

Church Membership

An Introduction to membership in Carryduff Baptist Church



CARRYDUFF
BAPTIST CHURCH

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What we believe

The Constitution of Carryduff Baptist Church begins with a brief summary of our core beliefs.

It is important to understand that these are the theological truths which underpin the teaching we will offer and endorse in the church. While they have no authority in themselves, these statements define our understanding of the gospel. This is a summary of what we have found to be truly taught in the Scriptures.

Because of this, we generally expect members to be able to agree, in an informed way, to all of these points. If you have reservations, or doubts, about any of them, it is essential that that be discussed with the elders. That can happen here and now in the context of this class, or later on, privately with the elders. But you must let them know so that they can decide whether or not that would affect your being received into membership.

If you are accepted into membership with such reservations, it is understood that you do so being prepared to submit to the church on these points. That doesn't mean you can't discuss them, or even debate them in a helpful way. However, we do expect that members will not attempt to undermine the teaching given on these points, or seek to cause division about them. The appropriate way to respond to a personal conviction that there is an error in these core beliefs, is to seek to have the constitution changed. This is a decision for the entire congregation and the means to begin that process is described in the Constitution.

Our core beliefs fall under ten headings which we will look at briefly.

1 The Scriptures

The verbal inspiration and total inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as originally given by God; their sole-sufficiency and final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

By the term “inspiration” we mean that the Bible has its ultimate origin in the mind of God. When we read it, we are reading God's thoughts. This is what Paul is talking about in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is God-breathed”.

To this we add the description “verbal” because we believe that God has inspired not simply the broad ideas of the Bible, but each and every word¹.

Finally, we add the description, “inerrant”². This has become necessary because of some who have tried to teach that the words of the Bible are only inspired when they talk about spiritual matters. They

1 See Matthew 5:18, “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished”

2 The *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* is a helpful summary of what is meant by inerrancy. It can be downloaded from the Internet here: http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf

suggest that the authors might have made mistakes about history and dates and scientific questions. Because we believe the Bible is the word of God, we contend that it speaks without error on every topic it addresses: historical, scientific *and* theological.

It is important to remember that this quality of inerrancy applies only to the books, “as originally given by God”. We do not have the originals and the copies we have contain spelling mistakes and other variations. However, by comparison of the many copies, it is possible to detect and correct these mistakes and be confident that the Bible we have is, substantially, as it was originally written.

The 66 books we have are “sufficient” – that is, they contain everything we need for godly life. No other authority is needed alongside them. For that reason, they are our sole and final authority. All questions in this church can only be answered authoritatively by resort to the Bible. Even our constitution is simply our best understanding of what the Bible says. If the people of God here become convinced that the Constitution contradicts the Bible, we will revise the Constitution to conform to the Bible.

Simply put, what the Bible says, God says.

2 God

One God in three persons, the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; co-equal, co-eternal, sovereign and active in creation, providence and redemption.

It took the early Church almost three hundred years to summarise everything the New Testament added to our understanding of God. The result of those centuries of biblical study is summarised by one word: *Trinity*.

The Bible plainly teaches that there is only one God³ and in the New Testament “the Father” about whom Jesus speaks, is clearly that God⁴. However, Jesus is *also* identified as God⁵, and the Holy Spirit is similarly identified as God⁶.

We summarise these facts by saying that this one God exists as three persons. But:

- The Father, the Son and the Spirit are not three gods, they are one Being.
- The Father, the Son and the Spirit are not *parts* of God, as if the Father was one third of God, the Son another third, and the Holy Spirit what was left over.
- Father, Son and Spirit are not different *names* that God goes by at different times in the way that a man might be a husband and a father and a son⁷.

They are “co-equal”, all three of them rule the universe together.

They are “co-eternal”, they have all, always existed. The Son was not created by the Father, nor did the Spirit have a beginning.

