

‘The Meaning of ‘Membership’ (Part two)

Our church is currently engaged in an important two-week series on church membership. Let’s begin with the reminder that when we at Springwood Baptist Church (SBC) speak about ‘membership’ we can use this term in two distinctly different ways:

1. **Membership in Christ’s Universal Church**: Our church Constitution affirms the Biblical teaching that all who profess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour are members of Christ’s universal Church family. This is the most fundamental meaning of membership.

- *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Jesus Christ... Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household...” (Ephesians 2:13, 19)*

2. **Formal membership in our local church** relates to SBC’s own congregational form of government in which formal members must meet our constitutional requirements and be recognised by other existing members before gaining the right to vote on key church issues or being eligible to hold some leadership positions (e.g. elder or deacon).

It is this local form of church membership that we need to put under Biblical examination.

- Read the following Bible verses and reflect on how they reveal evidence of local church identity and membership within the early churches. (Acts 2:36 – 47; 1 Corinthians 1: 1 – 2, 10 – 17; 5:9 – 13).
- Based on these passages, what are some of the benefits, requirements, responsibilities and pitfalls of recognised membership within local churches?

SBC’s leaders have issued a call to prayer, discussion and re-examination in regard to our current requirements for formal membership. These can be found on pages 6 – 7 of our constitution. Below is a summary of the process and requirements now under review:

- Once someone has applied to our church’s membership secretary, a current SBC ‘*member of experience*’ is appointed to interview the applicant. Applicants need to give a sincere profession of faith in Christ and demonstrate evidence of spiritual change through the Holy Spirit.
- Candidates must also accept the doctrines and practice of our church (as outlined in our church constitution¹) and must have been baptised as a professing believer by full immersion.
- Candidates for membership must be recommended by the diaconate and voted into church membership at a formal church meeting.
- Formal church members are expected to regularly attend worship services, contribute to the funds of this church and engage in the work of this church according to the opportunities before them and their abilities.

Do you agree that the above should form the process and requirements for membership within SBC? Explain.

Please pray that God will make his will clear to us on this matter.

¹ Our constitution affirms that the Scriptures have supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct in our church (Springwood Baptist Church Constitution. Page 2, point 4).