



Introduction to Church Membership

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1. What is Church?

"Church" is a word which paints a variety of pictures in the mind when it is used. Some people see a building, others a variety of activities, while others imagine a group of people. I trust that over this brief course we might come to a common understanding of what we mean by "church" and begin to see the importance of it in what appears to be a very "post-church" age.

Church in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the word we translate as "church" is the Greek word "ekklesia" (from which we get such words as "ecclesiastical"). It means "called out" and originally referred to an assembly of people "called out" for a particular purpose. The term would have better been translated "assembly" or "congregation" but, of the 115 references to "ekklesia" in the NT, 113 have been translated "church" (the remaining 2 as "assembly").

There are 2 basic uses for the word in the New Testament:

1. Universal Church (1 Cor 10:32; Eph 1:22-23)

This refers to the Universal Church - the Bride of Christ - all those who are saved from around the world.

2. Local Church (1 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:1)

By far the majority of references to church are to do with the local body of believers in a defined geographic location: e.g. "God's ekklesia in Corinth" (1 Cor 1:2). This is the visible expression of the universal church, and is the place where Believers in Jesus can give and receive the love of God and work out their Christian lives in relationship with others.

One Church - Different Flavours

In the NT, some towns and villages would have had one group of believers who met together; larger towns and cities would appear to have had different groups who met in a variety of homes. NT letters were written to believers in a particular town (e.g. Corinth) and the impression given is that the letter would circulate among the different groups (or congregations) who met in that town. While the church in a larger town would be divided into smaller units, they were still seen as one church, (while it is difficult to be specific, it is likely that different congregations may have shared the same

leaders).

Church history has left us with a diversity of denominations in any given town. However, I believe God looks with a geographical eye over the countries of the world and sees believers together in a locality. Groups of believers (denominational churches and congregations) make up "the church" in a locality.

The main Christian denominations share common core values which are fundamental to Christian belief. These are centred around faith in God, the Divinity of Jesus, the finished work of Jesus through the cross, and His bodily resurrection. However, there are many secondary issues such as worship style, methods of government, general ethos, etc. It helps me to understand the different church groupings by seeing them as ice cream: they are all ice cream, but there is a great variety of flavours - and we all have our favourites! Some people prefer a formal or traditional approach, while others prefer to be more relaxed. The important thing is that our preferences don't become prejudices, and that we find a place where we feel at home, can receive spiritual food, express worship, and exercise the particular gifts God has given us.

Brief History of Emmanuel

Baptists emerged from the 'State' church in the 17th century when the State attempted to impose religious conformity on them. They became known as "non-conformists" or "dissenters" as they attempted to get back to a more "gospel" centred faith that focused on an individual's need for personal salvation by grace through faith rather than being born into a "Christian State".

A Baptist church in Swanage was first founded when a visiting evangelist inspired a small group of dedicated Christians to start a new church in the town. It began with just a handful of members in the summer of 1905. They began meeting in "Cosy Cottage", 90 Kings Road, and very soon built a small chapel onto the side of the house with a communicating door. The first minister of the church (Rev J W Bailey) began with a membership of 12 and lived in the house for the 2 years of his ministry (from December 1907). He was followed by the Rev W Gillard (1909-1914), and by 1913, when a baptistry was installed, the membership had grown to 30.

In 1921 a new building in Howard Road was opened to accommodate the

growing church, but there was a division of loyalties between the old chapel and the new building which resulted in a difficult period with the two sites functioning until the first was finally sold in 1947.

One of our members, David Dalton, has written a history of the church: "The First Hundred Years". Copies of this are still available from the church office.

The Basis of Fellowship

In all practical ways, we try to live our lives and formulate church life on the teaching and instruction contained in the New Testament. One passage that gives insight into the life of the early church is Acts 2:42-47. The key feature in the church was **devotion**. They devoted themselves to:

Teaching. The church grew in its understanding of truth as the Holy Spirit illuminated the Scriptures to them. Scripture is considered the final authority in matters of faith and conduct in EBC. It is taught Sunday by Sunday and it also guides the discussions and decisions the church makes.

