



## Church Membership

## Requirements for Church Membership

We believe that membership within the local church is a privilege and is not to be taken lightly. It is for this reason that we have put forth a set of clear requirements based upon the word of God, which must be met before one is considered for membership into Sussex County Bible Church

### **A Clear Testimony of Salvation** (Acts 2:47)

Christ is the head of the Church. For this reason, it is imperative that only those who acknowledge Him as Savior are part of the membership local church. It is also important to understand that church membership is Sussex County Bible Church's corporate endorsement of the member's salvation. Therefore all prospective members are asked to provide two things in writing, for the purpose of elder review; first, a simple and brief explanation of the gospel, and second, a personal testimony of faith in the gospel. We ask that this testimony be received prior to meeting with the pastor or elders of the church. If circumstances do not allow a written testimony, that is not a problem and other arrangements can be made

### **Believer's Baptism by immersion** (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 8:36-39)

All who have accepted the salvation that comes through faith in Jesus Christ are commanded in Scripture to be baptized. This baptism does not "save" a person but rather it is a clear public testimony of the change that has taken place within a person's heart. All examples of baptism in the New Testament follow a person's conscious decision to follow Christ. There are no Biblical examples of infants being baptized. Baptism is reserved for believers because infants are still unable to believe and therefore should not be baptized. SCBC also follows the evidence of Scripture by practicing baptism by immersion only.

### **A Lifestyle Consistent with the Teachings of The Word of God** (Matt 18:15-20, Rom 12:2; 1 Pet 1:14-16)

As a member of SCBC you act as a representative of God and this ministry to the surrounding community. Therefore it is important that one's lifestyle reflect the high moral, ethical, and spiritual values taught within the word of God. Scripture does not teach that holiness is an option for the believer; rather it is a necessary requirement. By this we do not expect perfection in one's life, but a clear desire to grow in grace and holiness. Because of our desire to guard the name and reputation of our Lord as well as the body of believers here that is Sussex County Bible Church, we believe in, and are firmly committed to the practice of church discipline as mentioned in Matthew 18:15-17, 2 Thessalonians 3:14-16, 1 Corinthians 5:1-5.

### **Agreement with the SCBC Statement of Faith** (Acts 2:46-47)

The purpose of our statement of faith is to provide the common understanding of the essential elements of our faith so that we as a church may be of one mind (Acts 2). Because of the wide diversity of church backgrounds that are present at Sussex County Bible Church, it is important that you read it carefully. If there are questions as to the meaning of specifics, please share these questions with the elders of the church.

This does not mean that one must agree to the smallest points of doctrine. We hold sacred the priesthood of the believer which means that each of us has the privilege but also the solemn responsibility of opening the word of God, reading it, and reaching our decisions about what it means as the power of the Holy Spirit gives us direction. It is important however that those who hold positions of authority within the ministry of SCBC (teachers, elders, etc.) agree to hold to the fundamental doctrinal positions of the church.

### **Faithfulness to the SCBC family** (Acts 2:42, Hebrews 10:25)

SCBC is not a place, it is a gathering of persons who know and follow Jesus Christ. We gather often for worship which involves the preaching and singing of God's Word. Equally important is the area of fellowship with one another. SCBC is not looking for more attendees; we are looking for people who want to invest their lives in making a difference in this local church, the community, and ultimately the world. Therefore we encourage that members make every reasonable effort to be at the gatherings of SCBC.

### **Ministry Participation** (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

Another important aspect of the priesthood of all believers is the belief that all believers have been given priestly access to the Father and are given priestly roles. These roles are expressed through ministry to one another in the body of Christ. Ministry is one of the best ways to gain a real sense of contribution and connection to the Church as a whole.

## **Why We Believe in Church Membership**

In a day when commitment is rare, it should come as no surprise that church membership is such a low priority to so many believers. Sadly, it is not uncommon for Christians to move from church to church, never submitting themselves to the care of elders and never committing themselves to a group of fellow believers. To neglect—or to refuse—to join a church as a formal member, however, reflects a misunderstanding of the believer's responsibility to the body of Christ. And it also cuts one off from the many blessings and opportunities that flow from this commitment. It is essential for every Christian to understand what church membership is and why it matters.

