



April 2016

St Andrews Baptist Church  
[standrewsbaptist.org.uk](http://standrewsbaptist.org.uk)  
Charity no: SC008794

# Membership guide



### Step three: Elders and Church meeting

Following the conversation your application will be submitted to the elders and then to the Church members (as part of a Church meeting). A brief report of the conversation will be given (around those five bullet points above) and a recommendation for Church membership will be voted on. It is good practice for you not to be in the meeting at that point.

### Step four: Public welcome into the Church

This will happen at the nearest possible communion service, where you will be invited to the front. Three questions will be asked and then you will receive the 'right hand of fellowship' and be prayed for.

The three questions are:

- Do you believe in one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and do you confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord?
- Do you commit yourself to worship and to serve within this church and do you believe God has brought you here to grow in Christ, to help others grow and to witness for him?
- The congregation will then be asked 'Do you welcome ..... into this local family of God and do you promise to support, encourage and pray for ..... as partners together in the Gospel and in this church?'

**We look forward to your joining us in what God is doing!**

## Welcome to Church membership

We are delighted you are considering church membership with us at St Andrews Baptist Church. This membership pack seeks to introduce you both to the life and ethos of the Church and to reflect on why we consider local church membership important. Enclosed are:

- a prayer card with our overall vision and values; and specific prayer targets for this year
- a copy of the Church constitution
- a fellowship list of the active members of the congregation
- the fellowship list also has a useful introduction to all the key ministries of the Church and who to contact for more information.

## What is distinctive about a Baptist church?

The first Baptist church in the UK was planted in 1609. Baptist churches began to be planted in Scotland through the witness of some of Cromwell's soldiers in the 1650s but then disappeared again until the middle of the C18th. St Andrews Baptist Church was founded in 1841.

Many folk think that a Baptist church is distinctive simply by its mode of baptism, believer's baptism (usually by immersion). But there is much more to it than that. At the heart of our Baptist identity are some critical and shaping *values*. There are five which are central. None are unique to Baptists; it is rather the convergence of all five that leaves us distinctive.

- **The value of a community where all are committed to sharing a journey to Jesus and with Jesus.** This is the vision of a truly *believers' church*, a visible community of those who genuinely seek to know Jesus Christ and follow him. It is a church that is excited and intentional in its desire to live in a Christ-like way. *Entry* into this way of life is marked by believers' baptism; and *continuing* in this way of life is marked by a mutual commitment to walk together in the ways of Christ. We are to be a community that embodies the Good News.
- **The value of every member of the congregation being regarded as spiritually equal.** Early Baptist churches were radically and rigorously *congregational*. Every member of the congregation mattered. Any hint of a clergy/laity divide was shunned. They may have had elders, deacons and pastors, but at the very heart of their life was a common bond and a profound *mutuality*. They listened to God together, shared meals together, learnt and interpreted Scripture together, offered discipline together and resourced each other for witness in an often hostile world. What is important to note is that (a) final authority in the local church does not lie with the pastor, elders or deacons but lies decisively in the hands of the Ascended Lord. His authority is discovered as we gather together in his name; (b) though God gives particular leadership and overseeing gifts to his church, *the mind of Christ* can also be accessed, through the Spirit, by the newest and humblest believer – of either gender. This is at the very heart of congregational government.
- **The value of being free from the dictates of the state and the lure of power.** Part of a Baptist vision is to take

## So how do I proceed with Church membership?

If you are happy with the above (and we hope you are) then going forward will involve *four steps*. It is simply a way of making sure that both you and the Church are comfortable with the commitment.

### Step one: Agreement in principle

Having read this membership pack please indicate to one of the pastors or elders your willingness to go ahead with Church membership.

### Step two: Interview

Two members of the Church (usually one being an elder) will arrange to have an informal conversation with you. The aim primarily will be to get to know you and to allow you to ask any questions about the life, leadership and vision of the Church. During the course of the conversation you will be asked about:

- How you came to faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord
- Whether you have been baptised as a believer (and if not, what is your view on believer's baptism)
- What your previous church experience has been
- What ministry team you feel drawn to
- whether you agree with our statement of faith and are happy with the Church constitution

If there are any issues that occur, this is the time they can be talked through.

Fellowship List in your membership pack where all our activities are outlined) and prayerfully consider where you may be able to offer your help and service.

