



LOCAL DISTINCTIVES

Our "Statement of Beliefs" describes the teachings of the Christian faith which are essential to salvation and, therefore, are non-negotiable for those who call themselves true followers of Jesus. The following local distinctives outline our local practices and positions on Scriptural issues which are important, but not critical, to the follower of Christ as it relates to their salvation. Agreement on these issues will not be required to become a member of Northside Evangelical Church however, these statements are given so that members and prospective members will understand, appreciate and respect our local distinctives.

Baptism

Baptism is an ordinance which has perpetual obligation upon the Church. Baptism involves the immersion of Believers upon the profession of their Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and is a symbol of the fellowship of the regenerate in His death, burial and resurrection. The symbol of being baptised (being plunged under water and then brought up again) re-enacts Jesus' death and resurrection as being a substitute for one's own death and resurrection. For this reason, we baptise Believers who are free to choose faith in Christ and we prefer baptism by full immersion. Baptism does not make a person right with God, but is an expression of an inner spiritual commitment.

However we also believe that the door to local Church membership should be roughly the same size as the door to membership in the universal body of Christ, and excluding someone from membership in the local Church is very serious and usually implies a warranted doubt about the validity of someone's faith. Therefore exceptions may be made to the requirement for believer's baptism by immersion in certain cases where, after significant study, thought, discussion, and prayer, a prospective Member sincerely and humbly believes that it would be contrary to Scripture and conscience—and not just contrary to family tradition or desires—to be baptised by immersion and thus to count his infant baptism or his adult sprinkling as improper or invalid. This belief is not viewed by the Church Council as a weighty or central enough departure from Biblical teaching to exclude a person from membership. In such cases the member will give evidence that there is a humble, teachable openness to more light which may lead to a change of mind and, eventually result in a baptism by immersion.

Our theology and practise of baptism will be regulated by the following parameters:

- Christian baptism is instituted by the resurrected Lord Jesus, and is rooted in the earthly ministry of Jesus, in His death, and in His resurrection.
- Baptism is the outward sign of the inward reality of belonging to the body of Christ. While it is neither necessary for, nor a guarantee of, salvation it is an act of obedience of the believer to the command of Christ.
- Baptism is the sign and symbol of our new life in Jesus Christ. Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place.
- Baptism implies conversion and a new life. It is not simply an external cleansing, but involves the conversion of the heart and initiates a life in faith and obedience under the guidance of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of people before, in and after their baptism.
- Infants or children will be presented and blessed in a dedication service which will involve thanks for the gift of the child, a commitment by the parent/s to Christian parenthood and a dedication of the child to the Lord.

At all times we recognise that it is God's saving grace which initiates, enables and empowers us to become a member of God's family.

Charismatic Issues

The Spirit works to grant His gifts for the purpose of service, not self-indulgence. Their use is determined - not by personal desire for fulfillment, or satisfaction - but by the principle of building the church. Not every gift of the Spirit is given to the church at every moment of its life, only those necessary for building Christ's body. This is the context which determines Northside Evangelical Church's views on Charismatic Issues.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Every genuine believer was baptised by the Holy Spirit at the moment at which they were regenerated and brought to true faith in Jesus Christ. The experiences of the disciples at Pentecost and of the Samaritan believers in Acts chapter 8 were unique and unrepeatable moments of salvation history, and they do not provide a pattern for present day spiritual experience. Every genuine believer is therefore always indwelt by the Holy Spirit, however, all believers are urged by Scripture to ensure that they are increasingly surrendering to the power, influence and control of the Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

Healing, Signs and Wonders

Healing signs and wonders were closely connected with the apostles, as such, we do not believe there is evidence for encouraging a continuation of this ministry today. At the same time we would not want to rule out the possibility of healing, signs and wonders in special circumstances under the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Therefore in all their earthly troubles Christians are to put their trust in their heavenly Father who never forsakes those who seek to put their refuge in Him. We do have a God who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think and we have every right to approach the throne of grace with confidence and pray for healing, even in times when such healing would be a true wonder.