Fellowship. The early church was a loving church. Its devotion to Jesus naturally spilled over into good relationships with fellow believers. The depth of relationships was far-reaching and practical as they shared their lives and resources. At EBC, relationships are a high priority as we are concerned for the well-being of one another and seek to support and encourage each other in a variety of practical ways. Our home group network is one of the key ways for enhancing fellowship and practical care in the church.

Breaking of Bread: At EBC we regularly share in the "breaking of bread" or "communion" as a reminder of all Jesus has done for us on the cross, and also a way of looking forward to being with Him. Communion is one way the church can maintain its focus on Jesus.

Prayer. Prayer was an essential element in the life of the early church (cf Acts 1:24, 4:31, 6:6, 8:15, 10:9, 12:12, 13:3, etc) Prayer is the lifeblood of the church; it keeps us connected to Jesus and prevents us becoming no more than a social club. With prayer, the church can become a dynamic organism that is empowered to love and serve a dying world. Prayer is a regular feature at EBC and we encourage as many as possible to attend the

regular prayer events.

2. Joining the Church

Some people struggle with the concept of "joining" a church

- particularly if coming from a church background where the issue of becoming a "member" was never raised. For some, it seems unnecessary while others might think it more like becoming a member of a social or sports club. I hope that in this session we might be able to explain a bit more about the significance and importance of becoming an active member of a local church.

1. Joining the Universal Church (Luke 19:9-10)

Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost. We all fall into that category. When we first become Christians we not only have a new Heavenly Father, but we are born or adopted into a new family - we become part of God's family where we are brothers and sisters with all believers. There are 3 elements that Peter identified on the day of Pentecost that those wishing to be saved needed to do (Acts 2:37-38):

a) **Repent.** Repentance is more than saying sorry; it is about a complete change of mind and direction. For all our lives we have been in the driving seat; repentance is letting God take control and doing a complete U turn in our journey. Repentance is an ongoing process of change as we continue to say "yes" to God and choose things that honour Him. Repentance is a deliberate act of turning away from sin and towards God. Sin is not just doing bad things - it is an inherent weakness in even the "best" of people. Sin is living our lives without God at the centre. When we repent, we are not only turning away from individual acts of disobedience, but also from our inherited sinful human nature.

b) **Believe.** Belief is active. The Bible says the demons believe, but they're not Christians! Belief is more than believing something in our head - it means trusting ourselves to it. We can believe a chair will hold us up or that a train will take us to a certain destination. But until we take action - sit down or get on - we will not move from where we are. Believing the Good News is more than intellectual understanding or knowledge of historical facts about Jesus - it is actually entrusting our lives to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord.

Take the opportunity to read about what Jesus has done for you and me.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Now read it again and see how many times the word "grace" appears. Our salvation has nothing to do with our own efforts - we can never be good enough. It is all to do with believing and receiving what God has done for us. Once we are saved by grace, we need to continue to live by grace. Grace sets us free from slavery to sin, guilt and shame; it frees us to live a fruitful and productive life for God. (See Galatians 5:1)

c) **Be Baptised.** When we repent and believe we are transferred into a new kingdom. We are taken out of the Kingdom of Darkness into the Kingdom of Light - out of Satan's domain and into the domain of Jesus! (See Romans 10:9)

On the day of Pentecost Peter said to the enquirers, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) Baptism was an essential part of Christian discipleship. It is a public sign of identification with Jesus and a public confession to what has already happened inside. It demonstrates a transfer of allegiance from one belief system to another. Baptism is a picture of a new beginning - we symbolise our dying to self and being raised to new life in Jesus.

At EBC we teach and maintain the practice of baptism by full immersion and would expect people who come to faith in the church to be baptised before becoming a member of the church. However, we also respect that other churches have different practices. While we encourage all people who wish to join the church to be baptised, we will accept into membership those from another tradition if they have made a public confession of faith as a believer in another established Christian church tradition. (For example, someone from an Anglican background may have seen their confirmation as a public confession of genuine faith. However, if confirmation was something "to be done" because of family or church wishes, we would encourage that person to be baptised. We do not consider infant baptism to be sufficient for membership because it is not an expression of the personal faith of the one being baptised.)

Joining the Local Church

As we saw last time, by far the majority of references to "church" in the NT are to the local church. While it is important that we are members of the universal church - that we come into God's family - it is in the local church that we are able to express that universal commitment. It is in the local church that the practicalities, joys and challenges of our Christian faith are worked out. God has not made us to live independent lives, but to live inter-dependently with one another.

If we have been brought up within the 'State' church, the concept of joining a local church seems alien because everyone on the parish roll is considered a part of the church whether or not they have any relationship with the church. However, just as we have to make a positive choice to receive God's gift of salvation, so we believe it is important to make a deliberate choice to make a commitment to a local expression of God's family.

Church membership is about:

Identification. With a local body of believers. Identifying and aligning ourselves with the particular style, ethos and vision of a local church.

Accountability. Members of the church should be "mutually submissive" through a structure of accountability. God calls people to places of leadership and we are called to submit to them in a godly way. This does not mean the leaders are above the rest or ruling in a particular fashion; it does mean that leaders are similarly accountable to the wider church body for the actions and decisions made.

Fellowship. It is good to belong; it gives us a sense of worth and it blesses others, too, as we gather to be together. We are able to receive fellowship in the wider church, but also through the smaller house groups which enable us to give practical help, care and support to one another.

Commitment. This is not a popular word today, but is a very important concept in the church as our commitment to one another models - in a poor but important way - the commitment God has to us.

3. Aim, Ethos, Values & Vision

Introduction

What does Emmanuel Baptist Church stand for? In this session we hope to give an indication of the things we hold dear to us as a church. We trust that those who join us as members would recognise and share these things so that we might move forward together into all that God has for us.

Aim

The overall aim of the church can be summed up in 4 words: "Touching Heaven, Changing Earth". Moses declared to the Lord, "...Your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on earth. show me your glorious presence." (Exodus 33:16,18). It is the presence of the Lord that makes a church different from any other organisation or group of people. Our desire is to see the presence of God to touch heaven for if we do that, we will certainly make a difference on earth.

Jesus said, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10) Paul wrote, "Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven." (Colossians 3:1) We want to know and experience the realities of heaven and bring them to where we live. We desire to see and be a place where people can know the presence of God and be changed.

Ethos

Ethos has to do with the particular style or identity we seek to reflect here at EBC. It's not necessarily about what we do, but the way we do it. The New Testament offers a variety of pictures that show what the church is like an army, a temple, a bride. All of these have valuable lessons and need to be emphasised from time to time. However, the primary picture we seek to reflect is that of a loving family. The Old Testament speaks of God's people as a family - the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This family picture continues in the New Testament where Jesus encourages us to see God as our Father (Matthew 6:9, 12:50) and the church as our family (Galatians 6:10). Good families are a blessing - it is the safest and best environment for people to grow. Using the picture of a family, we aim to:

→ Speak the truth in love to one another, and communicate God's truth in language that everyone can understand so that everyone can understand. We endeavour to eliminate religious jargon and practices that alienate people.

→ Create a relaxed and informal family atmosphere which allows God to speak and act among us in a secure environment. We don't want to pressure people, but enable them to worship and respond to God in a way that is appropriate to their individual character.

→ Encourage responsible family participation where each member shares their gifts, talents and resources to strengthen and further enhance the local and wider church family.

Values

Values reflect the standards and principles we aspire to for ourselves as God's people. They are foundational standards we expect every member to uphold, and are a reflection of God's desire for His holy people. We seek to be:

- 1. A Worshipping Community.** Worshipping God is our highest calling. It is not restricted by what we do at meetings, but involves our whole lives being given over in worship to God (Romans 12:1-2). We worship God in the way we live from day to day, seeking always to honour Him in our choices and decisions. We worship as we live in obedience to the teaching found in God's word.
- 2. A Prophetic Community.** This means following Jesus by confronting evil and injustice in our world both locally and globally. We are called to challenge the standards and values of this world with God's values of righteousness, love and justice that are found in God's heart.
- 3. An Inclusive Community.** Following Jesus is not restricted to class or age - the Gospel of Jesus transcends all barriers of class, race, age and sex. We are called to identify with the vulnerable, deprived, rejected and despised people and we aim to make all people welcome and accepted.
- 4. A Sacrificial Community.** We're called to serve and honour one-another as we follow Jesus who gave everything for us. This means we are to

give our time, talents, gifts and resources freely and generously to bless and serve others.

5. A Missionary Community. We are called to be more than people with a moral and social conscience - although that is important! We are called to be a community with a message that begins and ends with God expressing His love to a broken world by giving Jesus. We are called to proclaim the Gospel message and encourage people to follow Jesus for themselves.

Vision

Whereas our aim, ethos and values remain constant, our vision has to do with what God is doing among us at any given time. Vision can grow, develop, and become fulfilled. Vision gives a sense of direction that people can identify with, own and follow for themselves. The Bible is clear: **"Where there is no revelation (vision), the people cast off restraint (perish)."** (Proverbs 29:18) Vision keeps a church on track with what God is calling them to do at any given time. Vision comes out of our aim and our values. At Emmanuel, our vision is to see a strong and vibrant church that models Jesus to the world through works and wonders. This is achieved by being an outward focused church that seeks to serve Swanage by meeting the practical and spiritual needs of people through proactive community initiatives and prayerful concern.

At Emmanuel, we have initiated a number of community projects which include:

Computer Club, Senior Forum, Oasis, Bus, Mums & Tots

In addition, we have a vision to see a new building that will not only be a "home" for Emmanuel Baptist Church, but a vibrant centre for community-building initiatives.

We seek to achieve this by being:

1. A Praying church (Zech 4:6). We rely not on our own strength or wisdom, but on the Lord. Seeking the Lord is a priority if we are to fulfil God's purposes as a church, and so we encourage folk to be involved in the various prayer opportunities in the life of the church.

2. A Caring church (Rom 12:10, Jn 15:12). It is important to develop strong, wholesome, loving relationships. We recognise the importance

of small groups in developing loving, caring and supportive relationships in the church so we encourage people to get involved in house groups.

3. **A Sharing church (Act 1:8).** The church exists primarily for those outside of it, and a church empowered by the Holy Spirit should be a witnessing church.
4. **Growing church (Mt 16:18).** We believe God wants to see churches flourish, and we want to be open to grow both spiritually and physically. We are not into "empire building", but do want to see God's kingdom grow in Swanage.

4. Nuts & Bolts

Introduction

Emmanuel Baptist Church, while being a member of the Old Baptist Union and the Baptist Union of Great Britain, maintains its autonomy. Each Baptist church will develop its own ethos, style of worship and systems of leadership. However, one thing Baptist churches have in common is the church business meeting - our starting point today.

The Business Meeting

All decisions within EBC are made or ratified by those who attend the Business Meeting. Becoming a Member of the church gives people a real opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process of the church as we seek God's direction together. While non-members are welcome to attend the business meetings, which are held quarterly, it is not possible for them to express their views in the vote; this is restricted to people who are members of the church.

The Minister

Ministers are called to office by a special meeting of the church members, and will be someone who is perceived to be gifted in particular (not all!) aspects of spiritual and church leadership.

Leadership Team

The minister chairs a group of lay leaders collectively called the leadership team. These are folk who have been nominated by a church member who has also secured the signatures of four other members, and they are elected to office by the membership of the church at a business meeting.

They serve a term of three years, after which they can be re-elected for a further term. On completion of this, they stand down for at least one year, after which they are eligible for re-election.

Most, but not necessarily all, have a portfolio, giving them oversight of a specific area of church life

The leaders are accountable to the minister, and ultimately to the church via the church meeting.