### Three often-asked questions

**Q1. Is it possible to be a Church member without believer's baptism?** The only baptism we practice as a local Baptist church is believer's baptism. However, we do respect that others do not agree with our interpretation of the New Testament and honour different routes others have taken in their faith journey. To this extent we are an *open membership church*, welcoming into full membership those who have been baptised as infants. What we would not be happy with is welcoming into membership those who have had no form of baptism. We would always actively encourage thinking about believer's baptism.

**Q2. I am a student and only here for a limited period?** Clearly situations vary and need to be considered. Some students, for example, may have membership in their home church and want to keep it there. However, particularly where students have come to faith in St Andrews and are baptised, we see baptism as the New Testament sign of Christian initiation into the Body of Christ and would therefore see church membership as highly appropriate. We welcome others to join for the duration of their time in St Andrews and see this as good practice.

**Q3. What happens to my membership if I leave St Andrews?** Your membership will be retained with us until you find a new church and ask for a transfer. If there is a long delay (two years) we would write and enquire pastorally about your circumstances. We would never remove your membership without informing you.

seriously the fact that the New Testament declaration 'Jesus is Lord' is a profoundly political and subversive statement. We are declaring our allegiance to a different King. We disown any ultimate allegiance to the state and its trappings of power and privilege. We find our true place on the margins of society, not because of some perverse desire to be marginalised, but as a consequence of a faithful witness to the fact that Christ's reign allows no pretenders. Today, in many places around the world, including some in Europe, this is a defining issue for Baptists. Such freedom has the potential to be enormously *creative*. On the one hand it allows us to speak uncompromisingly and prophetically to our society. On the other hand it offers to our racially and religiously mixed society a way of harmonious living that goes beyond anaemic notions of tolerance. It provides a vision of true *religious liberty* where alternative truth claims can be articulated sincerely, heard clearly, and coexist respectfully.

- **The value of an 'openness' to other congregations.** Baptists have always sought to make a careful distinction between the *competency* of the local church and the *completeness* of the local church. The New Testament points unmistakably to the ability of each congregation to discern the mind of Christ but *never concludes* from that reality that each local church is therefore totally self-sufficient. Thus, a crucial part of our heritage has been to witness to the openness of each congregation to receiving support, encouragement and accountability from neighbouring fellowships. This involves both an interdependence among Baptists and ecumenical involvement.

- **The value of Jesus as our Example as well as Saviour.**  
At the very heart of Baptist spirituality is a passionate commitment not only to trust in Christ's death and resurrection for our salvation but also to imitate *Christ's life* for our direction. It is the call to a discipleship shaped by the closest attention to the plain teaching, values and attitudes of Jesus. As one early Anabaptist put it: 'No one can know Christ unless he follows after him in life'.

### Why Church membership matters?

It is a fair question to ask 'Where do we find local church membership in the New Testament?'. It is equally understandable to ask why there needs to be 'something more formal' when involvement in the church already expresses support and commitment.

The answer we would offer is threefold. First, a key word to describe being the people of God in Scripture is the word '**covenant**'. From the original covenant God graciously made with Abraham and Israel right through to the New Covenant brought about through the death of Jesus Christ the identity of God's people has always been shaped by this idea. What is important to note is that such a covenantal understanding of God's people not only has a primary *vertical* dimension (God taking the initiative to invite us into a relationship with him by his grace and requiring our response of faith and obedience) but it also has a *horizontal* dimension. Israel was called to reflect the love and justice of God in all her relationships and the same is true for God's New Covenant people today. One of the most characteristic images for the church in the New Testament is represented by the 'one another' passages ('love one another', 'forgive one another', 'bear one another's burdens'...) all with a

- Leadership Team
- Pastoral Visiting Team
- Welcome Team
- Youth and Beacon Kids Team
- Student Ministry Team
- 28:19 Global Mission Team
- Practical Ministry Team
- Music Ministry Team
- Preaching Team
- Prayer Ministry Team

In addition two further teams are planned:

- A catering ministry team
- An evangelism, discipleship and social action ministry team

Our hope is that your experience of a ministry team will involve:

- clear leadership
- a sense of belonging
- a shared purpose
- relevant training
- support from one another in the team
- a sense that we are operating in the power of the Spirit

The aim is for you to feel that you are truly part of a like-minded group who share similar gifting and passion and that by working together you can encourage, support, train and 'spur one another on towards love and good deeds' (Hebrews 10:24). Our vision is to be a church that is not led *top-down* but rather is *polycentric*, that is with many 'centres' initiating new things and moving things on. Please look at the list above (and at the

benefit to the Church) and you can talk to the treasurer about this.