### **The Definition of Church Membership**

When an individual is saved, he becomes a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). Because he is united to Christ and the other members of the body in this way, he is therefore qualified to become member of a local expression of that body. To become a member of a church is to formally commit oneself to an identifiable, local body of believers who have joined together for specific, divinely ordained purposes. These purposes include receiving instruction from God's Word (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2), serving and edifying one another through the proper use of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; 1 Pet. 4:10-11), participating in the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42), and proclaiming the gospel to those who are lost (Matt. 28:18-20). In addition, when one becomes a member of a church, he submits himself to the care and the authority of the biblically qualified elders that God has placed in that assembly.

### **The Basis for Church Membership**

Although Scripture does not contain an explicit command to formally join a local church, the biblical principles for church membership permeate the New Testament. This biblical basis can be seen most clearly in (1) the example of the early church, (2) the existence of church government, (3) the exercise of church discipline, and (4) the exhortation to mutual edification.

### ***The Example of the Early Church***

In the early church, coming to Christ was coming to the church. The idea of experiencing salvation without belonging to a local church is foreign to the New Testament. When individuals repented and believed in Christ, they were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5). More than simply living out a private commitment to Christ, this meant joining together formally with other believers in a local assembly and devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42). The epistles of the New Testament were written to churches. In the case of the few written to individuals—such as Philemon, Timothy and Titus—these individuals were leaders in churches. The New Testament epistles themselves demonstrate that the Lord assumed that believers would be committed to a local assembly.

Scripture also indicates that when a believer moved to another city, his church often wrote a letter of commendation to his new church (Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:10; cf. 2 Cor. 3:1-2). In the book of Acts, much of the terminology we find fits only with the concept of "formal" church membership. Phrases such as "the whole congregation" (6:5), "the church in Jerusalem" (8:1), "the disciples" in Jerusalem (9:26), "in every church" (14:23), "the whole church" (15:17), and "the elders of the church" in Ephesus (20:17), all suggest recognizable church membership with well-defined boundaries (also see 1 Cor. 5:4; 14:23; and Heb. 10:25).

### ***The Existence of Church Government***

The consistent pattern throughout the New Testament is that a plurality of elders is to oversee each local body of believers. The specific duties given to these elders presuppose a clearly defined group of church members who are under their care. Among other things, these godly men are responsible to shepherd God's people (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), to labor diligently among them (1 Thess. 5:12), to have charge over them (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17), and to keep watch over their souls (Heb. 13:17). Scripture teaches that the elders will give an account to God for the individuals allotted to their charge (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:3). Those responsibilities require that there be a distinguishable, mutually understood membership in the local church. Elders can shepherd the people and give an account to God for their spiritual well-being only if they know who they are; they can provide oversight only if they know those for whom they are responsible; and they can fulfill their duty to shepherd the flock only if they know who is part of the flock and who is not. The elders of a church are not responsible for the spiritual well-being of every individual who visits the church or who attends sporadically. Rather, they are primarily responsible to shepherd those who have submitted themselves to the care and the authority of the elders, and this is done through church membership.

Conversely, Scripture teaches that believers are to submit to their elders. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders, and submit to them." The question for each believer is, "Who are your leaders?" The one who has refused to join a local church and entrust himself to the care and the authority of the elders has no leaders. For that person, obedience

to Hebrews 13:17 is impossible. To put it simply, this verse implies that every believer knows to whom he must submit, which, in turn, assumes clearly defined church membership.

### ***The Exercise of Church Discipline***

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus outlines the way the church is to seek the restoration of a believer who has fallen into sin—a four-step process commonly known as church discipline. First, when a brother sins, he is to be confronted privately by a single individual (v. 15). If he refuses to repent, that individual is to take one or two other believers along to confront him again (v. 16). If the sinning brother refuses to listen to the two or three, they are then to tell it to the church (v. 17). If there is still no repentance, the final step is to put the person out of the assembly (v. 17; cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-13). The exercise of church discipline according to Matthew 18 and other passages (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 1 Tim. 5:20; Titus 3:10-11) presupposes that the elders of a church know who their members are.

### ***The Exhortation to Mutual Edification***

The New Testament teaches that the church is the body of Christ, and that God has called every member to a life devoted to the growth of the body. In other words, Scripture exhorts all believers to edify the other members by practicing the “one-anothers” of the New Testament (e.g., Heb. 10:24-25) and exercising their spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-7; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Mutual edification can only take place in the context of the corporate body of Christ. Exhortations to this kind of ministry presuppose that believers have committed themselves to other believers in a specific local assembly. Church membership is simply the formal way to make that commitment.