Prophecy

In this life our experiences will never be a reliable guide therefore dreams, promptings, voices or impulses which God's people have experienced should never be identified as authoritative. Scripture alone is the reliable and sufficient authority since the Spirit has sovereignly and freely limited Himself to only speaking through the Word. The Spirit does lead, guide and direct the Church in ways other than through the Scriptures; yet we may not presume infallibility on any point in our perception of this leading, guiding and directing.

Tongue Speaking

Scripture never teaches that tongue speaking would be available to every believer, nor is it a necessary sign of receipt of the Holy Spirit. We recognise that individuals may be given this gift but we do not believe there is evidence for requiring the continuation of this ministry for all believers today. In response to the problems mentioned in Scripture we will not seek the use of tongue-speaking in corporate worship.

Church Governance

Jesus Christ is Lord and Head of the Church therefore He is the sole authority in all matters of faith and conduct, in the life both of the Church and of the individual. This allows each local Church the right, under Christ and freed from any ecclesiastical or other external authority, to interpret Christ's mind for the Church and for the Church to have liberty of thought and conscience as it decides and governs its own affairs.

This Congregational Principle of Church government, where each member has equal rights and responsibilities, means that the members of the Church Council are servants of the Church who give spiritual leadership in the life and ministry of the Church. The Church Council consists of the Senior Pastor and elected representatives of the Church. The Church Council is responsible for the governance and direction of the Church seeking to bring into reality the vision and mission of the Church. All Church Council appointees subscribe to the Statement of Beliefs and agree to support the Church's Local Distinctives.

Our Church will encourage and empower every believer to be creative, to take initiative, to see and respond to the needs of others, and to participate in those activities which make disciples.

Creation

We acknowledge that there are divergent Christian views on the age of the earth, the length of the “creation days”, the interpretation of Genesis 1-3, and the processes God used to put creation in place. With respect to creation we believe that:-

- all created order was supernaturally put in place by God and was initially unaffected by sin.
- Adam and Eve were specifically created by God, with the rest of humanity being their descendants.
- entrance of sin into the world, through Adam, brought God’s curse on all creation, culminating in death and separation from God
- Jesus Christ, as the “second Adam”, came to reverse the effects of the fall.
- evolutionary theories contradict Scripture when they state that nonliving substances gave rise to the first living material, or that one species can transform into a completely different species.

In the process of discerning our beliefs on Creation we encourage our members to become Biblically and scientifically informed about these divergent views.

Discipleship

The presence of Christ is demonstrated in relationships of love. Therefore we seek to build relationships within the body through fellowship activities, small groups, and ministry tasks that will facilitate acts of love. We will use small groups as the focal point for spiritual nurture and pastoral care, though this will not preclude the establishment of one-to-one relationships where they are more appropriate. Our philosophy will be to establish small groups where:

- Leaders are not just group facilitators but seek to train and develop others in the group.
- Individuals learn God’s Word through Christ-centred Bible studies that encourage obedience, transformation and maturity.
- An environment of prayer, pastoral care, fellowship and supporting one another in our mission task occurs.
- New-converts or prodigal children are integrated into the life of the Church.
- There is an expectation for growth in discipleship and in numbers with the ultimate objective of multiplying.

We seek an intentional process of disciple-making, with several sequential levels—from interesting people in the gospel and leading them to faith, to grounding them in the basics of the Christian life, to developing them in Christian character, to helping them discover their spiritual gifts and training them in ministry skills, to deploying them in ministry so that they become involved in this process of disciple-making.

At the heart of our Church is a lifelong process of leading and encouraging people to submit ever more fully to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, to bear fruit, both inwardly in godly character and outwardly in ministry to others, and to develop and maintain a lifestyle of sacrificial stewardship. Our aim is to develop maturing mission-minded disciples of Jesus Christ.

Evangelicalism

Our identification as an “Evangelical Church” means that we take our stand with those who believe in what are called “the fundamentals” of the Christian faith:

- The existence of the Triune God.
- The complete authority of the Scriptures.
- The utter sinfulness of all humanity.
- Salvation by God’s grace through faith in Christ alone.
- The complete humanity and deity of Jesus Christ.
- The virgin conception of Christ and His incarnation as the eternal Son of God.
- The substitutionary death of Christ as the only way of salvation.
- The physical resurrection of Christ and His sure return.

