

statement of current practice

ST NEOTS EVANGELICAL CHURCH

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1. Introduction

This booklet is a description of the current practice of St. Neots Evangelical Church and should be used as a point of reference when new matters are to be considered. It is, of course, by no means an exhaustive document but the principles on which it touches are a sound basis upon which further decisions can be based. It is important, however, to make the following points:

- This document is not designed as a written constitution for the Church.
No human document can adequately summarise the call of Christ to His church.
- This statement is not final.
Practices will change as our understanding of God grows and the Holy Spirit leads.
- It does not imply that different practices elsewhere are incorrect.

2. What we believe

As those Christians commonly called Evangelical:

- We believe that God has shown us that the Bible is His complete and final revelation of His will to man. We seek therefore to trust and obey what is revealed in the Bible as it is ministered to us by the Spirit of Christ;
- We believe there is one God, who has three distinct persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
- We believe that the Son of God came to earth, became a man and was called by the name Jesus;
- We believe that all have sinned and are in need of salvation;
- We believe that being God Jesus is the only means of salvation;
- We believe that Jesus died upon the cross and on the third day physically rose from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit;
- We believe in justification by faith alone;
- We believe that Jesus will return to judge all mankind;
- We believe that those who receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour will go to heaven with new incorruptible bodies;
- We believe that those who refuse to worship Jesus as Lord and Saviour will spend eternity suffering punishment in Hell.

The Church is legally constituted as the St. Neots Evangelical Church Trust. We see the Trust and the Church as being one in purpose. This Trust has a Basis of Faith which is printed in full below.

Although the Church's practices may alter, God's word is unchanging and so sound doctrine on the basics of Bible Christianity is the criteria used to decide whether:

- The Church associates publicly with other Churches and organisations;
- Other Churches and organisations may make use of Church premises.

It is also important to emphasise that everyone who comes into membership of the Church must be in sympathy with the whole of this statement of current practice.

Basis of Faith

1. *The Divine Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*
2 Cor 13: 14 John 14: 16, 26
2. *The sovereignty of God in creation, providence, revelation, redemption and final judgement.*
Heb 11:3 John 1: 1-3 Col 1: 16, 17 Psalm 145: 9
Matt 5: 45 Eph 1: 9-12
3. *The Divine inspiration and infallibility of Holy Scriptures as originally given and their supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.*
2 Tim 3: 16 2 Peter 1: 20, 21
4. *That all men are sinners and justly deserving God's wrath and condemnation.*
Eph 2: 1-22 Rom 3: 10-12, 23 Rom 5: 12 1 John 1: 8-10
5. *The Lord Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation on account of His holy life, His sacrificial and substitutionary death, His resurrection and glorification.*
1 Cor 15: 3, 20 Acts 4: 10-12 Acts 10: 34-43
Rom 4: 24, 25 Rom 5: 8-11 1 Peter 2: 22-25
2 Cor 5: 21 John 14: 6 1 Peter 1: 18, 19
6. *That the work of Christ for the individual is dependent on the personal response of repentance, faith and belief in the atoning work and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
Acts 2: 38, 39 Acts 3: 19 Acts 16:31 John 1: 12
John 3: 14-18, 36 1 John 1: 7-9 Rom 10: 9
7. *That those who receive eternal life in Christ will show a new quality of life imparted by the Holy Spirit who ministers the sufficiency of Christ.*
2 Cor 5: 17 Rom 8: 2-4 Gal 5: 16, 22-25
Phil 2: 13 Titus 2: 11-14

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| 8. | <i>That the Lord Jesus Christ directs the life of the local Church by the Holy Spirit applying the principles of the Word of God as the members, deacons and elders seek His will.</i> | | | |
| | Acts 15: 22, 25, 28 | 1 Tim 3: 1-13 | 1 Peter 5: 1-3 | |
| | Matt 20: 25, 28 | Acts 20: 28 | Heb 13: 7, 17, 24 | |
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| 9. | <i>That all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are members of the Body of Christ and ought therefore to recognise their relationship to each member of His Body.</i> | | | |
| | 1 Cor 12: 12-27 | Rom 12: 4, 5 | Gal 3: 26-28 | Eph 1: 23 |
| | | | | |
| 10. | <i>The personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth.</i> | | | |
| | Acts 1: 11 | John 14: 3 | 1 Thess 3: 13 | 1 Thess 4: 16, 17 |
| | 2 Thess 1: 7-10 | Rev 1: 7 | Rev 22: 20 | Matt 24: 29-31, 36 |

3. Aims and Membership

Aims

The Aims of the Church

Although it is impossible to describe all that the Church hopes to fulfil, the following represent the four main aims to which we believe the Church has been called:

- To glorify God;
- To spread the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ;
- To provide for the spiritual growth of the members;
- To serve the community in the love of Christ as He directs.