### **Conclusion**

Living out a commitment to a local church involves many responsibilities: exemplifying a godly lifestyle in the community, exercising one’s spiritual gifts in diligent service, voluntarily contributing financially to the work of the ministry, giving and receiving admonishment with meekness and in love, and faithfully participating in corporate worship. Much is expected, but much is at stake. For only when every believer is faithful to this kind of commitment is the church able to live up to her calling as Christ’s representative here on earth. This is why we believe in church membership.

## **STATEMENT OF FAITH**

### **THE BIBLE**

We believe the Bible is God’s written revelation to man. It is verbally inspired in every word and inerrant in the original manuscripts. The word of God is infallible, sufficient for all things, and is our final and sole authority in all matters. 2 *Timothy 1:13; 3:16 2 Peter 1:20-21 Psalm 119:105, 160; 12:6 Proverbs 30:5*

### **GOD**

We believe there is only one, living and true God, an infinite, all knowing Spirit. He is perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three co-equal persons; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Genesis 1:1, 26, 27, 3:22; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2; Matthew 28:19; Psalm 90:2*

### **JESUS CHRIST**

We believe that Jesus Christ is God’s Son. He is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. He is fully God and fully man. He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless human life, performed miracles, and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind by dying on a cross. The purpose of His death was to become a substitutionary atonement for the sins of mankind. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven’s glory and will return again someday to earth to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. *Matthew 1:22-23; 1 Timothy 6:14-15; Romans 1:3-4, 3:21-26; Hebrews 4:14-15; Isaiah 9:6; Titus 2:13; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; John 1:1-5; 14:10-30*

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT**

We believe the Holy Spirit is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son of God. He is the divine helper, assistant, counselor and instructor. He is present in the world to make mankind aware of their need for Jesus Christ. The Scriptures teach that we are *all* baptized into one body by one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) therefore we believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs at the moment of salvation, not subsequent to it. The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers, and gifts them for service, and seals them unto the day of redemption. He provides the child of God with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right and we seek to live under His control daily. *1 Corinthians 2:12, 3:16, 13:1-13, 14:1-40, 2 Corinthians 3:17,; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 2:20, 5:18; John 16:7-13; 14:16-27; Galatians 5:25, Hebrews 2:3-4*

**MANKIND**

We believe that mankind has been created in the image of God and possesses intellect, emotion, and will. As the supreme object of God's creation, we were designed for dignity and fellowship with Him. However, Adam's sin sent all of creation into a fallen state, and plunged all his descendants into depravity. Thus, everyone, without exception, is marred by willful rebellion and disobedience toward God, which is called "sin." As a result, man is totally incapable of regaining a right relationship with God through his own efforts. *Genesis 1:27 Psalm 8:3-6 Romans 3:1-20, 23 Isaiah 53:6a; 59:1-2*

**SALVATION**

We believe that salvation is God's free gift to us. We receive this gift through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ alone. Repentance means turning away from our sin and turning towards Christ. Faith means trusting in Christ alone for the forgiveness of our sins. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, His perfect obedience is credited to us so that God sees us as the righteousness of Christ. Every person who truly is saved will spend eternity in heaven, while those who choose to reject God's salvation and die in sin will spend eternity in a place spoken of by Jesus called hell. *Romans 3:21-26; 4:1-25, 5:1, 6:23 Titus 3:5 John 14:6, 1:12 Galatians 3:26 Ephesians 2:8-9*

**THE BELIEVER'S SECURITY**

We believe God gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ. When a person makes a genuine commitment of faith in Jesus, he/she is sealed unto the day of redemption. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God alone, not by any self-effort on the part of the believer. We believe in the "the perseverance of God with the saints," meaning that, God perseveres with us, keeping us from falling away, and because He perseveres we also persevere. We persevere because God preserves us from full and final falling away from Him. *John 10:29, Romans 6-8, Ephesians 2:1-10 1 Peter 1:3-5 Hebrews 7:25; 10:10, 14 2 Timothy 1:12*

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**Sussex County Bible Church  
Membership Agreement**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understand the membership requirements of SCBC.

I agree to abide by the guidelines set forth in the SCBC membership document and I willingly submit to the care and leadership of SCBC as outlined in the membership requirements. As a member of this body I seek to be held accountable by my brothers and sisters in Christ as well as the elders for living a holy life that brings glory and honor to Christ and His church.

I further agree I will not seek to undermine the doctrines of this church, nor will I seek to cause dissension among the members of this body.

I agree to use my gifts and talents for the glory of Christ and the edification of His body here at SCBC.

\_\_\_\_\_ Member

\_\_\_\_\_ Elder