We joyfully affirm our unity with those from every tradition and denomination that hold these fundamentals, including those true believers in Christ who are members of denominations or Churches with which we might have certain theological or doctrinal disagreements in other areas.

Evangelism and Outreach

The primary responsibility of every individual believer is to have a "Great Commission Mentality" where we seek to continually be involved in the mission of making disciples. In order to enable, encourage and equip all our members to be mission-minded we will generate an ethos and Church culture which:

- Recognises that all believers have a calling to be involved in the disciple-making process.
- Expects all believers to take initiative to extend friendship and hospitality to not-yet-believing acquaintances and relatives.
- Demands that we do not fill our lives with so many Christian activities that we no longer have any time to develop meaningful friendships with not-yet-believers.
- Individually and corporately welcomes not-yet-believers who will be accepted and integrated into our Church regardless of their initial spiritual state.
- Calls us to a life-time of training and equipping in sharing the gospel, praying for not-yet-believers and leading people into greater spiritual maturity.

Our Church will have this culture because a principle task of the Church is to be involved in Christ's mission.

Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance which is a remembrance meal where Christian believers share bread and wine together to remind themselves of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the continued strength He gives to believers, and to proclaim that He will return. The Lord's Supper is a service of spiritual fellowship where we have the opportunity of entering into close fellowship with the Lord in the Holy of Holies to rekindle our love for the Lord and to reconsecrate our life to the Lord's service. The Lord's Supper should be celebrated on a regular basis by the members of the Church, ideally in the context of a worship service to demonstrate our unity in the body of Christ.

Membership

Nowhere do the Scriptures require adherence to an extensive set of creeds and confessions in order to be baptised and become a full member of the Church. Instead God is looking for a heart which is converted and relies on Christ as their Saviour which results in a willingness to mature and grow into a disciple who actively shares the Gospel. At Northside Evangelical Church membership and ministry opportunities in the local Church will require a commitment to our doctrinal basis as expressed in our Statement of Beliefs; along with this commitment we ask all members and perspective members to recognise our Local Distinctives. However, a person who holds a different view on these matters will not be excluded from membership, provided that they are prepared to respect the beliefs and practices of the Church and that they will not seek to undermine them.

Each and every member of the Church is called by God to utilise his or her gifts, whatever they may be, by ministering to other members of the Church and to the not-yet-believing community. The leaders of the Church are not qualitatively distinguishable from other members of the Church, but are appointed to provide encouragement, equipping, accountability and support to the congregation so that there can be unity of vision and purpose.

Second Coming of Jesus

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus will return one day, physically, to rule the earth in righteousness. Prior to that event times of tribulation are to be expected for God's people, there will also be an intensification of apostasy and the appearance of the antichrist. Christ's coming will bring about the resurrection of the just and the unjust with no further opportunity for repentance and conversion. The return of Christ will be the beginning of the new heaven and the new earth.

Women in Leadership

Women's ability to take positions of leadership in the Church is a constantly debated subject throughout the world today. With respect to women in leadership we affirm that:

- Men and women have full equality before God because both were created in God's image.
- Women in the New Testament engaged in significant ministry, performing valuable service in sometimes difficult situations.
- The Bible makes clear that in Church leadership, as in marriage, the roles of men and women are not interchangeable.
- All leadership should be implemented with the servant attitude of Christ Jesus.

As a result of these affirmations we acknowledge that both men and women are gifted for service and leadership in the Church; however the qualification of Scripture is that the position of ordained Pastor is limited to men.

Worship

We believe the Scriptures must be applied to our individual lives with warmth of heart, warmth of message and warmth of concern. Therefore our worship of God ought to engage the intellect, stir the emotions, challenge the will and be intentionally accessible to all. In order to attain these goals our corporate worship will:

- Centre on the dynamic and relevant preaching of the Word.
- Have a balance between intellectual/rational and the experiential so that we can express our faith experience in a personal and open manner.
- Recognise the need for contemporary expression in music.
- Remove culturally meaningless rituals or traditions.
- Be ordered, yet still relaxed and structurally informal.
- Be an environment where not-yet-believers will be welcomed, accepted and integrated regardless of their spiritual journey.

Our sovereign God requires worship which engages the whole person therefore it is essential to have solid biblical content in our worship, but it is equally important to have a dynamic engagement with God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit.