

Membership at Soham Baptist Church

Introduction

On the 8th April 1752 Soham Baptist Church was founded by six local men. 80 years later the present chapel building was opened and the work of the gospel has been based there ever since.



At the start, the population of the town (or village) was barely 1,500. Today the figure is well over 10,000. However the vision remains the same; to build believers up in their faith and to make Christ known to those who are unsaved.

Very early in the life of this Church there was an interest in "mission". This was largely through the influence of Andrew Fuller who served as Pastor and later, with William Carey went on to form what became known as the Baptist Missionary Society; widely recognised as the first 'modern' missionary society.

Mission continues to be an important part of the church's life as we look to respond to the call to make Christ known. As well as our commitment to local evangelism, we currently support both western missionaries and national workers in Malawi, Latvia, Romania and the Far East.

For more details on our history and what we are about now, log on to our website at www.sohambaptist.org.uk. If, having read this leaflet you wish to become a member of Soham Baptist Church or wish to find out more, please speak to one of our Elders.



Soham Baptist Church is affiliated to the **Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC)**. This is a network of independent Evangelical Churches rather than being a denomination with central authority. Formed in 1922, it now includes almost 500 churches, together with more than 800 personal Associates.

The FIEC exists to serve and support the affiliated churches. Its core work has three strands: Church Support, Training and Outreach. Much of its work revolves, therefore, around providing support and advice to pastors, church officers and others.

Various Teams (or committees) are drawn from the churches and wider afield, to organise and develop the work of the Fellowship and to enable it to provide specific services and resources. A small team together with volunteers, based in the Market Harborough office, handle the day to day workload.

Vision



Our desire is to glorify God in our individual lives and in the life of His church. We therefore seek to exalt Him in our private and corporate worship, honour Him in our relationships and grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ through prayer and the Word of God.

In **Ephesians 2:19-22** we see that Jesus is building His Church and we have the privilege of being His co-workers in that great task. As He was about to ascend to heaven, Jesus gave His disciples clear instructions about how they were to proceed until He returned. We call these instructions the Great Commission **Matthew 28:18-20**.

This Commission contains the directive for what we are to be doing. All that we do as a church is ultimately focussed on being a part of what God is doing in drawing people to Himself.

We believe that the primary impetus to motivate God's people toward this pursuit is when they are equipped by God's Word to delight God and seek to live in a way pleasing to him.



What are the characteristics of Church Membership?

- a) It identifies a person as a believer **Eph 2:19-22**.
- b) It provides a spiritual family to support and encourage one another in the Christian walk **Gal 6:1-2, Heb. 10:24-25**.
- c) It enables believers to discover their gifts and to use them in the ministry of the local church **1 Cor 12:4-27**.
- d) It places believers under the spiritual protection of godly leaders **Heb 13:17**.

What does it mean to be part of a local church?

Community:

The church is not primarily an organisation or structure; it is primarily people who have been chosen by God and experienced regeneration and are being built together by Him to help fulfil His purposes and bring glory to His name.

The apostle Paul describes the church in Romans 12:4-5 as the Body of Christ. This illustration emphasises not only that Jesus is the head of the body, but that each of us as a part of the body *"belongs to all the others"*.

The New Testament picture of the church (Acts 2:42-47) can best be described as community - a unified body of people with common characteristics, interests, values and purpose, living together within a larger society. This is the type of church life that we are to strive for in the local expression of Christ's church.

Fellowship:

If the lifestyle of the church is best described as community, our relating with one another within that community is best described by the word “fellowship.” Fellowship expresses the idea of sharing, or having something in common with somebody else. The word translated “fellowship” in the New Testament is also translated as participation, partnership and communion. In essence, it means to share a common life.

As we see from the verses mentioned already above from Acts 2, this includes praying together, learning together, sharing together, witnessing together and growing together.



Service:

It is our conviction as a church that every true disciple of Jesus Christ will eagerly desire to follow through on their commitment to our Lord and Saviour by serving Him and His people in the context of a local church.

It is an empty faith that seeks only its own interests (Philippians 2:3-4). We have been bought with a precious price, the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The freedom that He died to purchase for us is the freedom from selfishness and self-absorption. Service is naturally therefore the next step for discipleship.

