

The Church - God's family

The Bible uses many different images to help us understand what it means to be church together. Church is pictured as a flock of God's sheep, a temple of God's Spirit, branches connected to Jesus' life and a body of many parts where Jesus is head. (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 3:16; John 15; 1 Corinthians 12).

One of the most compelling images for church, is that of God's 'family'. When we come to faith we are adopted into this family (Romans 8:15). As we work out what this means we realise that we haven't just gained a new Father in heaven, but also a worldwide family of Jesus' brothers and sisters (see Matt 12:49-50)

Pointing to his disciples, [Jesus] said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.' Matthew 12:49-50

The New Testament points clearly to the fact that this worldwide family finds local expression in a specific group of people who share a mutual commitment to Jesus and to one another, and who together seek to touch the world with the love of Jesus!

Paul writes that followers of Jesus "are no longer foreigners and strangers, but *fellow citizens* with God's people and also *members of his household*". (Ephesians 2:19). John Stott points out that in this verse Paul points both to a "new [global] international God-ruled community" whilst also placing "an emphasis on family... a close relationship of affection, care and support". Put simply, Christians belong to 'global' church and 'local' church.

This leaflet explains how we enter that kind of community here at TBC.

Joining God's family at TBC

People first meet the TBC family in all sorts of ways. For example they may,

- attend one or more Sunday meetings.
- connect with a small group.
- get involved in the children's or youth activities.
- volunteer to help at a TBC event.

Each of these can give a sense of belonging - which is great! Many people find that after being involved for a while TBC has begun to feel like 'home' - which, again, is great!

When you feel you've moved from being a 'visitor' or 'guest' to actually belonging to the TBC family we like to formally welcome you, and thank God for your presence here!

This leaflet outlines a few of the distinctives of the TBC family so that you can know what you've joined.

Thornbury Baptist Church is a local, evangelical church in the Baptist tradition. We have good co-operative relationships with other local churches in the Thornbury / Bristol area, and we are members of the national Evangelical Alliance. We subscribe to the EA statement of faith, a version of which can be found in our 'Church Guidelines' document. A copy of the Church Guidelines, which also contain a wide range of information about the way TBC 'works', is available on request from the church office.

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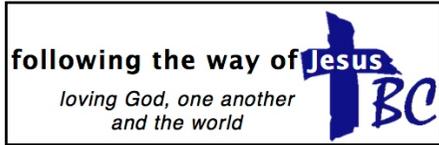


following the way of Jesus
loving God, one another
and the world



Family values

The things that we hold most dear at TBC are summarised in our vision statement:



Following the Way of Jesus

The church (any church) is comprised of people who have come to know Jesus as their saviour and Lord. Jesus is at the centre of what we believe, who we are and what we do.

Believers baptism is the Biblical 'boundary-marker' for receiving Jesus as saviour and Lord and at TBC we expect family members to have been baptised - or to be willing to be baptised as their next step in following Jesus.

Loving God

Jesus said that following him meant putting God first in everything we do. We should love God 'heart, soul, mind and strength' (Matthew 22:36-40). This is a lifelong challenge, made possible by the fact that God's love for us continually draws us towards him. Here at TBC we recognise the rich privilege of knowing God and believe that love for God comes first!

Loving One Another

Jesus' *new* command was that his disciples should 'love one another as he had loved them' (John 13:34). This was just after he had washed their feet, and just before he died for them, so that was quite a statement!

Family values

There are many ways that we at TBC seek to 'love one another'. Some of the more obvious are:

- being willing to forgive when things go wrong.
- speaking well of one another rather than gossiping.
- giving time, money and effort (as God leads) to help others and to serve the wider purposes of God through TBC.

For many members 'loving one another' might find expression in joining one of our many small groups.

Loving the World

This is the second part of Jesus' 'Great Commandment': love your neighbour as you love yourself' (Matthew 22:36-40). We take our neighbour to be anyone we know, meet or hear of who needs our help. The mission activity of TBC is a response to this commandment. It includes:

- **Personal mission** to those we meet on our 'front-line' at work, in social gatherings or in our neighbourhoods.
- **Local Mission** through activities run by the TBC family to reach our locality.
- **National Mission** through activities we support in the region and in the UK.
- **Global Mission** reaching out, especially to the poor, in many parts of the world.

We hope that TBC family members share our commitment to 'love the world', individually on their own 'frontline' and, as time and gifts allow, get involved in what we are doing.

Family Decision-Making

At TBC we believe that God leads his church by speaking through the lives of all its members.

Leadership is exercised as the church family gathers to discern the way ahead since, together, 'we have the mind of Christ' (1 Corinthians 2:16). These gatherings are called 'Family Forums' at TBC, and all family members are encouraged to attend and contribute. Family Forums meet about 3-4 times a year.

The Family Forum is responsible for appointing and holding accountable those who serve the TBC family as pastors and elders.

Welcomed In

When people have been around for a while and begun to consider themselves part of the TBC family one of the elders will speak to them to see if they'd like to be welcomed into the family.

In conversation there is the chance to probe anything within this leaflet and to ask any questions that may have arisen about TBC.

We like to offer a public welcome (at a communion service). This is really helpful to everyone else in the church since it gives them a chance to know who is joining the family, and to put faces to names.