Membership

The Church has a formal system of membership which is more than being in the congregation or under the pastoral care of the Church. The membership is the fellowship of those who, in response to the call of God, have committed themselves to serve Christ together in St. Neots and in any other responsibility He gives to St Neots Evangelical Church.

Becoming a Member

Christians within the Church, having considered (1) the aims above, (2) the responsibilities of membership and (3) having a desire to fulfil them, are encouraged to seek the Lord about the call to become a member. They should then express this

interest to an Elder who will arrange for them to be given a copy of this document and to be visited by Elder(s) or their nominees. This visit is a two-way process which allows the Applicant to ask questions concerning the Church and which allows the Elder the opportunity to ascertain the Applicant's standing in the Lord and their acceptance of the Basis of Faith.

All applications will be prayerfully considered by the Elders and then brought before the Church membership at a Business meeting. The members will then be encouraged to get to know the applicant and any concerns regarding the application need to be discreetly brought to the Elders' attention within one calendar month. If after this time no objections are received the applicants will be formally accepted into membership at the next convenient Sunday Service and it will be minuted at the next Business meeting.

It is stressed that Church meetings are not the place to discuss individuals and, in the unlikely event of an objection to an application for membership, the Elders will act with due sensitivity and love, revealing reasons for objection only to relevant parties.

Responsibilities of Membership

Every member has the responsibility before God to:

- Live a life worthy of the calling which they have received(see Eph 4:1-6);
- Attend the annual Covenant Service where the Church affirms its commitment to one another and to the Lord for the coming year;
- Reside permanently in the area (*allowance will be made for students & missionaries*);
- Keep themselves informed of what the Lord is doing in the Church;
- Make every effort to attend services at Church and to take communion regularly;
- To obey the church leaders and submit to their God given authority;
- Keep in regular contact with the Eldership - even if they anticipate disagreement!;
- Be collectively responsible for the stewardship of the church and its fabric.

Resigning Membership

Any member, who does not attend the annual Covenant Service without offering apologies, is deemed to have resigned their membership. Beyond this, however, should members wish to resign their membership during the course of the year, for whatever reason, they should inform the Eldership in writing of their intention and this will be reported to the membership at the next Church meeting.

Church Discipline

There must be discipline within the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ and members are expected to recognise the guidance of the Elders. Membership will be withdrawn from anyone who persists to act in such a way as to bring discredit to the name of our Lord by their behaviour or teaching. The Elders will also bar from taking communion anyone who, after warning, persists in that which dishonours our Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, the Elders and the Church as a whole will show the love of Christ to any individual concerned and will constantly seek repentance and restoration for them.

4. Church Structure

The Church of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a democracy in the sense that decisions are made by a majority vote in human judgement. Christ leads His Churches as whole fellowships through the guidance of His Holy Spirit. The New Testament shows that in the wisdom of God the Holy Spirit uses leaders in a determinative fashion. The Holy Spirit guides the fellowship by the recognition of His work through the leaders and in the interaction between the whole Church and the leaders.

After studying the Scripture in the light of our own situation, we have decided that the Church should have one group of leaders referred to as Elders.

Appointment of Elders

- Elders are appointed because they recognise the call of God and because the Church recognises the appropriate gifts in them. (See 1 Tim 3: 1-7 & Titus 1: 6-9)
- In the first instance, it would normally be an Elder who would approach a prospective Elder and who would encourage them to seek the Lord as to whether they should be available for such service and responsibility.
- It would then be normal to bring this person's name to the Church's attention at the next Church business meeting.
- Over the next two months, the person concerned, the Elders and the membership as a whole, are urged to seek the Lord regarding the appointment.
- If the Elders then feel it is right to proceed with the appointment, a formal recommendation will be brought before the Church at the next business meeting.
- Any objections will be dealt with as per applications for membership.
- Upon appointment, a period of Association with the Eldership will take place before the new Elder is formally set apart.
- Any Elder reaching the age of seventy, will normally retire from duties.

Responsibilities of Eldership

- The Elders are servants of God's people responsible for maintaining the high standards of their Christian calling in their personal lives. Together they are jointly and equally responsible before God for pastoral care and prayer for the Fellowship and the work of Christ within the Church. They have the authority to speak in the Lord's Name as they humbly serve in this way.
- They are ultimately responsible for the organisation of all services, meetings and activities of the Church (although it is likely that some of this responsibility will be delegated) and no activity may take place in the Church's name without the prior consent of the Elders.
- They must keep in regular contact with the membership and they also have the authority to speak to Church members regarding un-Christlike behaviour and attitudes. Whilst continuing to show the love of Christ to the individual concerned, and constantly seeking repentance and restoration for them, the Elders do have the authority to take away membership and bar from taking communion anyone who, after warning, persists in that which dishonours the Lord.

