

NELSON BAPTIST CHURCH

Membership Policy and Guidelines

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A. WHY MEMBERSHIP?

Belonging to the church has historically been a priority for followers of Jesus because commitment to a local congregation is important for Christian discipleship and underpins the unity and health of the church. Throughout the New Testament, the pattern of the Christians is to meet in local congregations (e.g. Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 4:16; 1 Timothy 3:15). In addition, the church is described as a family, a body, and a unit. The apostle Paul introduces the idea of being a member of the church, when he describes the local church as a “body” and each person within it as a “member” of that body, inter- dependent on all the others. (1 Corinthians 12:12-19).

Right from our beginnings in the seventeenth century, one of the things that has defined Baptists has been our understanding of church membership. We believe church membership should never be viewed as joining a club or organisation. Properly understood, church membership clearly signifies our covenant commitment to Christ, to our fellow believers, and to the mission Jesus has given our congregation.

At Nelson Baptist Church, we believe that becoming a church member is the public declaration of a member’s covenant commitment to walk together as disciples of Jesus, care for each other, grow and mature together, and worship and serve together in mission.

Who is membership for?

Church membership is for those who are firstly, committed to Christ, and secondly, committed to NBC for this present season of their faith journey.

Clause 4.1 NBC Constitution

Any person who confesses faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has been baptised as a believer, shows evidence of following Christ in newness of life and who is willing to uphold the commitments as outlined in the Members’ Pledge may apply to become a Church Member.

In the light of the Baptist principle of freedom of conscience, if a person genuinely believes that their baptism as an infant and their subsequent confirmation of their faith is sufficient, that person will be permitted to apply for Church Membership.

So, to become and remain a member of NBC you must:

- have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and have a personal relationship with him
- have publicly declared your commitment to follow Jesus through full immersion believer’s baptism (see ‘freedom of conscience’ allowance in NBC constitution clause 4.1 paragraph above)
- with God’s help, be daily seeking to live in a way which honours Christ
- seek to serve Christ within the church and beyond
- be supportive of Baptist ecclesiology and Baptist beliefs regarding church and leadership structures (see Frequently Asked Questions section below)
- be willing to accept teaching, and if required correction from church leadership

B. MEMBERSHIP ROLL

A list of church members will be maintained by the NBC elders and reviewed annually.

Clause 4.3 NBC Constitution

A Membership Roll shall be kept and reviewed annually by the Elders.

The Membership Roll will list current active, restricted, suspended and lapsed members

All personal data on the Membership Roll will be held securely in line with NBC's Privacy Policy.

Active Members List: anyone received into membership who is regularly participating in the life and the mission of Nelson Baptist Church and fulfilling the commitments of the NBC Members' Pledge.

Restricted Members List: anyone who has previously been an active member of NBC, but who is upholding those membership commitments they can to the best of their abilities but is currently unable to regularly participate in the life and mission of the church. Examples may include: members serving in the mission field, those no longer able to attend worship services due to ill health or frailty, students studying away from Nelson.

Suspended Members List: any member suspended or expelled from membership due to misconduct (See clause 4.4 of the NBC Constitution). Suspended members will be offered the opportunity for restoration to active membership by way of an intentional restoration process overseen by the pastor and elders. Expelled members, where genuine repentance, and improved behaviour has consistently been demonstrated for a minimum of 6 months, may re-apply for church membership. Names of suspended and expelled members will remain on this list for one full review cycle except in cases where the individual resigns their membership.

Lapsed Members List: anyone who has previously been an active member of NBC, who is not currently participating in the life and mission of the church, and not demonstrably upholding NBC membership commitments.

Annual review

Any members who have ceased to fulfil the spirit of the Member's Pledge (see below) within the last 12 months shall be contacted, wherever possible to discuss their membership.

Where contact is not possible, those persons' names will be transferred to the Lapsed Members List until the next review. If there has been no evidence of re-engagement in the life and mission of the church, their name will be removed from the membership roll.

Details to be recorded on the Membership Roll	
Active	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Name● Date membership commenced
Restricted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Name● Date membership commenced● Reason for being on restricted list● Date name placed on Restricted Members List
Suspended	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Name● Date membership commenced● Status (suspended/ expelled)● Date name placed on Suspended Members List
Lapsed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Name● Date membership commenced● Date name placed on Lapsed Members List

C. EXPECTATIONS OF CHURCH MEMBERS

Anyone connected to Nelson Baptist Church and its various ministries is welcome to participate in the activities, ministries and mission of our congregation. However full participation in church members' meetings is reserved for those who have publicly declared their commitment to the wellbeing and mission of Nelson Baptist through becoming a church member. These rights of membership go hand in hand with the responsibilities of membership as described in our Member's Pledge.