The diverse aspects and activities of church life mean there are many

opportunities to serve. Whilst membership of the church is not a prerequisite for serving on a team, teams are almost always led by a member of the church.

The main teams are in relation to - finance, children and youth, pastoral, prayer, catering, worship, evangelism.

Participation in a house group is encouraged among members and non-members alike, but these groups are always headed up by someone from the membership.

Finances

The church has a general fund for the normal expenses of the church, made up of a number of bank accounts. Gifts can be given by cash or cheque through the weekly offering bags or directly into the bank, and we encourage Gift Aiding for taxpayers which adds 25%. Also an Agape Fund for pastoral needs within and outside the church. The world focus team also distributes money tithed to it by the general fund.

Basis of Christian giving, 2 Corinthians 8:2-15; 9:6-8

What happens next

Your application is taken to the next leadership meeting and a member of that team normally visits you which gives opportunity for questions. The application is then taken to the next church meeting and agreed by the members. Following this you would normally be welcomed into membership at the next communion service.

SUMMARY

Responsibilities & Privileges of a Member

WORSHIPPING REGULARLY:

Unless I have a genuine reason for absence my place is in church on Sunday, sharing the highest activity of which my human nature is capable - worship.

BELONGING:

Not only to my own church fellowship, but to the people of Christ in this town, the country, and throughout the whole world. Wherever I go I need Christian fellowship to keep me spiritually alive and sensitive.

PRAYER:

A church strong in prayer is a strong church. I know it may be harder to pray as part of a team, but that is why I need to be part of the praying church and to be present whenever possible at the communion service and when the church meets for prayer.

SERVING:

I have a talent to use for serving God by serving others. It may only be a small talent, but the more I use it the brighter it grows. I lose it when I do not use it. I am saved to serve.

GIVING:

I have the honour of giving to God's service what I can honestly afford, but after all, God sees not only the amount I give, but also my motive for giving and what I keep for myself. I recognise the bible's teaching on making tithing the basis of my Christian giving.

5. Statement of Mission & Purpose

Touching Heaven, changing earth.

We aim to do this by:

Upward Focus

- We acknowledge the sovereignty of God and seek to worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit, recognising that "man's chief end is to worship God and enjoy him forever." (Westminster Catechism)
- We seek to honour God at all times in our private lives and in our public witness. Our desire is to be worshippers who "worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23).
- We believe that worship involves two-way communication between us and God and so we make space within times of worship to hear what God is saying to us through the Holy Spirit.
- We desire to build a community where the tangible presence of God is welcomed and experienced by all: "...he will restore us, so that we might live in his presence" (Hosea 6:2); "in his presence there is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11).

Inward Focus

- As the Body of Christ, we seek to grow more like Jesus by applying His word to our daily lives. "We will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church" (Ephesians 4:14).
- We recognise that God loves us and wants to bring His followers into experience all that is involved in sonship and friend-ship. "I no longer call you slaves... Now you are my friends..." (John 15:15) "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:14).
- We acknowledge the need to understand the Great Commandment to love God (Matthew 22:37) before we are able to fulfil the Great Commission to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19).

Outward Focus

- Our mission is motivated by God's love for people. "God loved the world so

much that he gave..." (John 3:16).

- We believe that all people are created and loved by God regardless of gender, marital status, race, ethnic origin, religion, age, sexual orientation or physical and mental capability. Because of this we seek to serve all people in the community without discrimination.
- Emmanuel Baptist Church recognises it has a mission to the whole person - caring for the physical, spiritual, social and emotional needs of all people.
- We aim to provide a safe place where all people are valued, respected and empowered to achieve their full potential.
- We seek to serve the local community by developing partnerships and networks with other churches, voluntary groups, statutory agencies and local government in order to create an effective, integrated service for the community while avoiding unnecessary duplication of resources.
- We will happily seek to explain our faith motivation to those who ask, but we will never impose our Christian faith or beliefs on others. We respect people's freedom to hold their own views.