Full Time Workers

Full Time Workers will be appointed to the Church to meet the needs of the fellowship. Where appropriate, at least one of the Full Time Workers will be a Pastor who will have authority to speak on behalf of the Church in situations where consultation with the other Elders is not possible or necessary.

The Calling of Full Time Workers

- When the need for a full-time worker is recognised by the Church, the Elders will prayerfully consider the matter, and, dependent on the role of the worker, will recommend to the Church the way to proceed.
- The name of any individual considered by a member to be suitable for the particular role should be brought to the Elders.
- The Elders will bring before the Church the name of any they believe God is calling to the work. The normal means of decision making will be followed (see *Business Meetings*). After an appropriate period for prayer, discussion and consultation, the calling will be affirmed at a Church business meeting.
- The Elders will nominate at least two of their number to conduct the necessary appointment details on behalf of the Church.

Small Teams

The Church manages its day-to-day activities through the ministry of small teams. These exist to provide encouragement and support to Church activities by using the gifts of God's people.

In such teams, a small number of Christians (usually Church members) will meet to plan and prepare activities for which the team are responsible, seeking God's guidance at all times. The team, possibly with the help of others, will be responsible for the running of the activities to which they are assigned.

- The teams will be responsible to the Elders and, from time to time, will meet with the Eldership for discussion and prayer regarding the ministry of the team.
- Teams may be formed in support of any of the Church's main activities, and may be of a temporary or permanent nature. Examples of teams that may exist include:

Music	Leading Services	Home Group Leaders
Finance	Sunday Groups	Evangelism
Children's Work	Youth Work	Elderly

- The members should be fully informed of all developments and no new activity may take place without the prior approval of the Elders.
- Members of the teams must ensure that they are not so pre-occupied with their responsibility that they are un-informed or dis-interested in the activity of the rest of the church. Such pre-occupation can harm the unity of the Church.

Recognition & Appointment of Small Team Members

- Teams will be formed by recommendation of the Eldership. The Church will be kept aware of the membership and activities of the teams at its business meetings.
- It is not essential that each team has a designated leader but, where necessary, leaders of a team will be nominated by the Eldership. These Team Leaders should be Church members so that the Church can be confident that decisions taken will be in line with Church doctrine and practice.
- Team members will be considered by the team and the Eldership. Before a potential new member is approached to join a team, the approval of the Elders is required to ensure that the member is both suitable and available for such ministry.

The use of the Church premises

Requests for the use of the premises for other than published Church meetings / activities should be made to the Elders.

Business Meetings

Members should make every effort to attend the regular Business meetings at which the business of the Church is raised for discussion and prayer.

- Meetings are to be chaired by an Elder.
- Minutes will be kept and their accuracy agreed at the next meeting.
- Items for the agenda should be given to an Elder in advance.
- An agenda will be published in advance.
- No extra business may be taken (*to ensure that time for prayerful consideration is allowed*).

Parts of some meetings may be open for questions on agenda items and for discussion, but such a meeting is not the place to discuss individuals so matters of discipline and appointment will be reported only. What is said will be confidential to the Church and should not be discussed outside the Church.

Normally, no decisions will be taken at the meeting. We do not vote at Church meetings but rely on those who have reservations on matters to say so. Where there are variations of judgment, each person should be willing to accept that what others think may well be the way that the Lord is leading the Church. It is our desire to move forward in unity but where, after an appropriate period of time for prayer and consultation, complete unity cannot be reached on a matter, it will be the Elders' responsibility to prayerfully come to a decision. In the circumstances of the church being mistaken, we believe that the Lord will make that clear to us.

If, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, there is complete unity upon a matter at a meeting then some decisions may be made there and then; but for the most part the Elders will take note of all that is said at the meeting and seek to come to a prayerful evaluation later. The holding of these meetings does not take away the responsibility that Church members have for keeping regular contact with the Elders and vice-versa.

There are bound to be differences of opinion and the judgment of the elders may not always be right. It is part of our commitment to each other in our Lord's name that no member should use his or her responsibility in the Church to lead others against the known attitudes of the Church and Eldership. If anyone feels that the Spirit of Christ has revealed the need for a major change, the persuasion will be done openly with discipline and mutual respect.

Financial Matters

The Church members are responsible for the financial commitments of the Church and together we are responsible for trusting the Lord to provide for the activities to which He has called us. We believe it is dishonouring to the Lord to ask the general public for money for the Church or to seek to raise money through fund raising activities. Each member should be aware of the challenge that the Lord gives to the Church and what the Lord requires of them. Such giving is a matter between the individual and the Lord and the Church treasurer will ensure privacy as far as is possible in these matters. Offerings will be taken at most services, although members may give directly to the

treasurer if they prefer. Those who pay income tax are encouraged to make a covenant so that the Church can benefit from the tax rebate.

