

Welcome to
Emmanuel
Baptist Church



Emmanuel Baptist Church Eastleigh
Desborough Road Eastleigh Hampshire SO50 5LZ
emmanuel-eastleigh.org

An Introduction to Membership

Emmanuel Baptist Church began its ministry in Eastleigh in 1933. Then as now it existed to present the 'faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints'. It is a member of the Old Baptist Union, a group of evangelical Baptist churches founded in 1880.

As a church we believe that formal membership of the local church is a Biblical principle which is both a privilege and a responsibility. Therefore every member and potential member of Emmanuel should read this booklet prayerfully and carefully, to ensure familiarity with the basis upon which our membership functions. Keep it in a safe place for future reference.

May the Lord bless you as you serve Him here.



Charlie Keene (Pastor)

The Purpose of Membership

'On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer... After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind.' Acts 4:23-32.

In church life the term 'member' is often applied to everyone who attends a church regularly, in that they are attached to it or one of its departments. They may regard it as their spiritual home, contribute to it financially, physically support its meetings and prayerfully support other church attenders.

However, Emmanuel, like many other churches, also has a formal membership which firmly establishes the mutually beneficial relationship between church and member. The member is committed to support the church in practical and spiritual ways, regarding it as their spiritual home and treating it as such. Likewise the church is committed to supporting its members in their spiritual growth and security, offering them Biblical teaching and an opportunity to participate in the church's future developments.

This form of membership has its basis in the Biblical model of what church is all about. In 1 Corinthians 16:15-16 those of the household of Stephanas 'devoted themselves to the service of the saints'. Accordingly Paul urged the church to reciprocate; 'to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labours at it'.

The potential that such an attitude carries is immense. From the verses in Acts 4 that opened this booklet, we see that Peter and John went to their *own* people and reported to them, showing that they, the leading Apostles of the church, were committed to the local fellowship and were open to them, then in verses 24-30 the people prayed for them, showing this mutuality of support in action.

With this incredible display of unity, look what happened next... After the people prayed, in verses 31 & 32, the place where they were meeting was shaken, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. The believers were '*one in heart and mind*'. Doesn't that confirm that God commands blessing where people live together, committed to each other, in unity? (Psalm 133).

In practice the unity of the church will not be hindered or helped by people simply joining the membership. Unity as we see it in Scripture is a spiritual matter which we must all strive to maintain, member or not. But the public demonstration of unity, which becoming a member gives, is a powerful statement of our mutual commitment.

Membership is also good for church government, which is a Biblical principle. One of the first developments in the post-captivity Israelite people was the division of the nation into small manageable groups. Moses reports:

'So I took the leading men of your tribes, wise and respected men, and appointed them to have authority over you as commanders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens and as tribal officials'. Deuteronomy 1:15

God divided them into smaller units that people *belonged* to and to which they were *committed*. Judges 21:24 tells us of an occasion where the men of Israel left Shiloh 'and went home to their tribes and clans, each to his own inheritance'.

That they went home is an indication that they went to the people to whom they belonged. That they went to the place of their inheritance indicates their return to the place of their commitment, after all, 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Matthew 6:21).

This management structure was carried over into the New Testament church. Immediately after Pentecost, the church in Jerusalem, which had grown to enormous proportions, experienced a time of persecution (Acts 8:1). God used that opportunity to divide it into smaller local churches around the country that were more easily administered. As Moses had done, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each of the churches and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust' (Acts 14:23).

A Biblical View of Membership

We look to the model of the early church for the basis upon which people are accepted into membership at Emmanuel. Acts 2:41-42 clearly outlines 6 principles which defined those who were in fellowship with the saints. They: (1) accepted the Gospel message and (2) were baptised. They were devoted (3) to the apostles' teaching, (4) to the fellowship, (5) to the breaking of bread and (6) to prayer.

Therefore each member of Emmanuel must:

- 1 Be a committed Christian.** In John 3:1-7 Jesus stated our need to gain salvation through choosing to be 'born again'. While it is possible to be attached to a church without making that commitment, formal membership must be based on the applicant being a born-again believer.

Christ is the Supreme Head of the church, therefore those who form the body of the church must belong to Him (Ephesians 5:30), otherwise the church will not function properly. Paul's injunction about Christians being yoked with unbelievers in 2 Corinthians 6:14 indicates that those who have committed their lives to Christ clearly have different agendas and priorities to those who haven't.

The member needs to show evidence of having received the Holy Spirit by displaying spiritual fruit in their lives in accordance with Scripture (Matthew 7:16 and Galatians 5:22 and 23). They should also be prepared to use the Gifts of the Spirit given to them to edify the church (Romans 12:6 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

- 2 Be Baptised in water.** It is a Biblical command for believers to be baptised by immersion to show that they have died to their old way of life and been resurrected into new life, having been washed of their sin (Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, 10:8 and 22:16). It is also a very public declaration of the work of salvation in their life (Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:12 and 1 Peter 3:21).

- 3 Embrace the church's teaching.** This is to ensure that

each member is secure in correct Biblical teaching and the whole church has a core curriculum that is the basis of its unity (Proverbs 4:2 and Titus 1:9). This works, for example, in that one of the responsibilities of the membership is to be part of the decision making process of the church. This cannot be done effectively if members are not in unity about the spiritual direction of the church, which is based entirely on the doctrines taught.

