

# Membership Workbook

Replace with  
Your Church Name



SEVENTH DAY  
**BAPTIST**<sup>®</sup>

This workbook is presented for use in Seventh Day Baptist churches. Most of the material was developed initially by the Rev. Rodney Henry for use in the Next Step Seventh Day Baptist Church in Thornton, CO and further adapted for use in the Foothill Seventh Day Baptist Church in Montrose, CA. Those involved with the development of the materials graciously provided permission to the Seventh Day Baptist Board of Christian Education to further adapt the materials into a template for this membership workbook.

This template will be posted on the Board of Christian Education website ([EducatingChristians.org](http://EducatingChristians.org)) for as long as we choose to maintain it. From time to time it will be updated to make using the template easier, to clarify information, or for other purposes. It is not our intention to maintain a historical record of the changes to this document. If you need to make sure you have a copy of this particular template, please maintain your own backup.

Replace with Your Church Name

# Membership Materials

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## **Steps to Membership in the (Replace with Your Church name)**

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Replace with your typical pattern (example steps follow):

- Believers baptism by immersion.
- Six months of church attendance.
- Acceptance of the Church Covenant.
- Agreement with the Statement of Belief.
- Recommendation for membership by the diaconate.
- Vote into membership by the church.

Replace with you local church covenant.

## **Brought together by Christ's Love in Covenant**

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Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus describes the church as being "knit together" and "building itself up in love" (4:16). Passages like these remind us that while what we believe is crucial, the way we relate to each other is also part of God's plan for His church. We remember that Jesus commanded His disciples to love one another—to the degree that they would be recognized as His disciples by their love.

A central practice in the life of Seventh Day Baptist churches is covenant. The covenant is one way we remind ourselves that we are in the work of God together, looking for ways to help each other grow up, looking for wholesome ways to express God's love.

A church covenant is a promise to follow God in the midst of other believers—allowing them to care for you and, in turn, caring for them. Most church covenants are written documents that detail basic agreements that help bind people together in community. They generally refer to God's great revelation of Himself through Jesus, the trustworthiness of the testimony about God in the Bible, our pledge to Christ as Lord, and our desire to work with other believers as part of His kingdom.

As you can see, covenant is about relationship. And Godly relationship is at the heart of how Seventh Day Baptists see God's church working.

Do not mistake this emphasis on relationship for weakness with respect to what we believe. While Seventh Day Baptists have historically kept our Statements of Faith short—recognizing that there is room for liberty of conscience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit—we have developed statements of faith which clearly describe the Biblical convictions that those joining a church are expected to have.

At times we have referred to ourselves as covenantal rather than creedal. The reason for that statement is that we don't emphasize lock-step adherence to a set of beliefs which govern details of the whole Christian experience. We have sought to identify only crucial, central items in our statements of faith and then emphasize a commitment to relationship among the members.

So, as you join this church, you commit to a covenant. The covenant is two-sided. You promise to support those already in the group and those in the group promise to support you.

# Statement of Belief

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## Introduction

Seventh Day Baptists consider liberty of thought under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to be essential to Christian belief and practice. Therefore we encourage the unhindered study and open discussion of Scripture. We uphold the individual's freedom of conscience in seeking to determine and obey the will of God.

The following statement is not intended to be exhaustive, but is an expression of our common belief, which is derived from our understanding of Scripture.

*2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 2 Timothy 2:15; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:3-6, 15; Romans 10:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17.*

## I. God

We believe in one God, infinite and perfect, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe who exists eternally in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and desires to share His love in a personal relationship with everyone.

*1 Timothy 1:17; Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Kings 8:27; 1 John 1:5; Genesis 1:1-2; Acts 17:24-25, 28; Psalm 90:1-2; Matthew 28:19; John 3:16; Isaiah 57:15; 2 Peter 3:9.*

### The Father

We believe in God the Father, who is sovereign over all, and is loving and just as He forgives the repentant and condemns the unrepentant.

*1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6; Ezekiel 33:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8; John 5:24; John 3:16-18.*

### The Son

We believe in God the Son, who became incarnate in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. He gave Himself on the cross as the complete and final sacrifice for sin. As our Risen Lord, He is the mediator between God the Father and mankind.

