



Membership at SGBC

December 1, 2022

Revision B

Introduction

... so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another (Rom. 12:5).

Biblical church membership does not focus on being part of an organization, or club, but being part of an *extended family* where each member receives care and shoulders responsibility for the entire family or church *body*. The Bible uses the metaphor that the local church is like a body with many parts, each part being necessary for the healthy functioning of the whole. Individual Christians are the many and varied members of the body. As each part of our bodies receives care from and contributes to the well being of our bodies, so each Christian is to function within the church. The following sections point out some matters which are important for us to understand and practice in order to function as a church body that pleases the Lord and maintains a honorable witness to the world.

Requirements for Membership

- SGBC believes that any person whom Christ accepts as one of His own should also be accepted as a member of the local church of which Christ is the head. Thus, the basic requirement for membership is that a person be converted and a believer in Jesus Christ.
- SGBC also believes, since many false Christs (1 John 4:1, 2 Pet. 2:1, 2 Tim. 4:3) have been proclaimed throughout the ages, there is an *irreducible minimum* of doctrinal convictions that a person must hold, or he/she cannot be considered to be a believer in Jesus Christ. This is not to say that a person is not a believer if he/she does not initially understand all of the following truths. However, when given a reasonable opportunity for instruction from the Bible, it is expected that any converted person would be willing to confess these truths. For the developmentally disabled, exceptions may be made at the discretion of the elders.
 - a. That the Bible (66 books) is God's Word and therefore without error.
 - b. That all that exists in the universe, physical and spiritual, was created by God as an act of His will, wisdom, knowledge and power. The one true God existed prior to and independent of all created things.

- c. The historic doctrine of the Trinity that the one God exists as three separate Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each person possesses all the essence of whatever makes God, God and therefore can be properly called God and worshiped as God.
- d. All humankind have been corrupted by sin and are born with a sinful nature, that is, with a propensity to rebel against God's authority as expressed in His commands.
- e. As a result of disobeying God's commands, all humankind have become guilty and are condemned by God to a just punishment for breaking His commandments. Unless forgiven, this punishment is eternal.
- f. That Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, possesses the true nature of God and man united in one person. His Divine nature was united to a human nature at his supernatural conception by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary.
- g. That the death of Christ was a substitutionary sacrifice for sin in the place of all who believe in him and is the only means whereby we may be rescued from eternal condemnation.
- h. That Christ rose from the dead bodily, ascended to heaven and sits exalted at the right hand of God, having all power and authority as Lord of heaven and earth.
- i. Salvation from sin is by grace alone apart from any human works of merit or contribution. This grace comes to us based solely upon the Father giving His Son to save us.
- j. We receive salvation solely by faith in Jesus Christ.
- k. All true faith in Jesus Christ includes a genuine repentance, a turning from unbelief to faith, and turning from sin to God.
- l. By the working of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the life of all believers, they seek to love Him and keep His commandments. This new obedience is never perfected in this life and believers continue to ask for and receive the forgiveness of their sins on the basis of Christ's past death for them.
- m. At a day set by the Father, Jesus Christ will return in glory to the earth to receive all of His people into His eternal kingdom that he

will establish. At that time he will judge all people, and their eternal destinies will forever be fixed.

These doctrinal convictions are a *subset* of SGBC's convictions.

Members are not required to subscribe to the full SGBC statement of faith. However, members should understand that the elders will teach and defend the full statement (see "Doctrinal Convictions" below). The full statement of faith may be amended or modified in accordance with the constitution. Any doctrine or passage of Scripture may be discussed, providing such discussion is done in a humble, patient and godly manner.

- SGBC also believes that every Christian will desire and pursue obeying His Saviour, and that a person who claims to be a Christian but *persists* in living a life as described in the following passages cannot be considered to be a true believer, and thus cannot be considered a member of SGBC: Eph. 5:5-7, Gal. 5:19-21, 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 1 Cor. 5:9-13, 1 John 3:7-10. If such an individual had previously become a member, he/she will be encouraged by the church to a renewed repentance toward God and faith in Christ. If these efforts fail, he/she will be dealt with as described in the "Church Discipline" section below.
- One must have been baptized (by any mode), *as a believer*, to be a member since Christ has commanded that all who believe in Him be baptized.
- One must be willing to submit to the authority and discipline of the church expressed through the elders. See "Church Discipline Policy" below and the Constitution.
- One must be willing to receive shepherding visits from the elders. See "Shepherding Practices" below.
- One must not be under the discipline of another Bible-believing church and must have left their previous church in good standing. If not, SGBC will work with one's previous church to bring the matter to resolution within the larger body of Christ.