Together, God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is “sovereign”. He is the King, he rules everything,

3 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut 6:4, see also Isa 45:14)

4 For example, see John 6:27

5 John 1:1; Titus 2:13

6 For example, in Acts 5, compare verses 3 and 4, "you have lied to the Holy Spirit ... You have not lied to men but to God"

7 In Matthew 3:16-17 we see the Father speaking about his Son as he is being baptised, while the Holy Spirit descends on him. All three acting simultaneously.

everywhere.

The Father, the Son and the Spirit, together created the world, they care for the world (“providence”) and they have provided redemption for the world.

3 The Lord Jesus Christ

The essential deity and perfect humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and men; His virgin birth, sinless life and sacrificial death on the cross as the only substitute for sinners; His burial, bodily resurrection and ascension to heaven; His high priestly ministry and personal return.

This is a summary of everything we believe specifically about Jesus. His “essential deity” means that he is, always has been, and always will be, truly and wholly God.

Ever since Bethlehem, Jesus has also been wholly, and genuinely, human. He did not simply 'appear' to be a man, or pretend. He, “[took] the very nature of a servant” (Phil 2:7). He really got tired, he truly had to eat and sleep. Finally, he really died. This was his, “perfect humanity”.

He did this to be the only mediator between God and man⁸. No-one else can speak on your behalf to God – neither angel, nor saint, not minister, nor priest. And in no other way does God call us to come to him except through this mediator⁹.

His mother Mary was a virgin when he was born, there was no act of sexual intercourse that began his life.

He never, ever sinned in any way.

He truly died, his body became a corpse. He did that as a substitute for the many who *had* sinned so that his death might be counted instead of theirs.

Having endured the punishment deserved by those he came to save, he was resurrected “bodily”. The same body he had before the cross, came back to life. And in that body he ascended to heaven from where he will return at the end of time.

In the mean time, we believe in, “His high priestly ministry”. He prays for us.

4 The Holy Spirit

The work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating the sinner and indwelling, sanctifying and empowering the believer.

“Regeneration” is the technical term for being born again. When a person is born again, it is a miracle. They were dead spiritually but, through faith in Jesus Christ, they become alive in the same way that Jesus' body was made alive again in the tomb.

This miracle is performed by the Holy Spirit¹⁰. Afterwards, the Holy Spirit lives in the Christian¹¹

8 1 Tim 2:5

9 Acts 4:12

10 John 3:8

("indwelling") and works in him day by day to make him a better, more righteous, and more holy person ("sanctifying"). It is because he is in us that we find ourselves increasingly able obey his commands ("empowering").

5 The Devil

The personality of the devil; his evil activity and final doom.

When we say, "the personality of the devil", we aren't talking about what kind of a character he is. We mean that he is a person. The devil is not just a vague way of talking about all the bad things in the world. He is a living, thinking, reasoning being who actively hates God and his people.

But, because of Jesus, he is doomed. Jesus talks about, "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41).

6 Humanity

The creation of humanity, male and female, in the image of God, equal and complementary; the creation ordinance of marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman; the universal requirement for chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage; God's intent that one's biological sex determines their self-identification as male or female; the entrance of sin through Adam's disobedience; the fallen and totally depraved state of all humanity; their subjection to God's wrath and condemnation; their responsibility to repent and believe the Gospel.

Mankind was made to be the very peak of the whole creation. Strikingly, God chose to create mankind in two, distinct genders – a man and a woman. Men and women are equal in worth before God, they equally bear the image of God, nevertheless they are not interchangeable but rather complementary. There are roles – both physical and spiritual – that are reserved for woman, and roles that are reserved for men. To teach that we can redefine any of this is to undermine God's purposes for us, and to experience less than the fullness of the image of God.