We will encourage you to use and develop your God-given gifts and callings within the life of the Church and in personal witness.

Commitment:



Commitment means a pledge or promise to do something, in this case to faithfully walk out your relationship with God and His people in a local church until God would direct otherwise.

Such a commitment is the Biblical norm where believers didn't just attend a church but were “added to” and “continually devoted to” its life and teaching. Faithful attendance at the regular meetings of the church expresses the desire to glorify God and in turn benefits not only the individual member but the rest of the church (Hebrews 10:25). Commitment establishes trust, which encourages us to open our hearts to one another, to relate openly and to plan for the future together under the hand of God.

Part of this commitment to the Lord’s work is expressed in our financial giving. As a church we believe in the Biblical principle of the voluntary tithing of our individual income. As with the New Testament believers, the local church provides channels for the effectiveness of this giving and under current law enables giving through the church to be tax free; thus increasing the value of the gift.

Giving through Soham Baptist Church not only maintains the ministry and outreach of the local church. We currently devote 20% of all income to World Mission; supporting the work of the gospel in the areas already set out in the introduction to this leaflet.

What are the requirements of Church Membership?

A personal relationship with Jesus Christ:

Our first priority is to make sure that everyone who joins the local church understands what it means to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Evidence of your testimony will be presented to the Members' Meeting in which your application to formally join us is considered. You will be encouraged to do this yourself and the Elders or visitors will be pleased to give you any help you need to prepare.

Believers Baptism:



We believe that identification with Christ through Believer's Baptism is required for membership. This was generally the pattern in the New Testament Church and expresses a public confession of faith in Christ and association with other believers.

Baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolising the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus **Romans 6:4**.

Whilst we would not want baptism to be used simply as a means through which someone becomes a member, we recognise that people considering the step of commitment to the local church may see this as the time to take the step of obedience in baptism.

If you have not been baptised and would like more information on how to go about it, please speak to one of the church Elders.

Statement of Faith and Church Rules:

The first and most important consideration when choosing a church is its doctrinal beliefs. We must be personally convinced that a church's beliefs are Biblical. **New members will be expected to agree in writing with the statement of faith that underpins the whole life and ministry of the church; together with the church rules which you will be given during your application.**

Back in the early days when Andrew Fuller was Pastor of this church, what were known as the '*Articles of Faith of Soham Baptist Church*' were drawn up. These nine statements summarised the Biblical basis on which the church continues to stand today and they are shown over the page.



If you feel that you do not understand any of the statements then one of the church leaders will be happy to spend time looking at them with you.

Our 'Basis of Faith' is very similar to that of the *Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches*; a document to which as an affiliated church we fully subscribe. The FIEC has published a very helpful booklet 'Light for Life' which explains each part of their Basis of Faith. A free copy is available from the Church Elders.

Basis of Faith of Soham Baptist Church

1. We believe in the full inspiration of both Old and New Testament as originally given, their inerrancy, supreme authority and sufficiency as not only containing but being in themselves the Word of God, the only rule of faith and practice.
2. The unity of the persons of the Godhead and the divine co-equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are the same in substance and equal in power and glory.
3. The essential, absolute and eternal deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, his virgin birth, his real but sinless humanity, his substitutionary and atoning death as the only and sufficient sacrifice for sinners of mankind; his bodily resurrection and ascension and his personal return in power and glory.
4. The personality and deity of the Holy Spirit, the necessity of his work in regeneration, conversion and sanctification, and of his influences in the ministry and worship of the church.
5. The total depravity of human nature through the fall, salvation being solely by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose imputed righteousness is the only ground for our personal acceptance with God.
6. The Sovereignty of God in creation, providence and salvation; particular redemption and the certain perseverance of all true believers.
7. The resurrection of the body and the judgement of the world by the Lord Jesus Christ; the eternal blessedness of the saved and the everlasting punishment of the unrepentant.
8. The spiritual unity of those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, called by God through the Gospel, born of the Spirit and justified by faith, the local church consisting of a body of believers who are the visible expression of the universal church.
9. The ordinances of Believer's Baptism by total immersion and the Lord's Supper as instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, but not in Baptism as conferring regenerating grace, nor in the Lord's Supper as being a sacrifice for sin, or involving any change in the elements of bread and wine.