The unsaved, inquirers, and seekers are welcome and encouraged to attend all activities, but they are not allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper since the Lord has given us this special ordinance to be used only by those who believe in Him as defined above.

Believing non-members are encouraged to become members. SGBC will seek to resolve whatever is preventing them from becoming members. During this period of time they are welcome to come to the Lord's Supper and participate fully in the activities of the church, but they will not be allowed to vote at congregational meetings.

Becoming a member

Individuals become members of SGBC through the following steps:

- Read this pamphlet and the constitution and discuss them with any other family members considering membership.
- Meet with at least two elders to discuss SGBC and your faith.
- During the meeting with the elders, acknowledge belief in the essentials of the Christian faith listed above, indicate that you believe to the best of your knowledge that you meet the requirements listed above and indicate that you have read this pamphlet and the constitution.
- Indicate your agreement with the church discipline policy expressed in this pamphlet (see "Church Discipline Policy") and the Constitution..
- If you have not been baptized by believer's baptism, be baptized.
- Attend the next Lord's supper where you will be introduced to the congregation as a new member.

Doctrinal convictions of SGBC

The statement of faith for SGBC is the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, with some modifications. As this document contains some 70 pages, we provide a condensed summary of our beliefs in a two page brochure. The confession, a pamphlet identifying the modifications, and the two page brochure are available from our book table. All documents are on our web site.

Shepherding practices

The elders of SGBC believe they are responsible to Christ as His under-shepherds to care for the spiritual welfare of all members of the church in accordance with His commands expressed in Heb. 13:17, Acts 20:28 and 1 Pet. 5:1-5. As part of the elders fulfilling their shepherding responsibilities, church members are expected to be willing to meet twice a year with two elders, either in their home or at a location suitable to

them, for a time of personal fellowship, prayer and discussion. This meeting provides an opportunity for the elders to inquire as regards the member's spiritual well being and provides an opportunity for members to discuss any matters with the leadership. Members are encouraged not to be shy and have their lists ready. These times have proven to be very helpful to leaders and members.

Attendance at regularly scheduled services

SGBC provides a number of regularly scheduled services and occasionally scheduled fellowship events. These events are at different times and places, seeking to make it as convenient as possible for members to be built up in their faith and to build others up (Heb. 3: 12-13, 10:24-25). It is understood that one may not attend all of these events. We encourage members to structure their lives to attend at least two services a week. However, there are three services that we believe members ought to make it a priority to participate in and make whatever changes are necessary in their lives to attend. These are:

- Our weekly Sunday Morning Worship service which is the gathered New Covenant temple of God, the time and place to worship the Lord and seek His blessing as He manifests His presence in a special way in His temple (Eph. 2:19-22, 1 Pet. 2:4-5, Heb. 10:24-25).
- Our monthly corporate prayer and church family awareness meeting. The first Sunday evening of each month is set aside for the entire church to gather for prayer. This is a priority for SGBC. This time is also used for leaders to share information with the body regarding significant happenings and plans regarding the church as a whole. During this meeting those leading individual ministries within SGBC to share regarding their particular ministry. Also during this meeting we hear from one another, our griefs, praises, requests for prayer and many other matters. We learn to become more "other oriented" as we see, hear and become aware of what our brothers and sisters are experiencing. We are also encouraged and instructed by their testimonies and examples.
- We remember and celebrate our Lord's death and resurrection by practicing the Lord's supper six times a year on a Sunday evening. The entire service is given to the communion service and worship. The communion ordinance is a special means of grace the Lord has

given us and all members are strongly encouraged to make it a priority in their lives to participate.

Participation in congregational meetings

We seek to keep congregational meetings to a minimum and much information is shared at the monthly corporate prayer meeting helping us achieve this goal. Annually we have a meeting to review the previous year's finances and adopt a budget for the new year. Full disclosure of SGBC's finances is done during this meeting, and significant decisions being made are discussed. Members are encouraged to participate. The church constitution and by-laws define those situations requiring a congregational meeting and approval.