The marital relationship between the man and the woman was also established as a part of our creation¹². It was intended to bind one man and one woman together for life¹³ and we are not at liberty to redefine it and recognise unions between two men, or two women, or of any other kind, as marriage biblically understood. Since marriage is given as the only legitimate context for sexual intimacy¹⁴ Scripture requires all people to refrain entirely from sexual activity outside such a union, and to be exclusively faithful to their spouse in it.

But Adam committed the first human sin and, because of that, sin came into the whole world. Ever since, every human being has been born guilty, with a hatred for God, his rules and his love. Mankind is, "fallen

¹¹ Rom 8:9

¹² See Gen 2:18

¹³ See Matt 19:6

¹⁴ See Ex 20:14; Deut 22:14; 1 Cor 7:9; 1 Thess 4:3-5; Heb 13:4

and totally depraved”.

In addition, many of those creation roles and relationships are affected, and we are particularly conscious of the painful reality that some find that their sexual desires are directed to others of the same sex, or even that they feel their sex at birth to be in conflict with the gender they believe themselves to be. However, it is neither loving nor right to say that because a person feels they are in the ‘wrong’ body that they should be treated as anything other than a member of the gender indicated by their biological sex at birth.

Feeling this way does not mean they cannot be saved, indeed, indeed it is precisely because the whole creation is so disordered that Christ came to die for us. Their conflicted condition requires and deserves the sympathy and grace they have a right to expect to find within the church.

When we talk about, “their subjection to God's wrath and condemnation”, we mean simply that everyone deserves to go to hell. Even the best of us – there are no special classes of sin that make us particularly subject to judgement.

That is why everyone has a responsibility “to repent and believe the Gospel”. Because there is no-one who doesn't need it.

7 Justification

The justification of the sinner by God's grace alone through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone; the eternal security of the believer.

Justification is a legal term, it is the 'not guilty' verdict given in the court of law. One of the wonders of the gospel is the fact that God issues that verdict right at the beginning of our Christian lives. Paul can say, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

That declaration comes:

- “by God's grace alone” - there is nothing whatsoever that we do to deserve his counting of our crimes as already punished in Christ.
- “through faith alone” - although we sometimes say we are justified “by faith”, that is really just short-hand for, “by means of faith”. Our faith has no merit, it doesn't impress God that we believe, after all devils believe¹⁵. We are not saved because of our faith, but it is *through* our faith that God gives to us his great gift.
- “in the Lord Jesus Christ alone” - our faith is ultimately in a person and in what he did. We read our Bibles only so that we will know more about that person.

We also believe in, “the eternal security of the believer”. That 'not guilty' verdict, once given, cannot be reversed. The person who is truly saved, cannot then be lost. However, we should not think that means it doesn't matter what we do. As Paul says, "Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Rom 6:1-2). Our justification is just the beginning of a process that the indwelling Holy Spirit has begun in our life. If our sin continues unaltered, then we must suspect that the Holy Spirit is not at work and there has been no new birth (see point 4).

15 James 2:19

8 The Church

The church, the body of Christ, made up of those drawn from every tribe, language, people and nation throughout history who are added to it by the work of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; the scriptural expression of the church in the world as the local company of baptised believers gathered under the headship of Christ for worship, fellowship, instruction and evangelism, in separation from all systems of belief that do not adhere to the Scriptures and are unfaithful to the gospel of salvation by grace alone; the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper: baptism being the immersion of believers on profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a symbol of their identification with Him in His death, burial and resurrection; the Lord's supper being a remembrance of Christ's death until He comes and a renewal of commitment to Him; the offices of elder and deacon; the gifts of evangelist and pastor-teacher; the priesthood of all believers and their unity in the Body of Christ; the separation of church and state.

We will touch on the nature of the Church later on in this course so only a few comments here.

As a Church we worship, "in separation from all systems of belief that do not adhere to the Scriptures and are unfaithful to the gospel of salvation by grace alone". There are churches which claim to be Christian but which do not preach the gospel of Scripture. We cannot join in formal worship with such bodies, or work together with them¹⁶. To do so would not only make the message we declare unclear to people who saw us alongside people who declare a different message, it would also be ungrateful to God for the truth he has given us.