*John 1:34; Hebrews 1:3; John 1:14-18; Romans 1:3-4; 1 John 3:16; 1 Peter 2:24; Hebrews 10:10-14; 1 Corinthians 15:20-21; 1 Timothy 2:5; John 14:6; 1 John 2:1-2.*

### The Holy Spirit

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who gives spiritual birth to believers lives within them, and empowers them for witnessing and service. We believe the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures, convicts of sin and instructs in righteousness.

*John 14:16; 3:5-8; 14:17; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 2 Peter 1:20-21; John 16:7-11.*

## II. The Bible

We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is our final authority in matters of faith and practice. We believe that Jesus Christ, in His life and teachings as recorded in the Bible, is the supreme interpreter of God's will for mankind.

*2 Peter 1:20-21; Romans 3:2; 2 Peter 3:1-2, 15-16; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Matthew 5:17-19; Psalm 119:105; John 20:30-31; Hebrews 1:1-2.*

### **III. Mankind**

We believe that mankind was created in the image of God and is therefore the noblest work of creation. We believe that human beings have moral responsibility and are created to enjoy both divine and human fellowship as children of God.

*Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 8:3-9; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:44-48; 1 John 1:3; John 1:12*

### **IV. Sin and Salvation**

We believe that sin is disobedience to God and failure to live according to His will. Because of sin all people have separated themselves from God. We believe that because we are sinners, we are in need of a Savior.

We believe that salvation from sin and death is the gift of God by redeeming love accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection, and is received only by repentance and faith in Him. We believe that all who repent of their sin and receive Christ as Savior will not be punished at the final judgment but enjoy eternal life.

*1 John 3:4-5; Romans 3:23-25; Isaiah 59:2; 1 John 1:8-10; Romans 5:6-8; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 10:10-14; 1 Peter 1:3; John 3:16-18, 36; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 14:6; Matthew 25:41-46; Romans 5:10*

### **V. Eternal Life**

We believe that Jesus rose from the dead and lives eternally with the Father, and that He will come again with power and great glory. We believe that eternal life begins in knowing God through a commitment to Jesus Christ. We believe that because He died and lives again, resurrection with spiritual and imperishable bodies is the gift of God to believers.

*1 Corinthians 15:3-4, 20-23; John 14:1-3; Matthew 24:30; Titus 2:13; John 17:3; 1 John 5:11-13; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; John 10:27-28; John 6:40*

### **VI. The Church**

We believe that the church of God is all believers gathered by the Holy Spirit and joined into one body, of which Christ is the Head. We believe that the local church is a community of believers organized in covenant relationship for worship, fellowship and service, practicing and proclaiming common convictions, while growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We believe in the priesthood of all believers and practice the autonomy of the local congregation, as we seek to work in association with others for more effective witness.

*Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 12:13, 14, 27; Romans 12:4-5; Colossians 1:18; Acts 2:42; Ephesians 2:19-22; Romans 15:5-7; Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Peter 3:18; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Matthew 18:20; Hebrews 10:24-25*

### **VII. Baptism**

We believe that baptism of believers in obedience to Christ's command is a witness to the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We believe in baptism by immersion as a symbol of death to sin, a pledge to a new life in Him.

*Romans 6:3-4; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:41; Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:11; Galatians 3:26-27*

## **VIII. The Lord's Supper**

We believe that the Lord's Supper commemorates the suffering and death of our Redeemer until He comes, and is a symbol of union in Christ and a pledge of renewed allegiance to our risen Lord.

*Mark 14:22-25; Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 11:23-30*

## **IX. Sabbath**

We believe that the Sabbath of the Bible, the seventh day of the week, is sacred time, a gift of God to all people, instituted at creation, affirmed in the Ten Commandments and reaffirmed in the teaching and example of Jesus and the apostles.

We believe that the gift of Sabbath rest is an experience of God's eternal presence with His people.

We believe that in obedience to God and in loving response to His grace in Christ, the Sabbath should be faithfully observed as a day of rest, worship, and celebration.

*Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 16:23-30; Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 5:17-19; Mark 2:27-28; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14, 42-44; 16:11-13; 17:2-3; 18:4-11; Ezekiel 20:19-20; Hebrews 4:9-10; John 14:15; Isaiah 58:13-14; Luke 23:56*

## **X. Evangelism**

We believe that Jesus Christ commissions us to proclaim the Gospel, to make disciples, to baptize and to teach observance of all that He has commanded. We are called to be witnesses for Christ throughout the world and in all human relationships.

*Matthew 24:14; Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 4:1-2, 5-6; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Ephesians 6:14-20*



## **\* Vision and / or Mission Statement \***

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Replace with your church vision and/or mission statements here. If not applicable, delete and adjust the Table of Contents.

# A Christian Church

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## Our Statement of Belief on the Church

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*We believe that the church of God is all believers gathered by the Holy Spirit and joined into one body, of which Christ is the head. We believe that the local church is a community of believers organized in covenant relationship for worship, fellowship and service, practicing and proclaiming common convictions, while growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*We believe in the priesthood of all believers and practice the autonomy of the local congregation, as we seek to work in association with others for more effective witness.*

Our statement of belief understands the church as a human response to a divine initiative. Though the church is people, it is not made up of "ordinary" people. It is made up of "believers" who have responded to Christ's death on the cross (Titus 2:14). God continues to act in the formation of the church as these redeemed people are "gathered by the Holy Spirit and joined into one body, of which Christ is the head." Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). The church originates from divine initiative.

The first part of our statement of belief is referring to the church in the universal sense. It is the universal church which is gathered by the Holy Spirit. The local church is simply an expression of the universal church in a given place. Each local church is an expression of the body of Christ. The divine initiative of gathering believers into the universal church applies also to the local church.

Though the local church begins with the divine initiative (God acting on individuals) there is no church until there is a human response to that initiative. People are called to respond to the initiative of the cross by putting their faith and trust in Christ for salvation. These redeemed people are then called to respond to their salvation in the community experience of the local church. The word "church" comes from the Greek word *ekklesia* which literally means "called out or gathered." The church is made up of those who have responded to God's calling out and gathering.

## The Nature of the Church

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The Bible contains no precise statement of the essential nature of the church other than to speak in analogies. We must attempt to get our understanding from these analogies. The New Testament gives us the church as the people of God, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, and the building of God. We will examine the first two of these analogies, the church as the people of God and the body of Christ.

## **The Church as the People of God**

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The heart of the Bible message to mankind is that God wants for himself a people for his own possession. From Genesis to Revelation God desires to bring people into a relationship with him such that he can call them his people. In Exodus 6:6-7, God tells Moses to tell the Children of Israel, "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God."

The New Testament refers to the church as the people of God. This is clearly expressed in I Peter 2:9-10.

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (NIV).*

This New Testament concept of the people of God is rooted in the Old Testament concept of the multitude of people called "Israel" who were chosen from among all the other *ethne* (nations or peoples). This people of God always stands in contrast to the other nations who are the Gentiles. The people of God found identity and worth in relationship with each other. The worst punishment of all would be cut off from the community. In the New Testament, the focus on relationship in the community is continued through the use of the analogy of the church as the body of Christ.

## **The Church as the Body of Christ**

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The "body of Christ" is the most familiar picture of the church in the New Testament. It is a Pauline expression used fifteen times in describing the church. This metaphor is used to express the unity between Christ and his church and between the members of his church.

In this analogy Paul goes beyond seeing the church as a group of believers in a given locality. The church is more than an institution or organization of believers. The church is a living organism, the very body of Jesus Christ. The heart of the church is not its doctrine, leadership, or programs. The heart and life of the church is in the person of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who gives the church its life.

Membership in the church is more than a call to belong to an institution or organization. It is more than a call for participation in the program of the church. Membership in the church is initiated by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13). It is a call to participate in a living relationship with Jesus Christ. Membership in the local church is a call to lose our independence and learn the necessity of belonging to one another as members of this living body of Christ in unity. Baptism by immersion is the rite practiced by Jesus. By this act, we die to independence and self-centeredness and live for Him in the community of believers that make up the body of Christ.