Opportunities for service and use of gifts

Every member of Christ's body has been gifted and given the ability to build up the body of Christ in some manner - and everyone's "building up" is surely needed! There are various planned activities always in need of workers; nursery, music, Sunday School classes, Children's Church, men's and women's fellowships, security detail, media ministry, office work, facility work, AV operators and rides ministry. But equally, and perhaps even more important, there is the reaching out to one another and to visitors on our own to share with them the love and care of Christ for members of the church and to reach the lost. Meeting the needs of others, visiting those who are ill or just struggling with the various difficulties of living in this fallen world, giving a word of admonition, are all vital ways of serving Christ and His cause. None of these ways of service require any "approval" or "organization" from the church. It is as our Lord said, "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" Matt. 25:37-40. By attending the monthly prayer and church awareness meeting we learn of opportunities to serve in various ways.

Resources for you and your family

There are a number of resources available for you, your family and outreaching to others.

- Media ministry - Please visit sgbcphx.org for audio and video media.
- Book table - Good literature, books and pamphlets, on a wide range of subjects are available for purchase from our book table. The elders are always glad to make recommendations of good literature on any subject.
- Web site - The sgbcphx.org web site contains a number of significant papers on practical and theological subjects. The paper, "Guidelines and Directions Regarding the Exercise of Christian Liberty Within the Local Church" ought to be read by all members. Our statements of faith and other supporting literature, bios of our elders, the full policies for staff and volunteers, directions and more are on the site. The monthly church calendar including all events and volunteer schedules are available. Directing friends and those who may be interested in SGBC to the web site is a good way to reach out.
- 1360 AM radio program - We sponsor the "Sovereign Grace Bible Hour" Sunday morning, 8-9, radio broadcast. The preaching and music aired on this program are always edifying and honoring to the Lord.
- Church brochures - There are two church brochures which you may use when inviting others. These are available from the bulletin board. Help yourself.
- Points of contact list - a "Points of Contact" list is available on the website. Please use this list to determine whom to speak with regarding the areas listed.

Dealing With Conflict Between Members Within the Church

The New Testament is very realistic that members within a church need to - "with all lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" - *work at preserving unity*. This work begins with properly dealing with conflicts which may arise between ourselves and others within the church. When we function as a body and work together and become dependent upon each other, conflicts may arise. When they do, it

is very important that we (member and leaders) follow our Lord's directions in resolving them. The following steps should be taken if you have a conflict with someone or if you think someone may have an issue against you:

- Prayerfully seek the Lord regarding the matter and ask for a right spirit. Then go to the person in private and speak to them. Be resolved to listen also. Get the matter in the open between you and the other person. Before proceeding to the next step, you ought to attempt this first step more than once. Prayerfully consider the following passages before you go: (Matt 18:15-35, Lev. 19:17-18, Gal. 5:22-26, Matt. 7:1-5, Prov. 18:2, 8, 13, 17, Eph. 4:1-3, James 1:19-20)

If you would like counsel on how to approach another person in these situations, speak to the elders, and they will provide guidance. However, do not reveal the name of the other person or the specifics regarding the conflict. The elders *do not* want to know these details at this point, but they are glad to give a little coaching in these situations and will provide prayer support in the matter. They will also follow up with you to see how things are going.

- If the matter cannot be resolved by the above, then it's time to bring in a third party to seek to help achieve resolution. At this point you should seek the advice of the elders, but still without revealing who the other person is or the specifics of the situation.
- If the above attempts cannot resolve the conflict then you should reveal the situation, names and facts as you know them, to the elders, and they will become directly involved in helping to achieve reconciliation.

During the above process it is *very important* that you not speak to a third party regarding the issues you may have with another person.

If you happen to be a third party and someone begins to speak of issues they have with another in the body, you must graciously but firmly shut down such conversation and encourage the person to go directly to the other person. Here also is a time when you can encourage the person to seek the elders help on how to approach another person and inform them that the elders will insist that the other person remain anonymous as well as the nature of the conflict.

