

Accountability

Accountability (the quality or state of being accountable; an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions).



Accountability

Just what it means to be “accountable” is open to interpretation. For strongly independent characters it is an emotive word which they may interpret as being under someone else’s control. Controlling people, on the other hand, don’t see their excessive intrusiveness as anything other than guarding against what could go wrong. To them, it’s a proper exercise of accountability. Our intention in writing this document is to offer a view of accountability that avoids both extremes. As Christians we have to give account to our Lord and Saviour. Yet in our dependence on him as the Head of His body (the church), we also – as His body – need to relate to each other in a wise manner, so as to bring glory to God our Father. Many personal experiences and historical or biblical accounts could illustrate the point, but we hope that without these our comments will be helpful and balanced.

It would be unusual for anyone to live a normal life without some form of accountability. In its absence, people left simply to do as they please can end up harming themselves or others, and they often become isolated. Families, businesses, governments, and society in general work best with some form of in-built accountability, whether implicit or formalised. This way, relationships are able to remain open and transparent, and mutual trust can develop. Importantly, boundaries can be agreed and regulated where needed. For these reasons we believe there are good grounds for establishing an appropriate and practical level of accountability within Avail. Furthermore, as Christians we are encouraged to prefer others above ourselves and to be fair to all. We are accountable to the Lord as stewards; we also have a responsibility to be open and fair to donors and to respect the governments with whom we are registered. We ourselves as trustees have had to enter into mutual accountability, acknowledging that our different ministries and gifts colour our individual thinking. Yet recognising each other’s gifts has not only shaped and sharpened our own individual and collective thinking; it has helped to set the direction, purpose and structure for the mission.

Over the years we have become increasingly aware of the vulnerability to which both the mission worker and Avail are exposed should something go wrong. In such an event we would be required to answer to the relevant legal authority or government body. We therefore see the need to extend the scope of accountability to anyone who may implicate us by their actions. A strongly independent mission worker may find this hard to take, but it becomes increasingly important if we

wish to maintain our testimony. Our mission ethos of building relationships that are both gracious and righteous, while aspiring to integrity and excellence in everything we do, remains the same. We do want to work with you as friends, and not just to act as a soulless registered charity or as a convenient legal cover.

It is fair to say that Avail has been very relaxed about this extremely important area of mutual respect and care, but taking this stance has in the past led to some difficult moments. Needless to say, we are against the kind of controlling, assertive accountability that threatens people if they don't fit into a mould.

So how do we approach this matter?

Let's start with some questions that we may be asked.

Q. Do you tell people where to go on the mission field?

A. No. We are prepared to make suggestions, but ultimately we believe the Lord will direct your path.

Q. Will you tell me what to do when I go on the mission field?

A. No. But if you say that the Lord has called you to be a church leader, when you have no previous experience in that field, we would have some questions to ask.

Q. How would you respond if I applied but then felt unable to sign accepting the requirements outlined in the application process?

A. Naturally we would ask why. And we would request a face-to-face meeting to discuss your reservations.

Q. How will you react if after such a discussion I still feel unable to sign?

A. We would of course be very sorry, but would have to suspend the application process.

Q. Would you really refuse to support me?

A. We would. This is because, while we sincerely wish to serve you, you would be depriving us of the tools required for that support.

Q. I am seriously ill with no hope of a return to full health and strength. Would this cause you to refuse my application?

A. Not necessarily, but before deciding we would want to know a lot more about your health situation. We would try to agree a way to assist, and would probably require you to sign a disclaimer form.

Avail and the sending church

Q. In what way would you suggest a mission worker should be accountable to the sending church?

A. For example: You could agree with the church that every three months you will send them a quarterly report using a provided Microsoft Word template. This has a dual purpose: it lets them know what is going on, and it promotes you in their prayer and general support. Try to encourage the church to reciprocate by sending you regular reports on their work

Q. My pastor always insists we do things his way. Is this normal?

A. No. We don't think it is right for others to insist you do as they say because they presume to know better. Their advice is, of course, a different matter. The problem of misuse of authority is a common one.

Q. Do you think that I should be accountable to my supporters for money given for my personal use?

A. Definitely not. But you are certainly accountable for it to your spouse and to the Lord.

Q. We do receive funding from the church and other supporters for projects. Should I be accountable to them?

A. Yes, of course.

Q. As regards the last question, how would this accountability work?

A. You would need to find out from them what they want to know, and come to an agreement on content and frequency.

Accountability at Avail

Q. Why does Avail ask for confirmation of acceptance of the "Statement of Faith" and "Where we Stand"?

A. We have been concerned that nobody has ever requested clarification of our beliefs, and we are pretty sure that some would not agree with everything. Though variation in viewpoints is to be expected, there are certain truths and principles regarding social issues on which we are not prepared to compromise. We believe it is better to be honest now than to have disagreements later.

Q. I notice you want several security backups like Crisis Management, Risk Assessment and Database. Don't you think these precautions are overkill? Shouldn't I be left to trust the Lord without these, no matter what?

A. We don't want to take away from your trusting the Lord entirely. By filling out the requirements you enable us to fulfil our duty of care to you. Should something go wrong, at least you have someone to refer to. If you don't fill out the forms we will add a waiver to the agreements that we want you to sign. This will basically free us from any responsibility in that area.

Q. Why an annual report?

A. It is simply we want to keep in touch with you and to be in fellowship with you. We hope you will allow us to share your reports with others in order to strengthen your support network.

Please write to us if you have any questions about these matters. We would be glad to hear from you, and will reply. We may even include your questions and answers in a future version of this document!