The body of Christ analogy reminds us that as Christians, we need each other. It also teaches us that in the body of Christ we are all equally important and equally necessary.

## **No Division In the Body**

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Paul's references to the body of Christ also work against the separation and elitism between laity and clergy (Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and I Corinthians 12). The body of Christ has only one head and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Members of the body of Christ have equal status and importance but differ in terms of gifts and ministries.

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men (I Corinthians 12:4-6).*

In the body of Christ there are different kinds of *diakonia* (service). These varieties of ministry are distributed in the body based on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Ministry is not the responsibility of one person or "minister," but the functioning of all the members in the church.

In the body of Christ, there are also different kinds of spiritual gifts. We understand, firstly, that spiritual gifts are a characteristic of the body of Christ. Secondly, spiritual gifts are given to each member of the body of Christ. Finally, spiritual gifts vary from member to member. (See I Corinthians 12:1-11.) Based on these varying spiritual gifts, the members of the church have different roles and functions. Spiritual gifts are God's way of equipping each member for a specific ministry in the church. Ministry is the responsibility of the whole body of Christ.

## **A Baptist Church**

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Seventh Day Baptists are Baptists. We hold to the Biblical and traditional Baptist distinctives of the priesthood of all believers, liberty of conscience, local church autonomy, believers baptism by immersion, and the Lord's Supper.

### **The Priesthood of All Believers**

The call to be the people of God is the highest calling. It is the highest calling because it is a call to priesthood.

The priesthood of all believers was prophesied in the Old Testament in God's first covenant with the children of Israel. From Mount Sinai God told Israel, "Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). This prophecy is repeated in Isaiah, "And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God (Isaiah 61:6)".

This prophecy was fulfilled at the coming of the Holy Spirit. In the Revelation of John we are told what Jesus has made his people to be. "He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (Revelation 1:6). Peter tells us the same when he says that the church is "being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:5).

These above texts are addressed to the church as a whole and not to clergy only. Peter makes it clear that all believers are part of the priesthood, and are, therefore, qualified to "offer up spiritual sacrifices" and to "proclaim the excellencies of Him" (I Peter 2:9,5).

The universal priesthood of all believers contains two important concepts. First, the individual believer has direct access to God, through Christ as our only high priest. We have no need for human mediators. Second, all members have equal responsibility for the ministry of the church. Though all members have responsibility for ministry, we do not have the same roles (pastors, deacons, etc.) or the same gifts (I Corinthians 12:1-11). The priesthood of all believers does not eliminate the need for leadership and division of labor. The Bible knows only one class of people, the people of God or body of Christ, who are all members of the priesthood.

## **Liberty of Conscience**

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*Seventh Day Baptists consider liberty of thought under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to be essential to Christian belief and practice. Therefore we encourage the unhindered study and open discussion of Scripture. We uphold the individual's freedom of conscience in seeking to determine and obey the will of God. (Introduction to the Seventh Day Baptist Statement of Belief)*

Seventh Day Baptists with other Baptists believe that it is a fundamental right of every believer to study scripture with the help of the Holy Spirit, free from being forced by a government or even a church structure. Baptists emerged from an environment of intolerance from the government and the established church. Therefore, Baptists hold dearly the freedom to study scripture in order to determine the will of God.

The concept of freedom of conscience is based on an understanding of scripture that teaches the competency of a believer before God. God created people in his own image (Genesis 1:27). In the new birth we are told that believers have the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16). Jesus taught that the believer would know the truth and the truth would set him free (John 8:31). The Apostle Paul said, "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

The introduction to our current Statement of Belief says "*The following statement is not intended to be exhaustive, but is an expression of our common belief, which is derived from our understanding of Scripture.*" The Statement of Belief is a standard of common belief used by the Next Step Church in the acceptance of new members.

Love and our common beliefs will create a strong glue for holding our local churches and our denomination together. Love is the best context for working out our liberty of conscience. But for Baptists and Seventh Day Baptists, liberty is not license. Scripture, the covenant community, the Holy Spirit, and reason are the boundaries within which we must exercise our freedom of conscience.