Expressing Concerns and Questions Regarding SGBC and its Leadership

No church is close to perfect and no leader is close to perfect. Also, mis-understandings, misrepresentations, partial understandings, and rumors, perhaps all unintentional, can abound within a church body. Our spiritual adversary has wreaked much havoc among believers and in churches through these means. The elders of SGBC are very willing to hear *any* concern or idea you may have. Those concerns or ideas may relate to decisions made, ministries of the church, personal behavior of a leader, something a leader has said, doctrinal issues, the church's relationship to other churches and organizations - anything! It is vitally important that concerns be expressed in a timely manner, long before an issue grows to the point of one desiring to leave the body. Please - give us an opportunity to interact with you.

It is important that leaders not be criticized to other members of the body, especially so when the leader himself has never been spoken to regarding the matter. Leaders deserve the same respect in these matters as any other member of the congregation.

Inevitably, there will be occasions when leaders will be criticized by others to others. In these cases the admonition of 1 Tim. 5:19 is to be followed.

Church Discipline Policy

Church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18:15ff will be exercised on members who persist in denying the faith by either insisting on heretical doctrine (see the second requirement for membership) or persisting in a course of life which the Scriptures teach to be evidence that one is unconverted (Eph. 5:5-7, Gal. 5:19-21, 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 1 Cor. 5:9-13, 1 John 3:7-10) (see the third requirement for membership).

No offenses shall be publicly brought before the church (Matt. 18:17) until the instructions of Christ have first been followed (Matt. 5:23-24, 18:15-16, Gal. 6:1) and repeated attempts have been made in private to restore one to a renewed repentance and faith. If these attempts fail, then Matt. 18:17, "tell it to the church", will be carried out as a final means of bringing the individual to repentance. The specific procedure to be followed is given in the Constitution.

If the individual “refuses to hear the church” it is right and consistent with the Scriptures for the congregation, upon recommendation of the elders, to exclude from this fellowship any person who persists in holding heretical doctrine (see above), persists in living in denial of his profession of faith in Christ (see above), or persists in disturbing the unity and peace of the church (1 Cor. 5:1ff; II Thes. 3:6, 11-15; Rom. 16:17, Titus 3:10). The specific procedure to be followed is given in the constitution.

It should be understood that the stages of church discipline given to the church by Christ, both private and public, are for the purpose of restoring the individual to a right and safe relationship with God, the protection of the honor of Christ’s name which the church bears, and for the welfare and purity of the church.

Safety and Security.

SGBC is located in the center of a major metropolitan area and with this comes many opportunities and risks. All of SGBC’s staff and volunteers that work with minors are screened before they are put into positions of trust. Volunteers working with minors are trained yearly on SGBC’s policies relating to these ministries. These policies are given in the “SGBC Policies for Staff and Volunteers” document available upon request and also on our web site under the, “Child Safe Practices” heading. Contained within the “Staff and Volunteer” policies are guidelines for all members and guardians of minors. These guidelines for all members are repeated here as we desire that all new members be aware of them.

- Nursery policy for parents
 - a. No children over 2 years old are to be in the nursery rooms.
 - b. Names are to be placed on each diaper bag and parents are to write any instructions for their child’s care for that day and attach them to the handle of the diaper bag. Parents, please include diapers in the bag.
 - c. Parents are to “sign in” and “sign out” their children on the sign in / sign out sheet supplied by the attendants.
 - d. Parents may not bring sick children to the nursery or toddler room (fever, green discharge from nose, cough [non allergy], diarrhea). The nursery attendant has authority to judge in these matters and may instruct a parent to take their child home.
 - e. Only parents may deliver and pick up children. Children should be picked up as soon as possible after each church event, ideally within five minutes after the event.
 - f. Parents are to follow the directions of the nursery attendants on duty and should read Section I of this policy before placing their children in the nursery.
 - g. Un-diapered children should be encouraged to use the rest room prior to the beginning of nursery. If they need to use the rest room during nursery parents will be called out of their class to assist their child.
 - h. Parents must be on facility at all times while their children are in the nursery.
 - i. Parents who repeatedly fail to follow the nursery policies will no longer be allowed to place their children in the nursery.
- Sunday School policy for parents
 - a. Only parents may deliver and pick up their children. Children should be picked up as soon as possible after each church event, ideally within five minutes after each event.
 - b. Please encourage your children 12 and under to use the rest room prior to the beginning of class. If they need to use the rest room during class you will be called out of your class to assist your child.
 - c. You are responsible to supervise your children during the time between Sunday School and Morning worship. SGBC does not provide direct supervision for your children during this time.
- Youth ministry policy for parents
 - a. During services youth are expected to be in the services unless they are serving as helpers in Nursery, Sunday School or Children’s Church, or have temporarily left a service to use the rest room or for some other parent-directed reason.
 - b. During the Sunday School hour approved musicians (minors) may be in the sanctuary for the purpose of instrumental or vocal practice.
- Safety Policies for congregation