## Ministry teams in St Andrews Baptist Church

One of the main implications of the local church being the *Body of Christ* is not only that each member of the congregation has a part to play (as described above) but that these roles are coordinated, ultimately we believe by Christ the Head of the Church. For this to become a reality in our context we have encouraged everyone in the Church to identify with a **ministry team**, that is, a group of people who all serve in one particular area and support each other in it. It is a conscious effort to move away from the mentality of being on some rota or being on 'this committee or that' and to move towards the much more energising (and enjoyable) experience of being part of a team.

We already have ten teams operational and we hope to start at least two others. Our hope is that as a new member you will consider how God has gifted you and where he may be calling you to serve. The Leadership Team is appointed by election from the congregation. The others are appointed through a conversation with the ministry team leader. Please talk with one of the pastors or elders about where God may want you to serve. Our existing teams are:

strong sense of communicating our commitment to each other as part of our covenant commitment. We believe a public commitment to church membership expresses this strong covenantal nature of being the people of God.

Two things follow from this. First, as Baptists, with a strong view of the church as God's gathered and redeemed people, we are committed to *discerning the mind of Christ together as a whole congregation*. Clearly in the New Testament there is an important place for church oversight and leadership. But the early church rejoiced that the Holy Spirit graciously inhabits all God's people bringing his wisdom to us and so there is particular joy and accountability in a community of God's people discerning his will *together* (Acts 11:1-3). For us, this happens as we gather for Church meetings (usually quarterly). However, in order to safeguard such communal discernment there needs to be some definition and clarity as to exactly who has such responsibility and privilege. It is for this reason that we invite active members of the congregation to commit themselves to membership as a sign that they are willing to **share the responsibility for the future of the Church**. Others can participate in Church meetings but only members can vote. We believe this is a wise safeguarding of the privileges of being God's church.

The second thing that follows from a covenant understanding of the church is that local church membership **signifies permission** for loving support and accountability. In a culture that is characterised by radical individualism ('who are you to say how I can live my life?') publicly committing to the church is a way of expressing a countercultural desire to submit to the watchfulness of God's people. This needs to be done with great care and with a recognition that we are all broken people. This 'watching over one another' was a key and attractive feature of

early Baptist life. Galatians 6:1: 'My friends, if anyone is caught in a sin, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.'

Sometimes folk say that they are members, by baptism, of the *universal* church; therefore membership of the *local* church is not important. We would simply submit that membership of the universal church needs public commitment at the local level to make it real.

### **What does Church membership involve?**

In any committed relationship there are benefits and responsibilities both ways. The same is true for church membership.

The church is God's Project and it is an immense privilege to be part of it. The church is the Body of Christ where we all have the opportunity of using the gifts of service that God has given us by his Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). It is the family of God where we enjoy God's love and practical support through each other (Galatians 6:10) and find counsel and accountability (2 Corinthians 2:5-8). It is the Temple of the Living God (Ephesians 2:21-22) where we can offer our worship and enjoy his presence by the Spirit. Perhaps most fundamentally the church is God's new humanity (Ephesians 2:14-18), where a broken people (us) can begin to live in harmony and peace and so bear witness to the Good News of Christ in our fractured world. It could be argued that the benefits of church membership should be no different to the blessings of an active involvement in the life of the congregation and this is true. But membership is the Church's way of humbly expressing a commitment to nourish you through the Word, to encourage you, pastorally support you and pray for you. This is what you should expect.

Equally there is a mutuality to this commitment and the expectations of a Church member are fourfold.

- First, we expect members to be actively involved in the life of the Church by attendance on a Sunday and, where possible, in a home group. We also look for involvement in the prayer life of the Church. Our main Church prayer meetings are the first Wednesday night of the month and the third Wednesday lunchtime of the month. There are other prayer opportunities advertised in our weekly bulletin. It says of the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem that 'they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer'.
- Second, we long to see every member using their God-given talents to serve the Church (see ministry team page) and the wider community.
- Third, we look to members to play their part in the key decisions of the Church by coming to the Church meetings. These are important times where together we seek to hear God for our future. It is good practice to send apologies if you are not able to attend.
- Fourth, we expect Church members to give sacrificially and generously in support of the Church's many ministries (2 Corinthians 8:1-7.) One of the characteristics (and strong points) of a Baptist church is that we have no external or denominational financial support. This allows us to own what is happening and to feel our gifts count. If you are a UK taxpayer we would strongly encourage covenant giving (so there can be tax