Believing and Belonging

A Handbook for Groomsport EPC

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Introduction

It may seem strange to state, not just that that church matters; but also, that church membership matters too for those who are Christians. Yet, too often, their importance is not appreciated.

Church matters less and less in a world that is becoming more and more secular. God has been side-lined to such an extent that the idea of church as a God-given institution has become just a quaint irrelevance. But a brief glance over the last 2,000 years of world history (and longer if we include Jewish history) tells us that the church cannot be ignored or dismissed so easily.

It has been a huge factor not merely in the lives of those who have formed the church as the Christian community over the centuries, but it has been true also in the lives of the countless communities and nations where the church is found. And this pattern of influence continues to spread today as the church continues to grow around the world.

The Biblical Pattern of Church Membership

So too, church membership seems to matter less and less to many Christians. In part this is a consequence of the way that individualism has shaped society as a whole. Community and even family life are being exchanged for a self-sustained, self-contained way of life for many. You can go through university without ever stepping into a lecture theatre, watch your favourite team without ever being in their stadium and even do your weekly shop without having to go to a supermarket.

When it comes to church, it can be tempting for Christians to see the need for it, but only as and when it suits them. It isn't just that this has not always been the case and, as a result, we have lost something special. Rather, it is the fact the Bible makes it clear that God never intended it to be this way. Human beings were designed for community, the kind of community that does not merely involve other people but that has God at its centre.

For many people being a Christian and belonging to the church don't necessarily go together. But when we look at the Bible's

teaching about both, we realise that they actually do, and cannot be separated. In the New Testament when people heard the gospel and put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, they were 'added to the number' of those who had already believed (Acts 2.47). Even though the word 'church' is not used in that passage, it is clear that the group to which they were added was already meeting together regularly and doing all the things that are part and parcel of what the church is (Acts 2.42-46).

Even though New Testament churches may not have had formal membership lists as many churches do today, a person who became a Christian was immediately and publicly identified with the body of Christian believers and was encouraged to fully participate in it.

1
The Church as a Body

Its Spiritual DNA

We share our DNA with the natural families into which we are born and with whom we are bound through blood ties with our parents and siblings. So, in an even greater sense in the church family, we share the same spiritual DNA because the eternal life we receive from God is the life we all share by his Holy Spirit.

> Paul says to the Christians in Corinth, 'You are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it' (1Cor 12.27).

Having just described their Christian experience as not merely something private and personal, but shared with all other true believers, Paul uses the imagery of the human body to help them grasp what that meant.

Just as our natural bodies are made up of many parts but are essentially one body, individual Christians are joined to each other because they have been joined to the Lord Jesus Christ in salvation and share in him the life he alone gives.

Paul's big point in what he is teaching the Corinthians is that no Christian can opt out of the body. Just as no body part can say 'I

don't need you', so no child of God can say he or she does not need the rest of the spiritual body, the church (1 Cor 12.12-27). Indeed, it is only as the body functions well as a unit that the individual parts can enjoy the Christian life more fully.

People sometimes reject this idea because they have had bad experiences with other Christians in church. So, they hold back from getting too close or too involved for fear of getting hurt all over again. Whereas it is not hard to understand such a reaction, it actually does not resolve the underlying issue.

If we adopted the same attitude to our own families – with all the hurts and disappointments they can inflict – we would soon discover we were losing more than we thought we had gained.

In *Groomsport EPC* we believe it is important for us as Christians to publicly confess our faith in Christ for salvation through membership of the church. This not only shows that we are bound to him in this new life he has given us, but are bound to one another in his family as well.

Church Members as Living Stones

The Apostle Peter talks about that in his first letter when he speaks about what it means to be a Christian and how it brings us into a whole new relationship with others because of the relationship we have with Christ. He puts it like this:

> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 2.4-5)

The whole idea of 'stones' that live, and live because they are joined to Christ as 'the living Stone', is a graphic picture of building a spiritual community that is strong and will last. If we truly believe in the LORD Jesus Christ, it follows that we must also belong to his family.

2
Groomsport Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Just as every family has its own particular background and characteristics, so it is with every church. In the New Testament we see many different churches and, while they all shared the same spiritual life in salvation that made them a church, they each had their own flavour. Not surprisingly, the same is true of *Groomsport EPC*.

Our History

The Presbyterian body of which the *Groomsport* church belongs is the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (EPC). It is a relatively small group of churches, but it was established in 1927 in the aftermath of a significant controversy in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. One of the Professors in its theological college in Belfast was charged with five counts of heresy, only to be acquitted by the Belfast Presbytery and later by General Assembly on appeal.

A significant number of people believed the Assembly's decision was wrong and believed they could not stay in a denomination that tolerated the teachings the Assembly had affirmed.

So, under the leadership of Rev James Hunter and WJ Grier, a graduate of Princeton Seminary, they left and formed what was originally known as the *Irish Evangelical Church*, but changed its name to the *Evangelical Presbyterian Church* in 1964.

The ruling body of EPC is called the 'Presbytery' and is made up of all its ministers along with the ruling elders from each of its congregations who have been delegated to represent their local churches and be involved in the discussions and decisions that relate to the church as a whole. These meetings are also open to members of EPC churches to attend as well as visitors from other churches with whom the Presbytery has links.

Groomsport EPC began in 1994 as a church plant of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The work began, in response to a request from Christians in the Bangor area, with Revs Derek

Thomas, Andrew Woolsey and Mark Johnston leading weekly afternoon services in the Scout Hall on Hamilton Road for several years.

The EPC Presbytery later sent Rev Jeff Ballantine, who was already serving in the denomination, to become the minister of this fledgling work.

Initially the church met in rented accommodation in various locations. But, in the Autumn of 2000, the church was given a site in the grounds of the old Groomsport estate and was able to build the church and the halls that now stand on that site.

From its earliest days, the congregation has looked for ways not just to welcome Christians looking for a spiritual home to come along to the church, but to reach out to those who are not yet Christians. Those efforts to share the message of salvation in Jesus Christ continue today.

Following the retirement of Rev Jeff Ballantine in 2022, Rev Mark Johnston was called in February of the following year as minister of the church and was installed later that month.

Our Beliefs

Groomsport EPC is a Presbyterian church and, while this describes how the church is governed, it also defines what we believe. In keeping with a longstanding practice throughout their history, Presbyterians have recognised the importance of having a clear statement of the core teachings of the Bible on a range of topics.

In 1643 the English Parliament summoned a respected group of Pastor-Theologians – who became known as 'the Westminster Divines' – to revise the already existing *39 Articles of the Church of England* and seek greater uniformity of worship among all Protestant churches in England at that time. But later that remit expanded into the production of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms* that go with it. They are widely acknowledged as among the very best statements of faith the church has ever produced. In drawing them up the Divines used several existing sources, but more than any other they were

influenced by the *Articles of the Church of Ireland* whose chief architect was James Ussher, later Archbishop of Armagh. The fact that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* was modified and adopted by Congregationalists in the *Savoy Declaration* and by Baptists in the *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* speaks for itself in terms of its esteem and acceptance across a wide spectrum of evangelical churches.

The Confession and the Catechisms, which summarise what we believe, function as a guide and safeguard for the teaching and the life of the church – its 'faith and life'. We use the *Shorter Catechism* as part of our Sunday School curriculum, but it is of great benefit to all age groups. Professor John Murray said of it: "There is no other document of its kind that presents the truth of the Christian faith with such precision of statement, such brevity of expression, such balanced proportion, such rhythmical stylistic quality, and such theological adequacy."

Our Leaders

Minister and Elders

While the designation 'Presbyterian' points to what we believe, it also expresses how our church is governed. Since *GEPC* has a Presbyterian form of church government, it is led by elders who have overall responsibility for the life of the congregation. They meet as a Session at least six times per year to review the pastoral needs of the congregation and to deal with the matters that relate to the life and ministry of the church.

Our particular view of eldership understands the New Testament to teach that there are two types of elder – those who teach and those who govern. The teaching elder, who is usually known as the minister, has a special function in the ministry of the Word through preaching and teaching. There is a 'plurality' of ruling elders who have 'parity', or equal authority, with the minister as part of the Session. Ruling elders are elected by the members of the congregation, but this does not mean their authority to lead is devolved by the members. Although they have that authority *through* the membership, they are recognised as having the God-

given New Testament gifts for eldership which qualify them to rule under the authority of Christ, the sole head of the church, and through the authority of his word.

All the elders, along with the minister, are involved in the pastoral care of the congregation and do their best to get to know everyone in the church to ensure their needs are met. They also seek to be approachable and available for anyone in the congregation to come to them for help or advice. The overall leadership provided by the elders filters down into the life of the church through men and women who are responsible for the various groups and ministries of the church.

Deacons

The work of the elders is augmented by the deacons. The title 'deacon' derives from a Greek word that means 'servant' and points to the deacons' responsibilities in the church. In part they take care of the practicalities of the fabric and finance of the church. But they also have an important role to play in caring for needs in the congregation and in the wider community. Sometimes described as 'mercy ministry,' they carry on the time-honoured work of the church in looking after the needs of people who may be struggling with a whole range of practical needs in life.

The congregation also elects deacons to office and, as with the elders, their suitability is measured by the qualifications set out in several New Testament passages, mainly 1 Timothy 3.8-13.

Commitment to the Truths that shape the Church

All ministers, elders and deacons are required at their ordination and installation to office to affirm the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* – which are subordinate to the Bible as the supreme standard of what Christians believe, the Word of God. They do this as an affirmation of their own beliefs without any reservations, and their commitment to them. Ministers and elders are also required to commit themselves through God's grace to teach and defend the standards to the utmost of their power against all error.

Our Members

The constitution of our church requires three things of our members. They must be baptised, hold a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ and to exhibit a teachable spirit. Such a spirit relates not just to what we believe and how we learn; but also, to our attitude and behaviour as members of Christ's Body.

So, we have three things working together: teaching, teachers and those who are teachable – the members, who have this frame of heart and mind. But we are called to cultivate this spirit so that it is visible and tangible for everyone to see. As we nurture this spirit as a congregation, Christ engages with us as his people – young and old alike – to gather and build us up as his people through his Word, the sacraments and prayer, all of which become effective through his presence by the Holy Spirit.

Our Affiliations

The New Testament teaching on the church indicates that the church exists in three dimensions on earth (and four if we include the part of the church made up of Christians who are now in heaven).

The most basic unit of the church is its local expression through congregations that meet in a particular town or area.

The church is also seen in particular regions or geographical areas. Luke points to this when he says, 'the church [singular] throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace' (Acts 9.26)

The widest expression of the church is often referred to as 'the universal church' made up of all true believers – regardless of denomination – throughout the world and across the centuries.

For this reason, Presbyterian churches have always sought to reflect these key aspects of church life in their wider connections within the framework of church life and oversight. From its

inception, the EPC has taken seriously its responsibility to cultivate meaningful links with other churches throughout the British Isles and across the world that hold to similar convictions. And, insofar as is practical, it seeks to work in co-operation with them.

3
Some Basics of Church Life

Throughout its history, the church has all too often lost its way through losing sight of the things that matter most. In *GEPC* we believe the Bible points to certain things that are essential for us to maintain our spiritual heath, stability and usefulness.

What it Means to be a Christian

People give many different answers to the question, 'What makes you a Christian?' Some point to things they do (or don't do) as the grounds on which they think God should accept them. Others point to Jesus as the One whose example they try to follow or whose teachings they admire. Still others point to their involvement in church, or even the fact they are citizens of a country that is still in some sense 'Christian'.

None of these notions matches what the Bible teaches. When the Philippian jailer asked the question, 'What must I do to be saved?' the apostle Paul answered, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 16.31). A person must respond to the gospel as the means of entering God's family. As Paul puts it elsewhere, 'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved' (Rom 10.9).

For some people that step of faith is a memorable turning point they reached at some point in their life. For others – often those who have grown up in Christian families – they can't remember a time when they did not believe. The key thing, as theologian, Jim Packer aptly says, it is not the precise moment of conversion that matters, but the reality of 'convertedness'. That is, professing and living out our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

There are, of course, many other important aspects and dimensions to what it means to be a Christian, and we continually grow into them as we grow in the faith. But when people are received into membership of the church, the Elders ask them to explain where their faith is placed in order to have their sins forgiven and to be sure that God accepts them.

How we Grow as Christians

When the embryonic New Testament church was finding its feet after the Day of Pentecost, we are told how the 3,000 or so people who came to faith through Peter's preaching that day began to grow in their newfound faith. Luke says, 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer' (Acts 2.42). In this way he identifies four key elements that are necessary for Christians to grow in their faith: the word of God, fellowship, the sacraments and prayer.

Although the word, fellowship and prayer are things we can enjoy informally and personally as Christians, all four together lie at the heart of healthy church life. They have sometimes been described as 'the means of grace'. That is, the means God uses to channel his transforming grace into the lives of his people.

The fact the early Christians in Acts 'devoted themselves' to these things makes it clear that they made them a priority. And that is why in *GEPC* we encourage people to prioritise the times during the week when we meet to take advantage of these God-given means of spiritual nurture: morning and evening on Sundays and our Tuesday night meeting for prayer and Bible study.

Sharing the Gospel with Others

As a church we also believe that every Christian is involved in the task of sharing the gospel with those around us. That does not mean we will all do so in the same way, because we don't all have the same gifts or the same approach. But, as Peter says, each of us must 'always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (1 Pet 3.15).

The early church grew not merely through the formal preaching

and teaching of the apostles and those who were recognized as evangelists and teachers at that time; but also, through ordinary believers who 'preached the word [shared the gospel] wherever they went' (Acts 8.4). We firmly believe that if the church is to grow and become strong, those who belong to the church should proactively look for ways to spread the message of Christ and his salvation in ways that fit with our personal gifts and abilities.

4
The Place of the Bible in Church Life

Our Supreme Standard

It may seem too obvious to have to say it, but it needs to be stated: the Bible should have a central place in the life of the church.

Peter says it is through the faithful preaching and teaching of the Bible as the word of God that people are born again and brought into the fellowship of God's family (1 Pet 1.23). It is the means by which the Holy Spirit engages the minds and hearts of those who are not yet Christians to bring them to faith in Christ. Peter also says that the same word that brought us into that new life with God is something we should 'crave' as 'pure spiritual milk' that will nurture us from spiritual infancy towards maturity and usefulness in the faith (1 Pet 2.2). The Bible is central in our worship, not as an end in itself – we do not worship the Bible – but as the way in which God makes himself known and engages with us through Christ. So, the Bible is the controlling factor in all the different ministries and activities we organise as a church.

Our Subordinate Standard

The first and longest chapter of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, to which we referred earlier, is 'Holy Scripture'. Its final section, Section 10, reads:

> The Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture is the supreme judge by whom all religious controversies are to be decided, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, human teachings, and claims to spiritual guidance are to be examined; with his decision we are to be content.

The opening section of Chapter 1 is well worth quoting:

> Although the human conscience and the works of creation and providence so clearly show the goodness, wisdom and power of God, that human beings are without excuse, they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary for salvation?
>
> Therefore, it pleased the Lord at different times and in various ways to reveal himself, and to declare his will to his church.
>
> Afterwards, for the better preservation and propagation of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the human heart, and the malice of Satan and of the world, God was pleased to commit this revelation of himself and his will wholly to written form. Accordingly, the Holy Scripture is now essential, for God's former ways of revealing his will to his people have ceased.

5
Worship: Gathering to Glorify God

We believe worship is vitally important to what it means to be a church.

Praising God in Worship

In his letter to the Ephesians – the letter in which he has most to say about the importance of the church – Paul says that the whole purpose of the church is that 'we might be for the praise of his [God's] glory' (Eph 1.12). This is the church's supreme mission statement: 'We exist for the glory of God'. Again, this needs to be stated because too often the church has existed for its own glory, to build its own little empire; but God has planned otherwise.

The two Dimensions of Worship

The Bible sees worship as expressed in two dimensions. The first and most obvious one is what we do when we meet together as the church to worship God through song, prayer, hearing the Bible read and proclaimed, presenting our offerings to God, receiving baptism and the Lord's Supper – the two sacraments

Christ has ordained – and receiving the benediction: God's sending us on our way with his blessing and encouragement.

The other key component of worship that pleases God is that it takes place 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4.24). That is, worship that is stirred by God's Holy Spirit and shaped by God's word, but that also engages the spirit and mind of those who offer it. We are to worship God with head and heart engaged. While the preaching of the word of God always takes precedence in our worship, the Lord's Supper is a most profound means of exhibiting and participating in the death of Christ and all the blessings we have in him.