- a. Unfortunately as the consciences of unbelievers in the culture that surrounds us become increasingly calloused to the commands of God, our church facilities, personal property, families, and our children may increasingly become the target of various crimes. Therefore we ask you to comply with the following rules to promote the protection of your family and others.
- b. We require that children age 12 and under not be allowed to use the rest rooms during church services (Sunday School, Morning Worship, Children's Church, Evening Worship, and Wednesday evening) without a parent. The fact that our rest rooms are outside of the sanctuary and accessible from the street poses special risks, particularly when adults are all gathered in a service in another building.
- c. If your child attempts to leave a service without an escort our ushers will return him/her to you. If your child is in Sunday School or Children's Church and requests to use the bathroom, the teacher will contact our security worker and he will locate you so you can come to the class and escort your child. We encourage you to train your children to use the bathroom prior to the beginning of services.
- d. Room A (the entrance to our nursery area) will remain locked during normal service times (9:30-10:30 am, 10:45-12:00 pm, 6:00-7:00 pm). If you need to access knock on the door and workers will allow you in if they recognize you. If not they will contact our security worker to assist you. If no one comes to the door, find the security worker who has the walkie talkie and ask him to get the attention of the attendants. You may want to ask the security worker, or an usher to "call" the nursery or class prior to your going to the area.
- e. During the time period between Sunday School and morning worship, and after the morning worship service you are to supervise your own children. You should not assume others will be supervising them during these times. They should not be allowed to do bathroom trips on their own. We strongly encourage you to treat the bathrooms in our church facility just as you would those in any other public facility.

- f. The following church activities are under the umbrella of "Children's and Youth Ministries". Nursery, child care during communion services, Beginner's Sunday School class, Primary Sunday School class, Children's Church, and youth ministry activities. For these activities SGBC provides adult supervision for your children as defined in these policies. It is also SGBC policy that your children of any age are welcome in any of our other services. However, for all non "Children's and Youth Ministries" activities, whether held on the church facility or elsewhere, SGBC does not provide direct supervision for your children. Parents are required to supervise and ensure the safety of their children during these activities.

Giving Financially

We request that when you give, you use the church-provided envelopes. Though this is not a requirement, it simplifies the amount of work required to provide end-of-the-year tax documentation to you and our record keeping tasks. If you desire that your giving be entirely anonymous, give cash, but we will not be able to provide an end-of-the year receipt for your giving.

Ending Membership

It is understood that membership in a local church is a willing association and that the body of Christ is larger than any particular local church. As Christians we also believe that we ought to conduct ourselves in a manner which honors Christ in all our dealings with his churches and people. So, ending membership needs to be done in a way *that preserves the overall unity that should exist between all Christians*, regardless of which local church they choose to associate with. Therefore we expect the following when membership is ended:

- That you are not ending membership because of an unresolved conflict with another member of this church since Christ insists that such matters be resolved (Matt. 5:23-24, 18:15-17).
- That you will have expressed the reasons for considering ending membership, discussed them with the elders and given an opportunity for the elders to respond. It is important to ensure that there are no misunderstandings. Also, there may be corrective action that this church needs to take and the elders are open to consider such. Many

churches do not improve because members leave instead of making an effort to help the body mature and mature themselves in the process.

Once matters have been discussed in a godly way, and the member is not under discipline, and there are no unresolved conflicts with other members, we will consider one having left in good standing and will communicate such to any church which may inquire of us. We desire to end with affirming to one another our basic unity as members of Christ's universal church.

We will work with other churches if we believe one has not left in good standing. One may enlist the help of a new church's leaders to resolve an open issue with us. In such a situation, this would be viewed by us in a positive light since the Lord requires that we pursue and maintain this type of peace and unity.

Notes

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