poor, marginalised, and vulnerable.

7.2.4 Commitment to Biblical Holiness

Each Member Church affirms its responsibility to:
a. Model and teach a lifestyle consistent with Scripture and the moral expectations outlined in the Network's Doctrinal Basis.
b. Encourage holiness, discipleship, and repentance within its congregation.
c. Address sin biblically and lovingly within the life of the church.

7.3 Affirmation of the Network's Doctrinal Basis

Member Churches affirm their agreement with the Doctrinal Basis set out in Section 3, including:

a. The authority, sufficiency, and trustworthiness of Scripture.
b. The historic, orthodox evangelical understanding of the gospel.
c. The full Evangelical Alliance Statement on Human Sexuality as adopted in Section 3.

Member Churches commit to uphold and promote these doctrinal positions in their teaching, governance, and pastoral practice.

7.4 Responsibilities Toward Other Member Churches

Member Churches agree to:
a. Maintain a spirit of cooperation, respect, and partnership.
b. Seek counsel, mediation, or support from the Network where relational, doctrinal, or ethical challenges arise.
c. Avoid behaviour or public statements that could damage the reputation or gospel witness of the Network as a whole.
d. Pray for the wellbeing, growth, and fruitfulness of other Member Churches.

7.5 Accountability and Relational Discipline

By joining the Network, Member Churches:
a. Welcome relational accountability, encouragement, and support from the Network Leadership Team.
b. Acknowledge that, where a Member Church persistently departs from the Doctrinal Basis or engages in conduct harmful to the unity or witness of the Network, the Network may apply the processes outlined in Section 8.
c. Recognise that the goal of any corrective process is restoration, repentance, and the strengthening of gospel witness.

7.6 Mutual Commitments Between the Network and its Member Churches

The Network commits to:
a. Support Member Churches through prayer, fellowship, resources, and shared mission.
b. Provide leadership, training, doctrinal clarity, and strategic guidance as appropriate.
c. Maintain integrity, transparency, and accountability in all operations.

Member Churches commit to:
a. Collaborate with the Network's leadership and other churches in good faith.
b. Communicate honestly and transparently regarding challenges, doctrinal concerns, or safeguarding issues.
c. Share in the mission, values, and vision of the Network.

7.7 Renewal of Covenant

This Covenant is reaffirmed annually at the Network's Annual General Meeting or equivalent gathering, during which Member Churches renew their shared commitment to Christ, to one another, and to the regional gospel mission.

SECTION 8 — RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND MEMBERSHIP REVIEW

8.1 Purpose

Immersed Network exists as a voluntary fellowship of churches and leaders united around shared gospel convictions and mission.
To preserve the unity, integrity, and witness of the Network, a process is required for addressing serious concerns regarding doctrine, conduct, or alignment with the Network's commitments.

This section sets out how such concerns are addressed in a manner that is **biblical, relational, and restorative**.

8.2 Guiding Principles

All processes under this section will be guided by the following principles:

- **Christ-honouring** — seeking the glory of Christ above institutional interests
- **Scripture-shaped** — guided by biblical wisdom and pastoral care
- **Relational** — prioritising conversation and understanding
- **Restorative** — aiming for repentance, healing, and reconciliation
- **Just and transparent** — ensuring fairness and clarity

The goal of any review process is **restoration wherever possible**, not punishment.

8.3 Grounds for Review

A membership review may be initiated where serious concerns arise relating to:

a. Doctrinal departure

Persistent teaching or practice that contradicts the Network's Doctrinal Basis.

b. Ethical or moral misconduct

Conduct by a recognised leader that brings harm to individuals, churches, or the reputation of the gospel.

c. Safeguarding failures

Serious breaches of safeguarding practice or failure to address safeguarding concerns appropriately.

d. Conduct damaging to the Network

Public or private behaviour that undermines the unity, integrity, or witness of the Network.

e. Persistent conflict

Unresolved relational conflict that significantly affects the partnership of churches within the Network.