Worship is the highest activity we can engage in as human beings: in it we are lifted up into heavenly realms to praise the triune God, our creator and redeemer and commune with him.

Failure in Worship

The Bible also warns us that we can go through this outward expression of worship in a way that renders it null and void. In the prophecy of Isaiah God says, 'These people worship me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me' (Isa 29.13) – words that Christ quoted when he was condemning the false worship of his day (Matt 15.8-9; Mark 7.6-7).

Our Attitude in Worship

The Bible also has a theology of worship that sees it as having order and logic in all we do as we draw near to God. Because we are not free to approach God through our own merit or simply because we choose to (Ps 24.3-5), we remind ourselves that we can only do so because God himself calls us to worship him. As we draw near to God, we realise he is enthroned in heavenly splendour and so we come in a spirit of adoration in song and prayer.

Because he is holy and we are sinful, confession of sin is a vital element as we stand before him – offered with the reminder from his word that when we confess, he assures us of absolution – forgiveness and cleansing – from all our sin and guilt. Worship has also been described as a covenantal dialogue between God

and his people. That is, he speaks to us through the Bible and we, as his people, respond in prayer, song and by bringing our tithes and offerings to him. Worship is far more important than we often realise and in *GEPC* we seek to cultivate a rich appreciation of what it entails in order that we may bring God the kind of adoration in which he will delight.

6
Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Understanding the Sacraments

Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper have been major sources of contention within the church throughout its history. In some significant instances this has led to deep divisions in the church over how they are to be understood and practiced. Part of the reason for this has been a failure to understand them in context, because the Bible does not present them in a vacuum. Just as an engagement ring, or a wedding ring are not merely bits of jewellery, but are rich in symbolism and significance which can only be grasped when they are seen in the context of marriage in which they are given and received, so also with these two ordinances.

Interestingly, the context in which both are presented in the Bible is that of the spiritual marriage between God and his people – the covenant that God established with them in which he says, 'I will be your God and you will be my people' (Jer 30.22). And in both the Old and New Testaments God attaches 'signs and seals' (Rom 4.11) to that covenant bond to bind himself to keep his promise to those who believe and assure them that he can be trusted. As signs, the sacraments display visibly and graphically Christ and the benefits of the covenant of grace; as seals they confirm or authenticate the genuineness of our possession these blessings as believers.

Baptism

By baptism, using the symbolism of washing with water, we are 'solemnly admitted into the visible church and enter into an open and professed pledge to belong only and completely to the Lord.'

(*Larger Catechism* 165)

The New Testament ordinance of baptism replaced the Old Testament rite of circumcision as the rite of initiation into God's family (Col 2.11-12). And, just as circumcision was to be applied not just to adults who were publicly professing their faith in God's promise of salvation, but to their children also; so too, the same scope carries through into baptism as its New Testament counterpart. For that reason, and in line with very many faithful churches through the ages, *Groomsport EPC* not only baptises those who have professed faith in Jesus Christ, who have not been baptised before; but we also baptise the children of believing parents.

The Lord's Supper

We understand the Lord's Supper, or communion, to be the sacramental meal instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ for the benefit of his believing people. It is not merely a memorial of his death (though it does include an ongoing remembrance and proclamation of it); it is also a profound act of communion with the crucified, risen Saviour, and with one another in him. In the language of the *Book of Common Prayer*, capturing Jesus' own words in John 6.53-58, it allows us to 'feed on him by faith in our hearts with thanksgiving'. Jesus has promised to bless us by his presence with us through the sacrament.

7
Every Member Ministry

In some church traditions, too much is seen to revolve around the minister. But that is not the kind of church life we see in the New Testament. We are told that every member of the church matters and every member has a part to play. Paul brings that out very clearly in what he says in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph 4.11-16). Although ministers and elders have a very definite Christ–ordained role, fulfilling it will have the effect of 'preparing God's people for works of service' so that 'the whole body may be built up' by Christ working through the lives of all his people. There

are three very basic ways through which each member in *GEPC* is able to play his or her part in building up the church.

Being There

It may seem too simple to merit a mention, but just 'being there' means a great deal. In the same way as a family member's absence is felt when they are not there for a family gathering, so too when God's family meets together. Of course, there are times when people are unavoidably absent for a range of reasons, but the exhortation in Hebrews to every member is always worth remembering: 'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching' (Heb 10.25). Through being together in the formal context of worship itself and being able to mingle with those who are brothers and sisters in Christ and meet those who are new to the church is a very significant way of expressing the oneness and love we enjoy in Christ as the family of God.

