

PROPOSAL FOR CHANGES TO NBC CONSTITUTION

Re: Baptism & Church Membership
for the Extraordinary Meeting on 24 July 2023



PROPOSED POSITION – SUMMARY

One practice that distinguishes Baptist churches from other churches is that of believer's baptism. Baptist churches do not baptise infants, but rather those who have made a conscious decision to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus Christ. Consequently, many Baptist churches will only admit to membership those who have been baptised as believers by full immersion. This is described as a "closed membership" position and is currently our practice as required by the NBC constitution.

NBC will always place a high value on the baptism of believers, understanding it to be the Biblical pattern. However, the Elders and Church Council propose that we move to an "open membership" position. This differs from the "closed membership" position in that it allows those who have been baptised in other forms (e.g., as infants and/or without full immersion) to apply for membership. "Open membership" is also practiced by many Baptist churches who recognise the importance of embracing our brothers and sisters in Christ as members of a local congregation. Church membership is essential to NBC as a congregationally governed body. We would like to ensure that all those who profess faith in Christ and are committed to participating and serving at NBC have a voice in the running of our church. Therefore, we propose that NBC extend membership those who have been baptised by any method, provided that such persons profess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

OUR THEOLOGY OF BAPTISM

- We remain committed to a Baptist theology of baptism.
- Baptism in the New Testament is best understood to be for the believer by full immersion in water.
- Baptism should be a normative act of obedience that follows immediately upon accepting Christ as Lord. As such it is only appropriately enacted for those who believe.
- Baptism represents our spiritual rebirth and identification "in Christ" based upon His death and resurrection.
- Baptism is an act of obedience and is NOT a condition of salvation.

OUR CURRENT MEMBERSHIP CONCERN

As mentioned above, our constitution states that Christians can only be members of our church if they have been baptised by full immersion as believers:

NBC Constitution: Basis of Membership

- 3.1 Membership is open to persons who have professed faith in Jesus Christ and have submitted to the ordinance of believer's baptism [This is further defined as "full immersion" in Section 5.9 of the constitution]
- 3.2 Prior to being admitted into Membership each applicant shall acknowledge acceptance of the Narrabeen Baptist Church Constitution and Rules.

Our Points of Concern

1. This constitutional rule that church members must be baptised is not a biblical mandate.
2. Our current practice results in an inequitable situation which presumes upon and alienates our brothers and sisters who call NBC their church but are not currently eligible for membership due to their form of baptism. They have been allowed and encouraged to participate in the life of the church, but have not been allowed to vote at church meetings.
 - They have been given various ministry responsibilities.
 - They have been asked to contribute their time and resources to the life of the church.
 - Many have been committed to ministry at Narrabeen for many years.

MEMBERSHIP PROPOSAL

Proposed Practice – Membership based on faith in Christ and commitment to NBC

1. We propose that membership is based upon the profession of faith in Christ and the acceptance of the constitution of NBC (this includes our doctrinal statement and a description of membership expectations)
2. We propose that applicants for membership must have been baptised in some form which signified their identification with Christ and with the Church as the body of Christ.
3. We propose that applicants must demonstrate a commitment to ministry at NBC for a period of 6 months.
 - a. This might include a membership small group which discusses the content of the

constitution. [Membership Classes]

- b. This should include a consistent presence at services, meetings, and other events in the life of NBC.
4. We propose to maintain the current practice requiring applicants to be interviewed by two members prior to their nomination at a church meeting.

The Current Constitution:

3. BASIS OF MEMBERSHIP

- 3.1 Membership is open to persons who have professed faith in Jesus Christ and have submitted to the ordinance of believer's baptism.
- 3.2 Prior to being admitted into Membership each applicant acknowledge acceptance of the Narrabeen Baptist Church Constitution and Rules.

The Motion before us at the Extraordinary Meeting is only amending 3.1 & 3.2

The Proposal reads:

3. BASIS OF MEMBERSHIP

- 3.1 Membership is open to persons who have professed faith in Jesus Christ and have submitted to the ordinance of baptism in some form.
- 3.2 Prior to being presented for membership each applicant must:
 - a) acknowledge acceptance of the Narrabeen Baptist Church Constitution and Rules.
 - b) have been an active participant at NBC for not less than 6 months.
 - c) be interviewed and supported by two members of NBC.