The Church has a Finance Team, under the supervision of one of the Elders, and this team will keep a detailed watch on income and expenditure so that the Church can be fully informed of the financial position. The treasurer will prepare the accounts annually which will then be audited and presented at a Church meeting. At other business meetings, the treasurer will give a report on the latest financial position.

In particular, it is helpful to bear in mind the following:

- All activities are to be seen as a part of the whole Church's service.
This means that no individual group within the Church needs to be self-funding.
- Each group within the Church must submit an annual budget to the Finance Team.
- Group leaders are responsible for keeping a record of their own group's finances.
- No discussion will take place at Church meetings about the salary / emoluments of full-time workers. Two Elders and the treasurer will oversee this responsibility.

5. Church Services

General

The main purpose of the Church services held each Sunday is to honour God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Communal worship should be conducted in such a way that it builds up the fellow believers in Christ. As the Spirit of Christ controls the meetings, each worshipper should be considerate of the worship of others present. The Church's worship should be characterised by joy but a joy which should also be tempered by reverence.

Corporate prayer is also seen as a high priority for the Church. Members are encouraged to attend, on a regular basis, the Communion services and the mid-week Prayer and Bible Study meetings, as well as the Home Group meetings where time is set aside for open prayer as the Holy Spirit leads individuals to contribute.

Baby Dedications / Thanksgiving

The Church's understanding of scripture is that Christian parents will wish to dedicate their newly born children to the Lord. At the discretion of the Elders, prayers of thanksgiving may be said at a Family Service when it is felt that Dedication is not appropriate.

Baptism

It is the teaching of the Church that Christ calls all believers to obey Him in baptism. Baptism does not have a saving effect in itself, but is a symbol of a spiritual conversion which has already taken place. It is the responsibility of the Elders to be satisfied over a candidate's suitability for baptism and so a short course on the subject is offered prior to a baptismal service. In the light of New Testament teaching, it is our normal practice for baptism to take place by total immersion.

The Church also recognises that true believers may have different convictions regarding baptism and our beliefs should not hinder us from having fellowship with those who hold such views.

Marriage

The Church will perform marriage services for those couples who have satisfied the Elders that they are both seeking to serve Christ and for whom the blessing and guidance of God is a priority. Requests for a marriage service will be considered by the Elders. It is not automatic that the Church will provide marriage for the relatives of members.

Funerals

The Church undertakes funeral services both at the Church and at the crematorium. Any questions concerning arrangements should be made to the Pastor or the Elders.

6. Church Ministries

Mission

St Neots Evangelical Church believes that it shares in the responsibility of the wider Church for the mission of the gospel to the whole world. Our current practice is to **reserve 15.0%** of the General Fund for missionary work, both in this country and overseas. We believe that this is a minimum commitment and circumstances may give rise to a level of giving beyond this minimum commitment. The Elders will make recommendations to the church regarding the disbursement of these gifts. We recognise, however, that our commitment to missionary work is not just financial. The Church also carries a responsibility to pray for this ministry and to support practically those whom we know to be engaged in such work.

Healing

It is the conviction of the Church that the Lord Jesus Christ heals the sick. Sometimes this is done in direct answer to prayer, sometimes through human medical procedures and sometimes through a combination of these two factors. Jesus may also heal through a person with a special gift of healing. The Church recognises, however, both from Holy Scripture and from experience that it is not always the will of God that the sick should recover; it is important therefore to emphasise that continued sickness, handicap or even death does not show lack of faith on the part of the individual nor of

the Church. Those who are seriously ill should ask the Elders to pray with them and to anoint them with oil as the Lord leads.

The Role of Women

We understand the Bible to teach that in the body of Christ women must not have authority over men. We note that in the New Testament women were involved in all other types of speaking and service in our Lord's name.

The ministry of women has also been a vital part of the growth of this Church and we judge it important for the Elders to have the advice and fellowship of their wives and of lady workers.

Pastoral Visits

A part of the Pastor's role is to make visits to the Church members and to respond to other calls for visitation as they arise. The Church is aware, however, that many demands are made upon the Pastor's time and therefore it recognises that the Elders and other members, requested by the Church, may make visits on behalf of the Church. It is important to emphasise that on all such occasions those making the visits must act and speak in such a way as to reflect the high Christian standards to which they have been called and that, where possible, this ministry will be undertaken by the someone of the same sex as those being visited.

Personal Gifts and Acts of Service

We believe that the Lord will give to us the gifts and talents that are needed for the service and witness of the Church and that each member will have some part to play in this. To this end, each member is expected to seek the Lord concerning their service for Christ and the Elders are responsible for encouraging and giving guidance in the various forms of service. Each one should seek to perform their role humbly, seeking to make it acceptable to the Lord. We recognise that this service will not always be perfect by human standards since the Church also bears a responsibility to nurture developing gifts. Mutual criticism must be undertaken with all due love and sensitivity.