



Membership

Walking together and watching over one another



**Thornbury Baptist Church
Gillingstool
Thornbury
South Gloucestershire BS35 2EG
01454 419118**

www.thornburybaptistchurch.co.uk

THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP

When we think of the term 'membership' we may think of joining a club with its rules and procedures, quaint initiation rituals and possibly some sort of distinctive dress code—like the local rugby club. Church membership is not meant to be like that. 1 Corinthians 12 talks about the Church being the body of Christ. Each part of the Church, like a body, is equally as important as the other and a body only works well if all of the parts are working together. It may be slightly old-fashioned terminology but another word for the parts of a body is 'members' - which is where the gruesome phrase 'dismembered' comes from.

Being a **member** of the church is about **belonging** and finding a spiritual **home** while we are on this earth. It is also about **commitment**. These are words laced with importance and meaning which is why we need to know and understand what it is we are committing ourselves to before we take the step of becoming members. **In becoming a member of Thornbury Baptist Church you would be making the statement that God has called you to be part of His work in this place.**

The early Baptist's had a phrase that expresses the meaning of membership well:

"Walking together and watching over one another"

AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH

We welcome anyone to **connect** with the Church in some way. We aim to be an open and welcoming Church for people at all stages of their faith including those who are seeking in some way, but we also encourage Christians who wish to signify their deeper **commitment** to the Church to become **members**. This is not to create a two-tier Church, it simply reflects where individuals are in their relationship to God and the local body of Christ here at Thornbury Baptist Church.

WHO CAN BECOME A MEMBER?

Membership is open to anyone who:

- Professes repentance to God and faith in Jesus. (John 14 vs 6)
- Shows by the way they live their life that they are Christians. (Galatians 5 vs 13-26)
- Has been baptised as a believer (Matthew 28 vs 16-20)
- Feels called to be part of God's work in Thornbury Baptist Church (Ephesians 1 vs 22-23 and 2 vs 19-22)

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH?

TBC, like any local expression of Church, has its distinctive characteristics. We express this in our mission statement: **"Going and growing together in the love of Christ to make Him known."** We are a Church at the forefront of God's mission to reach out into this world and we want to grow—not just in numbers but in depth of relationship with Him and with each other. Furthermore our purpose is to be a **mission, praying, loving and growing community**.

The key to Church life is **community** or common unity. We are not, and never will be, a perfect Church but we are called to be a united Church in the way that we interrelate to each other, it is only in this way that we can truly **belong**. The key to membership and unity is **relationship**—both with God and with each other. As a Church member we would seek to live out our lives in Biblical relationship.

RELATIONSHIP

The characteristics of Church relationship are:

- Love (John 13 vs 34)
- Devotion and honour (Romans 12 vs 10)
- Non judgemental attitudes (Romans 14 vs 13)
- Acceptance (Romans 15 vs 7)
- Patience (Ephesians 4 vs 2)
- Forgiveness (Ephesians 4 vs 32)
- Submission (Ephesians 5 vs 21)
- Forbearance (Colossians 3 vs 13)
- Encouragement (Hebrews 3 vs 13)
- Harmony (1 Peter 3 vs 8)

This may seem like an impossible list of attributes, but they are some of the characteristics of Jesus, the Lord who we follow and seek to be like with the help of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Becoming a Church **member** is **commitment** and as such members have certain responsibilities as well as seeking to live a life in right **relationship** with one another.

Leadership

As a Church we believe that God raises up and equips people to be Leaders of His Church. Within Thornbury Baptist Church there is a Leadership Team who seek to lead with a servant heart. As members we should support and encourage that Leadership Team and accept their leadership.

Serving

We are each called to serve the Church and to play our part in the body. With this in mind, we encourage every member to actively seek to discover their place.

Small Groups

We are a large Church who understand that relationships grow well in small groups and so we encourage members to play an active part in the small group life of the Church.

Finances

As part of the giving of ourselves to Jesus and His Church we encourage members to give of their Finances in accordance with their means.

Governance

We also encourage members to be part of the governance processes of the Church, especially through **family forums**. These are gatherings of the members of the Church under the leadership of Jesus and His Holy Spirit to seek the mind and will of Christ by prayer and discussion and to plan appropriate action to accomplish His will—no small thing! It is a time of sharing, envisioning and listening.

HOW DO I BECOME A MEMBER?

Becoming a member is simple. When someone feels they want to take the step of becoming a member, they let this be known to one of the Leadership Team. One of the Leadership Team will then spend time with that person, talking and praying them through the issues raised in this booklet and the other booklets to which this refers. If, having spent time together in this way, it is still felt appropriate to become a member then this request will be announced at a communion service so that the rest of the local body of Christ is aware of the intention. Should there be no Biblical objections raised after this announcement then the individual will be welcomed into membership at the next available communion service.

WHAT'S MY NEXT STEP?

Membership, as with anything to do with Church, is a topic that may raise many questions. Having read this booklet you may be all fired up and ready to become a member, or you may want to explore it in more detail, or even have lots more questions that this booklet has raised in your mind. Whichever category you find yourself in, we would ask that you study the Bible references, pray them through with God and then just talk to one of the Leadership Team, or maybe first to one of your Christian friends or a small group leader.