Using our Gifts in God's Work

The Bible also speaks about the individual gifts God gives his people: the specific talents and abilities to be used for the benefit of others (Rom 12.3-8; 1 Cor 12.1-27; 1 Pet 4.7-11). Church should be the place where those gifts are put to use. There are many ways to do that in *GEPC*: from helping with practical tasks like greeting people as they arrive for worship, serving coffee or cleaning, to teaching the children, helping to run the different weekly meetings, or visiting those who are unable to get out to church. There are many ways to help and we are keen for people to find ways to do so.

Supporting the Church through Giving

The Bible has a lot to say about supporting the work of the church financially – not as a form of church taxation, but as a tangible expression of gratitude to God for his abundant provision for our daily needs in life. (2 Cor 9)

In *GEPC*, the offerings we bring are seen as part of our Sunday worship because giving is an integral part of worship. There is a

freewill offering box in the Vestibule where which people can place their offerings. These not only go to supporting the work of the church, but also to missions and also to specific organisations and projects we support as a church. Some people choose to give by means of a standing order set up in conjunction with their bank. And anyone giving to the church who is a UK taxpayer is encouraged to fill out a Gift Aid form to allow the church to claim charitable tax rebate on their donations.

Further information about giving can be found in one of the free copies of John Stott's booklet, *The Grace of Giving* – available on the bookstall – or speaking directly with the church Treasurer.

8
When Things go Wrong in the Church

The Causes

Anyone who knows anything about church life will know that, sadly, things go wrong in churches. This can be caused by all kinds of things from breakdowns in relationships to serious sin or wrongdoing. The church is not the church because it is made up of perfect people; it is the church because it is home for sinners who have been reconciled to God through his saving grace in Jesus Christ and who need to grow in grace.

The Remedies

But, since things do go wrong in church, how should they be handled? The Bible tells us that the one response we cannot have is simply to 'bury' such failures, pretending they have not happened. It is only as we have the courage to face them and build the kind of respect for one another and for those who are entrusted with the spiritual welfare of the congregation that we can to work them through constructively.

Jesus lays down some basic principles for both offender and offended. In Matthew 5.23-24, in the Sermon on the Mount, he shows that those who have offended have an urgent duty to recognise the damage they have caused, to seek forgiveness and

to make amends quickly. In Matthew 18.15-20, a passage where Jesus deals more specifically with relationships between members in the church, he shows how issues can be addressed discreetly to help those dealing with them, without allowing them to become the stuff of gossip. It is often the case that the offended party is more aware of the offence than the offender, so it is interesting that, in Matthew 18, the onus for taking the initiative lies with the person who has been offended. This pattern reflects how God, as the ultimate 'offended party', takes the initiative to reconcile sinners to himself in salvation.

As with every congregation we pray that such problems may be rare in our church, but when they do occur, we want to handle them in a way that honours God, respects the individuals affected by them and preserves the peace and purity of the church.

Epilogue

The church is meant to be the most wonderful grouping to which anyone can belong. The Bible describes it in all kinds of ways from 'glorious body' and 'radiant bride' to 'fruitful vine' and 'strong city'. We hope that *GEPC* can be all these things in our own modest way and that you will not only enjoy finding out about us, but would be eager to join with us.

If you have any questions at all about the church, please do not hesitate to speak to the minister or to any of the elders and we will be eager to try and help.

Questions for New Members

1. Have you been baptised?
2. Do you believe in one God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit – who is the creator and sustainer of all things?
3. Do you believe the Bible to be the word of God in which he makes himself known and reveals the way of salvation?
4. Do you acknowledge your sin and need of salvation and look by faith to Jesus Christ alone for new life from God?
5. Do you commit, through grace, to have and exhibit a teachable spirit?
6. Do you promise, depending upon the grace of God, to confess Christ before others, to serve him in your daily work and to walk in his ways all the days of your life?
7. Do you promise to commit yourself to the oversight and care of this church and seek always its purity and peace?
8. Do you promise to give a fitting proportion of your time, talents and money for the church's work in the world?