However, we do reach out to the members of such churches socially and personally.

9 The Future State

The unconditional immortality of the soul; the resurrection of the body; the eternal joy in heaven of the believer; the conscious eternal punishment in hell of those who die impenitent.

This summarises the critical points of the hope that the Christian has in Christ. In some ways, it is shaped by what some have denied about the future.

When we talk about, "the unconditional immortality of the soul", we are rejecting the position of some who have taught that only the saved are immortal. They teach that immortality is a gift given on condition

16 2 Tim 3:2-5

of salvation. Under this scheme, the lost are not immortal and will, either immediately, or after a time of punishment, simply cease to exist. This contradicts Scripture¹⁷.

When we mention, “the resurrection of the body”, we remember that the Christian's hope is not a spiritual existence, but to enjoy the same experience as our Saviour – to be resurrected in perfect, immortal bodies¹⁸.

Finally the, “eternal joy ... of the believer” and “conscious eternal punishment in hell” are our understanding of Jesus' words to the wicked, “they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matt 25:46).

10 Christian Behaviour

The responsibility of all believers to obey and serve the Lord and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives; the duty of each local church to exercise godly discipline in a loving and caring fashion.

Increasingly, God teaches us and enables us to live more righteous lives. But we learn those lessons and make use of that help only with discipline and repentance. We believe therefore that each Christian is responsible for seeking to obey God's law, and also, that every member is responsible for helping the rest to do exactly the same – even if that means disciplining them when they refuse to try.

17 Dan 12:2; Matt 25:46; Mark 9:48; Rev 14:11

18 "the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality" (1Cor 15:53)

What is a Church?

Before someone can become a member of Carryduff Baptist Church the elders and members must first be persuaded that there are good grounds to believe that the candidate has been genuinely converted. This requires more than being able, simply, to agree to the truths we've been talking about, but to demonstrate a real and transforming faith in Jesus Christ.

In addition, we insist that members have demonstrated their submission to Christ by being baptised as believers by full immersion. We don't believe that baptism is necessary for your salvation, but it is the *visible* expression of your allegiance to your Lord and it's appropriate to require it at the beginning of your *visible* membership of his Church.

The reason for the position we take on these matters follows from what we believe the Church to be, and what it means to be a member of the Church. So it will be helpful to begin this part of the course by summarising briefly, what we believe about the Church itself. This will be particularly useful if you're coming to Carryduff from a background that is not Baptist, or even if you've just never given much thought to why Presbyterians and Anglicans and Baptists organise and operate their local congregations differently.

We can think of the church under three headings:

- *Materials* – what is the Church made up of?
- *Management* – how is the Church organised practically?
- *Powers* – what authority has the Church been granted?

Materials

First of all, a church is not a building, in the New Testament the word refers to a group of *people* who have assembled together. These assembled congregations could not at first build their own halls, instead they would meet in the homes of their members. Acts 2:46 says that the apostles used the public spaces in the outer courts of the Temple to preach in, and they would meet in people's houses to break bread¹⁹.

The materials from which the Church is built are, in the words of Peter, "living stones" (1 Pet 2:5). That is, individuals who have put their faith wholly, exclusively and unreservedly in Jesus Christ and, as a result, have been made alive in him. Paul described the church in Corinth as, "those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy" (1 Cor 1:2). They have, in Jesus' vivid image, been "born again".

This means two things:

1. Firstly, this means that an unsaved person cannot be a member of the church. This is why the church does its best to make sure that no unsaved person is led to believe that they *are* members. So we ask people who want to join to meet with the elders to discuss their conversion.

¹⁹ This is why, when Paul was trying to destroy the church, he went, "from house to house" (Acts 8:3). In the letters there are several greetings which are sent specifically to churches that met in some individual's house; for example, "Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house" (1 Cor 16:19). Another example is found in Colossians 4:15.

2. Secondly, it suggests that membership is not really optional. The purpose of stones is to become part of a building.

Management

The question of how to organise and manage the churches which are formed when believers come together is of great significance. Since the Church is not simply a voluntary organisation, like a club or a business, we don't decide these things for ourselves. God had determined how his Church is to be organised.

There is, fundamentally, only one Church. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that,

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless

Eph 5:25-27²⁰

However, in the vast majority of occasions where the Bible talks about 'church', it describes it as one among many. In this sense, there are *many* churches. Each of these was a local gathering of people who had put their faith in Christ. So there was a church in the city of Jerusalem, and one in Antioch, there was a church in Corinth and another in Thessalonica²¹.

In this way the one Church for which Christ died, exists on earth, as many local churches. The question of management concerns *how those local churches relate to the universal Church and to one another*.

Broadly speaking, churches have been organised according to three models:

- **Episcopal** – this is where authority is exercised by bishops (the Greek word for bishop is *episcopos*). Bishops have authority over a number of local churches. Beneath him, in each church, the priest has authority over the people. Examples are the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic church.
- **Presbyterian** – this is where authority is exercised by the elders (the Greek word for elder is *presbyteros*). It operates both within a local church (the 'session'), and also as a higher level of authority over groups of local churches. A gathering of elders from each congregation will form a presbytery, and all the presbyteries in a region will gather for a General Assembly. The rulings of the presbyteries and assemblies are binding upon local churches and their session.
- **Congregational** – this is where authority is exercised by the congregation (no Greek this time!). Each congregation is independent and has only a co-operative relationship with other local churches.

These are called methods of *Church Government*, in other words, how churches are governed. Baptists have always maintained that the Bible teaches a *congregational* method of Church government. The ultimate responsibility is vested in the whole, gathered congregation. This is seen in Matthew 18 where Jesus teaches us how to deal with a sin in the church – after all other resorts have failed, the final court of appeal is,

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church

Matthew 18:17²²

20 Other passages which speak of a single, world-wide church are Matt 16:18; Eph 1:22; 3:10; Col 1:18

21 See Acts 11:22; 13:1; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1

22 In I Corinthians 5:4-5, Paul tells the church, "When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful

The church also are collectively responsible for happier decisions. When deacons were required to care for the widows and orphans, the apostles said to the people,

Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them

Acts 6:3²³

Powers

When a church, made up of saved people, organised in this way, comes together, what authority does it have? What are its powers? This is addressed in the first mention of the Church to be found in the New Testament. After assuring Peter that he would build and sustain his Church, Jesus told him,

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven

Matthew 16:19

The keys represent the authority to exclude someone from the fellowship of the local church. In Matthew 18, the keys are used to close the door on an unrepentant member,

if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector

Matthew 18:17

Jesus does not say the individual *is* like a pagan or a tax collector, he says that he is to be *treated* like one. In other words, the local congregation is given the authority to determine how a person who professes faith in Christ is to be treated. It is the local church who decides whether or not that profession is credible. If a person shows signs of being a Christian – an understanding of their sin, trust in the gospel, and obedient repentance – then the church will accept them into membership. In this way, what has happened in heaven and what happens on earth should reflect one another.

If a member shows signs that their conversion may not have been real, the church may be forced, finally, to reflect that by excluding him or her from membership and no longer allowing them to take part in the Lord's Table with them²⁴.

It needs to be understood that this does not mean that the local congregation is a democracy. The purpose of coming together to make decisions is so that the whole body may decide what God's will is, not theirs. When a member votes in a church meeting they are being asked to make their best judgement, based on their knowledge of God's Word, as to what decision would best please God.

To this end, God has appointed that local congregations be led – but not ruled – by elders. The distinctive qualification of an elder is that he is, "able to teach" (1Timothy 3:2), "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). Their responsibility is to teach the congregation and to instruct them in the right principles by which they can exercise their corporate responsibility to exercise the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord"

23 It was as the whole church was, "worshipping the Lord and fasting, [that] the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."" (Acts 13:2). See also 2 Cor 8:19

24 "I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat" (1Cor 5:11)

Biblical Basis

One question that is often raised about church membership is whether or not it is biblical to require or request that Christians explicitly become members of local churches. After all there doesn't seem to be a single plain command in the New Testament to 'join' a church or that defines 'membership'.

However, even in the earliest days of the Church – before it had really grown beyond Jerusalem – there seemed to be a definite number of people who were recognised as belonging to it. Acts 5 notes that as people believed in the Lord, they were, "added to their number" (Acts 5:14²⁵). The situation became very apparent when it came to the need to deal with sin in the church. In Corinth Paul assumed a very clear distinction between those who were outside the church and those who were inside,

What business is it of mine to judge those *outside the church*? Are you not to judge *those inside*?

1Corinthians 5:12

One possible outcome of the judgement that Paul talks about here is for the person involved to be, "put out of your fellowship" (1Cor 5:2). The conclusion that he was "inside", and must therefore have, 'come into' their fellowship seems to be unavoidable. How else could he later be, "put out"?

This recognition by the church of a converted person as a 'member', as one recognised by the church as being "inside", certainly doesn't seem to have something that happened automatically when you were saved. For example, some time after Paul was converted on the way to Damascus, he returned to Jerusalem, and as soon as he arrived we read,

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple

Acts 9:26

This indicates first, that Paul felt an obligation to explicitly join this church, and secondly, that the church reserved the right not to admit him into membership.

25 See also Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 6:7; 9:31

Motivation

The main reason a Christian should become a member is because it's how we become an active part of what Christ is doing on earth. Remember in Matthew 16,

I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven

Matt 16:18-19

The Church is what Christ is building right now, it's how he's working on earth. And to the members of the church in each place he has given the, "keys of the kingdom of heaven". What the local church does with those keys is to be exactly the same as what happens in heaven.

- So every one that is admitted to the church must be saved – unsaved people are not bound to Christ in heaven and so they should not be bound to the church on earth.
- Equally, everyone that is saved, ought to be admitted – if we are bound to Christ in heaven, we should also be bound to his people on earth.

This is the power and the responsibility that is given the members of the church – to bind and to loose. It is the local church's responsibility to bind us to their number, to test that our understanding of the gospel is accurate and that it is safe for us to believe that we're right with God. They're there to guide us, and care for us, and love us, and – when we need it – to call us to repent.

And it's our job to be bound, to become members.

In addition, we should join a local church because we are called, as believers, to submit.

Obey your leaders and **submit to their authority**. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you

Heb 13:17

If we do not join a church, with leaders, there is no way for us to obey this command. Instead we will not be asking anyone keep watch over us, we will give no-one the authority to call us to our senses if we fall into sin.

Privileges

There are many benefits to becoming a member of a local church. First and foremost is the fact that you will be engaging with God's people in the way that God has ordained. You will be sustained in your faith and equipped for God's service by the only means that God has provided to accomplish both of these goals – his Church.

This is worked out in a number of ways, we'll consider two.

Pastoral responsibility

The elders of the church will take responsibility for you. Hebrews 13 says,

They keep watch over you as men who must give an account

Hebrews 13:17

The elders of the church will, of course, try to care for everyone who becomes associated with the church. However, it is clear that there is a specific body of people for whom God will require them to give an account. That is, those people who are the members of their church, those who have recognised the elders in this place, as, "your leaders" (Heb 13:17). God will not hold the elders of Carryduff Baptist accountable for every Christian in Carryduff, and not even for every Christian who attends services. Many others may be advised, encouraged and visited by these elders, but on the day of judgement, it is only those who submitted to these men as *their* leaders for whom they will be held accountable:

- accountable for teaching them the Bible accurately,
- accountable for encouraging them in their faith,
- accountable for helping them to find their gift and ministry within the church,
- accountable for calling them to repent when they fall into sin.

And, yes, the last one is also a privilege of being a member. It is the privilege of knowing that, should I fall into temptation and sin against God, there are brothers and sisters who have undertaken to draw me back into the right way.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ

Galatians 6:1-2

It is not just the elders who do this, the whole membership undertakes to do this, all who they have recognised as members. The elders are responsible for seeing that it happens. The elders are accountable for making sure the members are equipped to do this.

Practical preparation

There is a reason why the local church has elders and pastors and evangelists. Ephesians 4,

It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, **to prepare God's people for works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13

God provided prophets and apostles to lay the foundations of the church²⁶ and to give us the Bible. After that, he gives specific people specific gifts so that, when they come together as a church, they will be able to do what God wants them to do. Among those gifts are evangelists, pastors and teachers. They are “given”, because that is how Jesus is at work today building his Church. He builds it out of people, and when we join, we are joining to be prepared for works of service

The elders will take responsibility, they will shepherd, they will care, it becomes their duty to try to supply whatever is lacking in your faith. As Christians,

we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do

Ephesians 2:10

It's in the local church that Christ has provided an environment in which we can be prepared for those good works, where we can be encouraged sustained in keeping *at* those good works.

Ministry is not the sole province of those whom we usually refer to as 'ministers'. Those we call ministers are actually the ones tasked with making the members into ministers. That is their role, to equip and support others in their own ministry – whether that's in the home, in the office, in evangelism, or in preparing for full time service at home or abroad.

26 Eph 2:20

Obligations

Vote

The most immediate and visible obligation that you undertake when you become a member of Carryduff Baptist is the obligation to attend members' meetings and engage in the decisions that the church, as a whole, has to make. You'll be asked to vote on whether or not other believers should be accepted as members, you'll be asked to help choose the pastors, elders and deacons who will serve here. You'll be a part of the decisions about how we serve God's people here and how we reach the lost.

That means you'll need to apply yourselves to getting to know the people who worship with us, welcoming and learning about those who visit so that, if they apply for membership, you can contribute meaningfully to the decision about whether or not they should be recognised by the church.

It also means that you should get to know about the various ministries at work in the church, and supported by the church, so that you can pray for them as well as – together with the other members – making meaningful decisions about their direction and support.

Communion

Week by week you will be expected to obey the Lord's command to remember him in the Lord's Supper²⁷. Of course, you should be doing that already, Jesus said, "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). But now, the elders and other members will encourage you to do this, not as a burden, but as a privilege, something you need. If you stop wanting to worship with the church we will grow concerned about you. If you were to stop breaking bread entirely for more than six months we would consider seriously whether or not you could still be recognised as a member of Carryduff Baptist.

Service

You'll be encouraged to take part in the work here. This isn't a matter of you being landed with something. Rather, if you have a vision, or see an opportunity, you should bring it to the church. The church, in turn, may suggest areas in which you might consider serving Christ. The church should usually be the main base from which its members serve Christ.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully

Romans 12:6-8

²⁷ The constitution says, "Members are sincerely urged and expected to attend the services on the Lord's Day and any other meetings, especially the prayer meetings"

In general you'll be undertaking to do for all the other members, everything we've looked at as privileges you will enjoy as members. When you see brothers and sisters fall into sin, you will be among those who are responsible for trying to restore them. It will be *your* duty to help to encourage those who are younger in the faith, and it will be *your* privilege to support those trying to find and develop their gifts.

Devotion

To do all of that well, you'll have to pray and study the Bible yourselves. As part of the body of Christ here you are part of God's work, that's why teaching is so vital a part of our meetings together. You'll be expected to take the opportunities to learn and worship together offered in the services on Sunday.

In short, when you join the church, you become the church.