## **Local Church Autonomy**

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Baptists and Seventh Day Baptists "believe and practice the autonomy of the local congregation" (Seventh Day Baptist Statement of Belief). This means that each congregation has complete authority over and responsibility for its own affairs. Each congregation has self-rule and self-government. No group, denominational or otherwise, can dictate how to run a local Seventh Day Baptist church. This means that each congregation determines its own worship, programs, and organization. Baptists acknowledge no head of the local church other than Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:23).

However, the autonomy of the local church is held in tension with a Baptist tradition of association and cooperation with other churches to better accomplish the work of the kingdom. The only authority that the denomination has over a local church is the right to dismiss a member church from the denomination. Most of the time, the relationship between the denomination and the local church is characterized by advice and assistance.

## **The Ordinance of Baptism**

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Baptists and Seventh Day Baptists have traditionally observed two ordinances, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. A Baptist is one who holds to believers baptism. Our method of baptism is by immersion.

Seventh Day Baptists are a part of the history and tradition of Baptists. Seventh Day Baptists are a part of the Christian church and we are Baptists. But we are Baptists that are a little different in that we believe and practice the observance of the seventh day Sabbath.

# **A Seventh Day Baptist Church**

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A Seventh Day Baptist church is a fellowship of baptized believers in Jesus Christ, banded together for worship, fellowship, service, practicing common Biblical convictions (holy living), and proclaiming common Biblical convictions (evangelism). The desire of the church is that all people may come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and that God's will shall "be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is important to apply the will of God to all areas of life. One

of these areas of God's will is the Sabbath. Seventh Day Baptists believe that the acceptance of Christ's example and God's will includes keeping the seventh day Sabbath holy. Therefore, they include the presentation of the Sabbath as a part of their mission to the world and for Christ.

## **The Congregation**

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Seventh Day Baptists believe that the church is the universal body of Christ that is visible in a local congregation. The people who gather together in a fellowship in Christ are the local church. It is proper to think of it as an association of individuals led by God's Spirit to unite for mission in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptized believers, joined by covenant and common beliefs, become the church through which God speaks to his world. Such a congregation is an assembly of equals: each voice may be heard, each life bears its influence. Some may be set apart to special tasks by ordination, but this does not confer special sanctity or special class. Some may be elected officers of the group, but this does not give them authority to rule. The congregation is a gathering of equals organized for worship, fellowship, service, practicing and proclaiming common convictions.

## **The Association Principle**

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Seventh Day Baptists affirm that the central authority of the church is in Jesus Christ. From its beginning, the church has claimed Christ as its head. Seventh Day Baptist churches believe that the authority of Christ is real and valid. They believe that he speaks most surely in the intimate fellowship of the local congregation. Therefore, the congregation itself retains the power to regulate its affairs and direct its efforts while it seeks to follow the same direction sought by other congregations, that of the supreme head, Jesus Christ.

The local Seventh Day Baptist church is autonomous: it organizes as it feels God leads it to organize. It accepts programs and procedures as it believes God directs. It responds to appeals, gives financial support, serves human need and does all it does by reason of its involvement through prayer and dedicated labor, in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the congregation is responsible for adequate organization; it is responsible for the accomplishment of mission; it is responsible for the development of a loving fellowship; it is responsible for outreach and service. It is responsible, not to an organization or to a person, but to God alone. It is God to whom the church reports. It is he who judges. The church is responsible for itself and its work under God.

However, the local Seventh Day Baptist church is also dependent: its autonomy is conditioned by the "association principle." Just as individuals gather in churches to be strengthened by mutual faith, mutual concern, and mutual support, so churches gather into a larger body for mutual benefit and strength. Just as individuals gather into churches and submit their insights to the insights of all the members, so local churches gather into larger groups and

benefit from mutual discussion and correction. Just as individuals throw their efforts into congregational efforts to meet social injustice, immorality and inequity so that jointly an impact can be made, so local churches unite their efforts in those of larger groups so that impact can be made on regional, national and world-wide problems.

Seventh Day Baptist churches are involved constantly in the search for a balance between local autonomy and the association principle. Changing times, modern attitudes, new developments in government and education, all help to shape present thought and action; but Seventh Day Baptists are largely agreed in a balance between local church autonomy and the association principle.

## **Seventh Day Baptist General Conference**

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The Seventh Day Baptist General Conference (the denomination) is a voluntary association of churches united for mutual encouragement, aid, mission, education, and identity. It is the arm of the churches through which they do those things which can best be done together. It is the servant of the churches through which they can express their concerns and accomplish their purposes. Each Seventh Day Baptist church is expected to apply for admission to membership in the denomination; without this membership it is not considered ethical for a church to call itself a Seventh Day Baptist church.

## **The World Federation**

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In much the same manner as local churches have joined voluntarily in the denomination, our denomination and other Seventh Day Baptist conferences around the world have joined to form the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation. The purposes of the World Federation are clearly stated in its own constitution:

- To provide increased communication among Seventh Day Baptists throughout the world;
- To promote projects of mutual interest which will benefit from international cooperation;
- To stimulate friendship through periodic meetings of delegates or other such exchanges;
- To coordinate mutual endeavors through the office of an executive secretary.

## **Church Membership**

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For a Christian, the highest privilege in this life is participation in the Body of Christ. It is also a necessity. Membership in a local church places the Christian in fellowship with others who



know Christ as Savior and celebrate together their new creation in him. Those joining a Seventh Day Baptist church are entering into a solemn relationship with the other church members.

When a person joins a Seventh Day Baptist church, that church agrees to be responsible for the spiritual life of the new member. The new member agrees to participate with others in the spiritual life of the rest of the church. God will use those in church relationship, to mold one another into the church he wants them to be. Membership requires responsibility.

Membership permits believers not only to join with others of similar convictions in "worship" and "fellowship," but also to participate in the institutional tasks of the church like "service, practicing common Biblical convictions and proclaiming common Biblical convictions." Members may participate in the elections of its pastor, deacons, and officers, and hold such offices as fellow members shall assign him. As a member, s/he may enter into the discussion of questions coming before the church and vote on all motions, thus participating in shaping, reforming, and deciding issues facing the church.

## Requirements

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Church membership is offered by Seventh Day Baptists to those who, having reached an age of understanding, affirm a Christian experience, publicly profess that it is their purpose to follow Christ, have been baptized by immersion, give evidence of living a Christ-like life, affirm the responsibilities of the local church, and are in general agreement with the statement of belief.

**Born Again.** Seventh Day Baptists feel that it is clearly taught in the New Testament that one should have a change of heart before being admitted to the Body of Christ. Seventh Day Baptists have always maintained that "a new birth" is the first condition for membership.

**Profession of faith.** It is also consistent with the teachings of the New Testament that one desiring to unite in fellowship with Christ's disciples should make a public profession of his faith in Christ and of his determination to follow him throughout the rest of his life. "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:10).

**Baptism.** Among Seventh Day Baptists, *baptism* is a sign that a person has chosen to follow Christ. On the day of Pentecost: the people repented, they were baptized, and they joined the church. Christ indicated the same when he said, "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Seventh Day Baptists have held to the same elements for church membership. In the case of a new convert to Christianity, they expect adult, believer's baptism, by immersion. However, they do not believe that it is necessary to be baptized by a Seventh Day Baptist minister and congregation in order to belong to a Seventh Day Baptist church, and they do not believe that baptism is to be repeated. Therefore, they accept believers baptism by immersion from another church.

**Sabbath.** Seventh Day Baptists receive into membership only those who believe in and strive to keep the Sabbath of Christ and the Apostles. In doing this, we hold that Sabbath observance is a significant part of Christian living and expect some personal, public and creative form of Sabbath keeping from all their members. (We do not believe that salvation comes from keeping the Sabbath or any part of the law.)

**Responsibility.** Joining a Seventh Day Baptist church is entering into a responsible relationship with the other church members. Therefore, it is required that the person solemnly agree to live up to the responsibilities of membership such as attendance, giving, and participation in the programs of the church.

**Common Belief.** What we believe as a local church is significant in defining who we are as a people. The statement of belief of a local church is a defining document for those in the church and for those who would join the church. These statements are usually quite simple and deal with the essential and fundamental doctrine of scripture. General agreement with the statement of belief of the local church is important in maintaining our unity and identity as a people.