8.4 Initiating a Concern

Concerns may be raised by:

- Member churches
- Network leaders
- Trustees
- Recognised ministers within the Network

Concerns must normally be **submitted in writing to the Chair of Trustees or Network Lead**.

Frivolous or malicious complaints will not be pursued.

8.5 Initial Assessment

Upon receiving a concern, the Chair of Trustees (or an appointed panel) will:

1. Conduct an initial assessment
2. Determine whether the concern falls within the scope of this section
3. Seek clarification where necessary

If appropriate, informal conversation will be pursued before any formal process begins.

8.6 Relational Conversation

Where concerns are credible, the Network will seek to address them through **direct, pastoral conversation** with the leaders of the relevant church.

This stage may include:

- listening carefully to the concerns
- clarifying misunderstandings
- offering theological or pastoral guidance
- praying together for wisdom and unity

Many concerns are expected to be resolved at this stage.

8.7 Formal Review Process

If concerns remain unresolved, the Trustees may initiate a formal review.

This may involve:

- the formation of a small review panel
- consultation with relevant leaders
- gathering relevant information
- seeking external counsel where appropriate

The church or leaders involved will always be given **full opportunity to respond**.

8.8 Possible Outcomes

Following review, the Trustees may determine one of the following outcomes:

a. No further action

Where concerns are found to be unfounded or satisfactorily addressed.

b. Guidance and support

Where the Network offers theological, pastoral, or relational support to help address the issue.

c. Agreed restoration pathway

Where repentance or correction is required, a structured pathway may be agreed to support restoration.

d. Voluntary withdrawal

Where significant disagreement exists, a church may voluntarily withdraw from membership.

e. Removal from membership

In rare circumstances where a church persistently rejects the Network's doctrinal or ethical commitments, the Trustees may remove the church from membership.

8.9 Decision-Making

Decisions regarding removal from membership require:

- approval by the Trustees
- a two-thirds majority vote
- clear documentation of reasons

The church involved will be notified in writing.

8.10 Spirit of the Process

All parties are expected to approach this process with:

- humility
- honesty
- prayerful dependence on God

The aim is always:

- the honour of Christ
- the strengthening of churches
- the protection of the gospel witness.

SECTION 9 — DECISION-MAKING WITHIN THE NETWORK

9.1 Authority Under Christ

Immersed Network recognises the Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme authority over His Church. All decisions within the Network are made prayerfully under the authority of Scripture and in submission to Christ's lordship.

The Network exists as a **voluntary association of autonomous churches and leaders**, and therefore exercises influence through **partnership, counsel, and shared conviction**, rather than jurisdiction or control.

9.2 Role of Trustees

The Trustees of the CIO are responsible for the legal governance of Immersed Network and for ensuring that the charity operates in accordance with:

- Charity law
- The CIO Constitution
- The Network's doctrinal basis and values
- The charitable purposes of the organisation

Trustees oversee strategy, financial stewardship, safeguarding, and the overall integrity of the Network.

9.3 Role of Member Churches

Member Churches participate in the life and direction of the Network through:

- Members' meetings
- Prayer and discernment regarding strategic initiatives
- Shared mission and partnership
- Contributing insight, wisdom, and accountability

The Network values the collective discernment of churches and seeks to make decisions in a spirit of unity and trust.

9.4 Members' Meetings

Members' meetings provide an opportunity for churches and recognised members to:

- hear reports on the work of the Network
- pray together for the mission of the gospel
- consider strategic developments
- make decisions where required

An **Annual General Meeting (AGM)** will normally be held once each year.

Additional meetings may be called where necessary.

9.5 Voting Rights

Voting rights are normally held by:

- Member Churches (through appointed delegates)
- Individual Members recognised by the Network where appropriate

Each Member Church may appoint **one or more delegates**, but ordinarily exercises **one vote per church**.

Voting procedures must reflect the provisions of the CIO Constitution.