Member's Pledge

- To live at all times such a life as reflects a true Christian and a Member of the Church.
- To take an active and diligent part in the life and work of the Church, regularly attending its services of worship as far as I am able, and being willing to help in whatever way I can.
- To be faithful in prayer for the Church and its witness in the community.
- To share conscientiously in contributing to the funds of the Church according to my means.
- To share in the government of the Church by supporting and encouraging the Leadership of the Church and by attending Church Members' Meetings.
- To do all in my power to deepen and enrich the spirit of fellowship in the Church, always seeking to develop a spirit of love in this fellowship of Christ's people.
- To share by life and word in the supreme task of the Church, namely by witnessing to the saving power of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Church Members Meetings

It's part of Baptist conviction that each local congregation is free to seek and respond to the will of God as they have prayerfully understood it.

Although NBC is a church under the Lordship of Christ with no external authority of bishops or councils, we are part of the Baptist Union of New Zealand (NZBU). The NZBU and our Regional Association provide valuable ministry resources, support and assistance, but they do not rule over a local congregation.

Pastors, Elders and Ministry Team Leaders are people who are called to lead aspects of NBC life, and their maturity, judgement and expertise of God's gift to a local congregation, but these church leaders also do not ultimately rule over a local congregation.

For Baptist congregations, the final responsibility in discerning the mind of Christ rests not with the NZBU, or church leadership but with the church members. Members' Meetings are the occasions when we gather to seek the will of God through prayer and mutual listening. We acknowledge that Jesus is in the midst of our meeting, making his mind known to those who humbly and openly come seeking to know and do his will. At these gatherings, we consider important ministry and mission decisions which need to be made (Clauses 6.1 and 6.2 of the NBC constitution list the type of decisions that have to be considered at Members Meetings).

Whilst all people connected to Nelson BC can typically attend Members' Meetings, only church members may request agenda items, propose or second motions, and cast votes. When deemed necessary by the Members' Meeting chair, the chair has the authority to direct non-members to withdraw from a meeting.

Leadership within Nelson Baptist Church

Anyone connected to Nelson Baptist Church can participate in, and serve in the various ministries and activities of our church, but it is strongly preferred that leadership positions are filled by active church members. This is not a matter of 'special privilege' reserved for church members, rather it is a reflection of the seriousness with which we view leadership in Christ's church: our pastors, elders, and ministry leaders are to be people who actively live out the covenant commitments in our Member's Pledge. At the end of this document is a diagram explaining the 'organisational structure' of Nelson Baptist Church – including the different levels of responsibilities within our church structure.

Where a ministry leadership position is unable to be filled by a church member, the Elders may recommend the position be filled by a suitably qualified non-member providing that person has demonstrated a clearly recognisable and ongoing commitment to Jesus and the people and mission of Nelson Baptist Church. Any non-member being proposed for a ministry leadership position should be asked to consider becoming a church member, but in light of

the Baptist principle of freedom of conscience, if that person genuinely believes they are not being called to become a member of Nelson Baptist Church they may undertake the ministry leadership position.

D. OUR AFFILIATIONS

As a Baptist Church in Nelson we are a part of the Canterbury Westland Baptist Association, and we are a sister church to the eight other Baptist churches in the Top of the South region (Chin Glory Evangelical Church, Atawhai Community Church, Stoke Baptist Church, Richmond Baptist Church, Nelson Chin Baptist Church, Motueka Baptist Church, Connect (Blenheim) and Picton Baptist Church).

As a Baptist Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand we are a part of the New Zealand Baptist Union. Just as individual members make covenant commitments to be a part of Nelson Baptist, our church has made covenant commitments to support the work of our Association and Union through prayer, financial support and actively promoting regional and national activities and praying for their staff and the officers of the NZBU (National Leader, President, and Vice President).

As New Zealand Baptists, we also support the work of Arotahi (The New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society), and Carey Baptist College (the theological college of the NZBU).

On a global level, the New Zealand Baptist Union is part of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation and the Baptist World Alliance.

E. PROCESS FOR BECOMING A MEMBER OF NELSON BAPTIST CHURCH

There are three typical pathways for people to come into membership in our congregation: through baptism, through transfer from another Baptist church, or on request after regularly attending Nelson Baptist Church for a minimum of 6 months.

Baptism:

If you are being baptised at Nelson Baptist, your preparation for baptism will include a discussion on church membership, and you will be given the opportunity to become a member of Nelson Baptist Church after your baptism.

Transferring membership:

People may be transferred into membership from another Baptist church on receipt of a recently written recommendation from their previous pastor or the chair of the leadership group of their previous church.