## **Responsibilities and Privileges**

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Membership in a Christian church is a privilege for Christians and membership carries with it both rights and duties. It is the responsibility of every member of the church to be true to all church obligations. In public life we must abandon every form of sin and appearance of evil, to make our business and social practices conform to the rule and spirit of Christ. In our personal life it is a duty to lead a life of prayer and devotion, to study the Word of God faithfully that we may know how we should conduct our private and public life. In our church life it is our responsibility to help maintain public worship and help to bear the financial obligations of the church and kingdom of God on earth. As a member of the church, it is our privilege to participate in its worship, and its social, business and religious meetings, to hold offices, to participate in decision making, to avail ourselves of the leadership of the pastor. Church membership is participation in Christian living with fellow believers.

## **Church Discipline**

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There should be no doubt among Christians that becoming a follower of Christ and joining a local congregation do not free Christians from their human nature nor make them perfect in their relationships. They are never free from the necessity of dealing with sinful behavior within the local church. Christian love is the only ground for the disapproval of sin and church discipline. If church discipline becomes necessary, it should be guided by scripture.

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Galatians 6:1). See Matthew 18:15-17 for steps in dealing with sin in the church.

## **Membership: Belonging or Participation**

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In the Old Testament, God was dealing with Israel as a covenant community. They were a covenant community by God's choice and their response to that choice. As a covenant community they agreed that they would be obedient and submit to God and put their trust in Him. In return, God would be their God and they would be his people. To belong to the people of God required sacrificing some freedom in order to submit to the laws and will of God and to submit to each other. To be the people of God in community required sacrifice, submission, and trust, which gave the community a sense of belonging. And, so it is today. The Christian community needs sacrifice, submission, and trust to engender a sense of belonging in the church community.

**Church community requires sacrifice.** The essence of community is family. We will have healthy marriages and families to the extent that the family members are willing to sacrifice for the good of each other. Marriages and families that sacrifice create communities that sacrifice. Church leaders must set the example of sacrifice first in the home and then in the church. To the extent that church community leaders and individuals are willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good of the church community, to that extent the church community will be strong.

**Church community requires submission.** Members of a church community must begin by lovingly submitting to God. This is about obedience to the will of God. Members of the community must also submit to the formal and informal rules, restraints, and conditions of the community. The leaders of the church community must set the example for living and encourage others to submit to God and abide by the rules, restraints, and conditions of the community. To truly belong to a community, members must value belonging more than freedom and independence. Belonging to a community requires submission.

**Church community requires trust.** Trust is the glue that holds a community together. Trust begins with putting our ultimate confidence in God. However, to belong to a community, a person must also trust the leaders and members of that community. Trust is built by seeing leaders and other members demonstrating sacrifice and submission. Without trust, there can be no genuine community. Trust is so difficult to earn and so easy to destroy.

In the American church, there is little call to **belong** to the church, the people of God. The call is to **participate** in church. My observation is that it is much easier to get church participants because belonging to a church requires sacrifice, submission, and trust, which is not appealing in our culture. Let's look at sacrifice, submission, and trust in our culture today.

**Sacrifice.** In three short generations our culture has moved from a selfless, sacrificial culture to selfishness, with periodic episodes of sacrifice. We are losing the value of sacrifice because the leaders of church, business, and government in our culture have set the example of selfishness and not sacrifice.

**Submission.** In our American society, we pride ourselves on our independence and freedom. We want to make it on our own. Belonging must become a higher value than freedom and independence because submission gives up some independence.

**Trust.** For the most part, Americans no longer trust leaders or institutions, because they are not willing to sacrifice for the good of our society. American leaders in government and business have been selfish and self-centered. - Worse yet, the world no longer trusts the Christian church. Night after night a portion of the church is brought to justice in the media for child abuse and cover-ups, while another portion of the church is exposed for sexual immorality of other sorts. In the past, being a pastor was a position of trust. But, not anymore. Our culture is abandoning the values of sacrifice, submission, and trust. If it is true that belonging requires sacrifice, submission, and trust, then **Americans are increasingly having trouble belonging to anything.**

However, the Biblical Christian church was based on belonging to a Christian community that modeled sacrifice, submission, and trust. As people accepted Jesus as their Savior, they were brought into the church to learn and live a life of sacrifice, submission, and trust.