9.6 Written Resolutions

In accordance with the Constitution, decisions may also be taken by written resolution where appropriate.

A resolution in writing agreed by a **simple majority of eligible members** shall be effective provided that:

- the proposal has been circulated to all eligible members; and
- responses are received within the specified time period.

Written resolutions may be conducted electronically where appropriate.

9.7 Quorum

The quorum for Members' Meetings shall be determined according to the Constitution of the CIO.

If a quorum is not present, the meeting may be adjourned and reconvened in accordance with the governing document.

SECTION 10 — FINANCIAL PARTNERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

10.1 Principle of Shared Responsibility

Immersed Network is sustained through the **generous partnership of its members**.

Financial contributions enable the Network to support:

- leadership development
- mission and evangelism
- church planting initiatives
- events and training
- administrative functions

10.2 Membership Contributions

Member Churches are encouraged to contribute financially to the Network through an **annual membership subscription**.

The suggested contribution level may be determined periodically by the Trustees and communicated to members.

Churches are encouraged to give generously according to their means.

Individual members may also contribute voluntarily.

10.3 Use of Funds

Funds received by the Network are used to support:

- the charitable objectives of the organisation
- the development of gospel ministry
- the strengthening of churches
- leadership training and resourcing
- administrative and operational costs

All funds are stewarded responsibly under trustee oversight.

10.4 Financial Transparency

Immersed Network is committed to transparency and accountability.

The Trustees will provide:

- an annual financial report
- independently examined accounts
- clear communication regarding the use of funds.

SECTION 11 — SAFEGUARDING COMMITMENT

Immersed Network is committed to the protection and wellbeing of **children, young people, and adults at risk**.

The Network believes safeguarding is a vital expression of Christian care and responsibility.

11.1 Safeguarding Expectations

All Network activities will be conducted in accordance with safeguarding best practice.

This includes:

- appropriate safeguarding policies
- training for relevant leaders
- DBS checks where required
- safe environments for events and gatherings.

11.2 Member Church Responsibility

Each Member Church is responsible for maintaining its own safeguarding policies and procedures in accordance with UK safeguarding standards.

Member Churches are expected to:

- appoint a safeguarding lead
- follow appropriate safeguarding guidelines
- respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns.

11.3 Network Events

Safeguarding procedures will be applied to all Network events, including:

- conferences
- training gatherings
- camps and retreats.

SECTION 12 — LEADERSHIP OF THE NETWORK

12.1 Trustees

The Trustees provide governance and oversight for the Network as a charitable organisation.

Their responsibilities include:

- ensuring legal compliance
- safeguarding doctrinal integrity
- financial oversight
- strategic direction

Trustees serve in accordance with the CIO Constitution.

12.2 Network Leadership

The day-to-day leadership of the Network may be entrusted to a **Network Director, Lead** or leadership team, appointed by the Trustees.

This role may include responsibility for:

- coordinating Network activities
- supporting church leaders
- overseeing events and training
- implementing the strategic vision.

12.3 Advisory Support

The Trustees may establish advisory teams or working groups to support particular areas of ministry, including:

- theological reflection
- leadership development
- church planting initiatives
- mission and evangelism.

SECTION 13 — PARTNERSHIPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Immersed Network seeks to work cooperatively with other gospel organisations and churches where such partnerships advance the mission of Christ.

Partnerships may include relationships with:

- Baptist networks and associations
- evangelical mission organisations
- theological training providers
- church planting initiatives.

All partnerships must remain consistent with the Network's doctrinal commitments.

SECTION 14 — REVIEW AND AMENDMENT OF THE HANDBOOK

This handbook is intended to guide the life and governance of the Network.

To ensure its continued relevance and faithfulness:

- the handbook will normally be reviewed every **three to five years**
- amendments may be proposed by the Trustees or by Member Churches
- significant changes should be approved by the membership in accordance with the decision-making processes of the Network.