One of the pastors or elders will meet with you to hear why you want to become a NBC church member, to hear your testimony, to share the history of NBC, to discuss the responsibilities of membership, and to answer any questions you may have.

Note: Members of NBC transferring to another Baptist church can request a written recommendation from our Senior Pastor(s) or the chair of Elders.

On request:

You can request to become a church member by telling a pastor, an elder or the church administrator that you wish to be considered for church membership.

- a. A Pastor will arrange to meet you to hear why you want to become a church member, to hear your testimony, to share the history of NBC, to explain what it means to be a member of a Baptist church, to discuss the responsibilities of membership, and to answer any questions you may have.

You will be listening to see if membership of Nelson Baptist is the right step for you, and the pastor will be listening to determine if you are living *'at all times such a life as reflects a true Christian and a Member of the Church'*. If the pastor is away, they will arrange someone else to meet with you.

- b. A notice will be placed in the weekly church bulletin for 2 consecutive weeks letting the congregation know you have applied to be a member. This allows the congregation to encourage and pray for people seeking membership. This also allows people from the congregation to express any character concerns they may have about the person seeking membership.
- c. After the two weeks, if no concerns have been raised, an Elder will meet with you to answer any further questions you may have, pray for you and your family, and talk you through the process of being welcomed into membership at the next communion service. If concerns have been raised, the Pastor and Elder will meet with you to talk through your application.

Being formally welcomed into membership:

Ideally this will be celebrated during a communion service which typically occurs on the first Sunday of each month.

At some point during the service you (and if appropriate, your family) will be invited to come to the front. Either the Elder or Pastor who met with you will 'commend' you to the congregation - sharing a thumbnail sketch of your faith in Christ and your commitment to NBC, your hand will be shaken (a biblical practice found in Galatians 2:9 and known as 'extending the right hand of fellowship'), you will be invited to sign the Members Roll, and we will pray for you.

F. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is there an age limit for membership?

The simple answer is no. Because membership in a Baptist church follows believer's baptism, we do not place an age limit on membership. If you are old enough to understand your commitment to Christ and be baptised, we believe you are old enough to understand your commitment to a local church and becoming a member.

Note: whilst all members can attend and vote at members' meetings, if there is a particularly sensitive agenda item for discussion, one that could be harmful to the emotional or spiritual wellbeing of a younger believer, the Chair of the meeting may suggest to a young member that they withdraw from this part of the meeting. After the meeting, the Chair – or their delegate – will endeavour to meet with that young person to explain the discussion and any resulting decisions in an age appropriate way.

Do members have to tithe?

At Nelson Baptist, we do not require members give 10% of their income to the offering - our Members Pledge simply says *To share conscientiously in contributing to the funds of the Church according to my means*. So, we believe that the amount of your regular offering is to be determined by prayerful consideration - inviting the Holy Spirit to show you what you are to give to support the mission and ministries of Nelson Baptist Church.

Do members have to attend church every Sunday?

We know there are many demands on peoples' lives – from family and extended family, work, health – and so it is unrealistic to expect weekly attendance. However, as church members, there is an expectation that if you are available and able that you will gather with the church family to worship Jesus, be shaped by God's word, join in prayer, serve if needed and share in fellowship.

Is the pastor the boss in a Baptist church?

No! Jesus is the 'boss' and Lord of every Baptist church. We believe Baptist faith communities are *Christocracies* – congregations operating under the direct rulership and leadership of Jesus Christ. That is why we gather in members meetings to discern His will for us, our purpose and our mission. This includes members discerning together who is to be a pastor or an elder in the life of our church, and then those people are delegated authority over some aspects of church life (the church constitution, pastors' job descriptions, and the Elders' Charter explain the extent and limits of delegated authority, and are available on request from the Church Administrator).

Why is baptism required to become a church member?

The act of believer's baptism clearly displays to the world that a person has decided to follow Jesus, *and* that they have heard and obeyed Jesus' call to be baptised. As church members we gather to discern the mind of Christ regarding important decisions in the life of our church, so it is vital that members are people who have shown both their commitment to following Jesus, and their willingness to hear and obey Jesus' will.

If I become a Church Member will I have to stop drinking alcohol?

In decades past many Baptists supported religious and political movements to ban alcohol (prohibition/abolition of alcohol). Some of our older members may have chosen to '*Take the Pledge*' as teenagers or young adults, committing themselves to never drink alcohol. In past years, some Baptist congregations and members also frowned upon other social activities like dancing, playing cards or gambling, listening to rock and roll or pop music, and working or playing sports on Sunday. Today we trust and support each other to live lives that glorify God, and we believe that these activities are an individual matter of conscience – where each person prayerfully discerns what is, and isn't appropriate in their own life (considering also how our individual choices in these areas will impact the people we live in relationship and community with).