Today, most of the Christian church has abandoned the call to sacrifice, submission, and trust because few in our culture value these things. I contend, that truly belonging to a church requires sacrifice, submission, and trust and this forces the church to decide between **belonging** in community or simply **participating** in worship.

The largest, growing churches know the value of belonging in community. They seek community in small groups. But small groups that do not model and teach sacrifice, submission, and trust will not create a sense of belonging. They don't teach these values because they do not want to go against the cultural norms that place no value on sacrifice, submission, and trust.

I believe there can be no belonging in Christian community **without** sacrifice, submission, and trust. It begins with pastors preaching it and leaders modeling it. It continues with setting high standards of membership that call people to sacrifice, submission, and trust. Instead, many churches have abandoned membership all together, seeking the lower standard of participation only. With that, they lose the sense of belonging to a community that loves God and each other **enough** to sacrifice, submit, and trust.

God bless churches who specialize in bringing people from sin and unbelief to salvation and participation in the church. But there is more to Christian living than accepting the Lord and spending one hour a week participating in church worship. Our church is focused on bringing

people from participation to belonging. We do this **now** and we must get **better** at helping new people belong.

**The Church calls people to sacrifice.** We gather each Sabbath in our church as a covenant community. We look around our small church and see people who are willing to sacrifice themselves in order to belong and contribute to the good of the whole church. Our leadership, by their example, calls others to lead lives of sacrifice. When we gather together, we give of ourselves for the good of others because creating community requires sacrifice.

The Old Testament people of God were called to sacrifice wine, animals, or grain. But the **church** is called to “*present your **bodies** as living sacrifices.*” We are not just called to sacrifice things. **We** are called to be the sacrifice.

Belonging in our church requires sacrifice.

- We are called to sacrifice in the form of **tithe**. God expects his people to give a tenth of their income to the church.
- We are called to sacrifice our **time**. The Sabbath is a period of time dedicated to the Lord. Remember to keep the Sabbath holy because God made it holy.
- We are called to sacrifice ourselves in **engaging each other in love**. This is the mark of a true Christian. Sniping and petty criticism is not loving and has no place in the church. We must engage each other on an emotional and spiritual level to encourage one another and build each other up.
- We are called to sacrifice a life of **sin** for a life of **holy living**.

**The Church calls people to submission.** We call each other to be obedient to God’s will done in God’s way, power, and timing. Nothing less will do. We submit to God and his Word, the Bible. We also call each other to be submissive to the authority given by God through government, the church, and in the home.

**The Church calls people to trust.** We are called to trust in the Lord with all our hearts. It is only the Lord who is completely and perfectly trustworthy. However, in spite of **our** imperfections, we must love and build trust in each other. We must trust each other because God is working in each of us to become more and more trustworthy in our thinking and living.

In summary, we must continue to create a church community based on the values of sacrifice, submission, and trust, in spite of the continuing abandonment of these values in our culture. We must not allow the culture to set the agenda for values in our church. Only God will set the values in our church. This is going to be difficult, but we must not give up or give in.

The Church is a community gathered by the Holy Spirit to sacrifice, submit, and trust God and each other. Hence, we are a people who belong to one another and to the Lord. Our future spiritual maturity depends on God working through each of us. We specialize in encouraging and equipping people to “*take the next bold steps toward Christian beliefs, maturity, and ministry.*” That is who we are.

## Membership Check List

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Circle One

Yes No Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Savior?

Yes No Have you been baptized by immersion?

Yes No Do you agree with the church Covenant?

Yes No Do you agree with the Statement of Belief?

Yes No Do you wish to become a member of the Your Church Name,  
understanding that membership is a call to sacrifice, submission, and trust?

**Please sign here** \_\_\_\_\_

Your request for membership will be taken to the church deacons for their decision. Upon approval of the deacons, your request for membership will be taken to the church for their vote of approval.

Please give your signed “check list” to the Pastor.