What are those doctrines? As a member church of the Old Baptist Union, we adhere to the Articles of Faith of the OBU which are detailed in the church's *Constitution* booklet. Anyone who wants to be a member of this church must be able to agree with the 16 principles involved (which are generally in line with other main-stream evangelical churches).

- 4 Be devoted to the fellowship.** Members of Emmanuel are required to support church activities physically and prayerfully (Hebrews 10:25) and give tithes and offerings into the church treasury (Malachi 3:10).

It means members commit themselves to attend church business meetings, to be part of the decision making process and to accept church authority. It means they commit themselves to encourage other members of the church and allow themselves to be ministered to. It also means that they are open to take up roles as church officers or departmental workers, should either be appropriate.

- 5 Commit themselves to the breaking of bread.** That is by

being present at communion as often as possible, and by coming to the communion table focused on its importance (1 Corinthians 11:23-32) and free 'from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God' (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Holiness in each member is critical to the success of the whole church (Proverbs 14:34). It is a command of God (Leviticus 19:2 and Ephesians 4:24) and those who do not strive to live accordingly cannot bring glory to Christ.

6 **Be dedicated to prayer.** 'Brothers, pray for us.' (1 Thessalonians 5:25). This is the commitment to pray for the fellowship in all that we do. Pray for the leaders, the people, the relatives of our people, for church growth and for the continued out-pouring of the Holy Spirit upon us.

Prayer is the vehicle of faith; it is faith that moves mountains (1 Corinthians 13:2), it is faith that pleases God (Hebrews 11:6) and it is faith that brings healing (James 5:15).

Each of these 6 principles are framed in the Articles of Faith of the Old Baptist Union, upon which our fellowship is founded.

Authority and Discipline

The Bible is quite specific that the church and its leaders have authority and responsibility to ensure that members live in such a way as to bring glory to God (see Acts 16:4 and Hebrews 13:17). However Hebrews 13:17 also makes it clear that leaders are accountable to God for any actions taken under that authority. For their part, members are expected to respond positively to authority, which will be to their own advantage (2 Corinthians 13:10).

Members are expected to live their whole lives in a godly way, 'worthy of the calling you have received' (Ephesians 4:1). If the member does not live up to that calling they must take steps to put their own lives right in the first place. If they require help with such matters, he or she should speak to the Pastor in confidence. Areas of particular concern may include:

- Erroneous teachings (Isaiah 32:6, Colossians 2:8, Titus 3:10 and Hebrews 13:9);
- Immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18, Ephesians 5:3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3);
- Inappropriate behaviour (Romans 13:13, 2 Corinthians 12:20, Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Peter 4:2).

If a member falls into serious error in these or similar areas, the Pastor may take steps to help the member, and to protect others. Such discipline will always be dealt with as sensitively as possible, with the aim of securing a positive outcome (Hebrews 12:11). This is part of a Pastor's calling (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, 2 Timothy 4:4 and Titus 2:1-10).

Termination of Membership

A member's name may be removed from the register if they do not respond positively to any disciplinary steps taken. Membership will also be terminated if the member is guilty of unrepentant sin, or if attendance at Emmanuel has been neglected over a period of one year.

Of course it can also be terminated at the request of the member, should they wish to leave the church or if they are moving to another area and are therefore changing churches. In either case, written notice should be given to the Pastor in advance.

Other Matters

There are other matters, often referred to as sacraments, that are at the heart of our understanding of the Bible and therefore church life. It is important for members to be aware of these:

Baptism in Water

It is a biblical command for believers to be baptised to show that they have died to their old way of life and then been raised into new life, having been washed of their sin. It is also a very public declaration of the work of salvation in their life.

Baptism must be by total immersion, when the candidate is of an age to understand the step they are taking.

During the baptismal service it is the practice of this church for the Pastor to lay hands on each candidate, praying for them to be filled with the Holy Spirit, as taught in Scripture.

This is covered in greater depth in our Baptism booklet.

Communion

We believe that the Communion service is central to the life of the church, being a commemoration of Jesus' once and for all sacrifice for our sins. The bread and wine used are emblems of His broken body and shed blood.

It is the responsibility of the believer to approach the Breaking of Bread with their conscience clear. To come with known sin is to dishonour the remembrance of His death.

See our Communion booklet for more details.

Marriage

It is our understanding of the Scriptures that while both parties are living, marriage is intended to be a permanent relationship between a man and a woman. Divorce for any reason falls short of the divine ideal and contrary to the absolute will of God.

The Pastor will give all couples seeking marriage in Emmanuel full instruction in Biblical teaching concerning marriage and its obligations, stressing that they should not enter marriage without proper forethought about the step they are taking.

Because of the frailty of human nature, occasions may arise where the Pastor will be asked to officiate and bless marriages where one or both parties have been divorced. Pastors are permitted to undertake such a ceremony, if in their absolute discretion and understanding of the Scriptures they feel able to do so.

If the Pastor is in doubt over an application for marriage involving a divorced person, he should refer the matter to the Council of Management of the Old Baptist Union, either for guidance or decision. If the Pastor is on probation, he must seek guidance from the Council of Management as a matter of course.

Children's Dedication

It is the practice of this church to dedicate children to the Lord. In the Old Testament children were presented to the Lord in their infancy and so was our Lord Jesus.

During the dedication service the child is prayed for in recognition of the fact that he or she belongs to God, as well as the child's parents and family. The parents and family are also prayed for during the service and are called upon to commit themselves to fulfilling their responsibilities.