

Harlington Baptist Church

What is the Baptist Church?

At HBC we believe in “the priesthood of all believers,” and hence we like to give everyone opportunity to become fully involved in the ongoing life of the church. We welcome all believers, and invite all those who would like to become more involved, to become members of the church.

So what is the Baptist Church?

Baptist churches are found in almost every country in the world. Baptists see themselves as part of the wider world church of God, with a common mission to live and preach the Good News of Jesus, and to bring people everywhere into God’s family.

In this Baptist family everybody is equal, for everybody has a part to play in the service of God. There is no hierarchy of bishops or priests exercising authority over our members. We do not have ‘priests’ - rather we believe in the ‘priesthood of all believers’. That is to say we believe that all Christians are equal before God and that all are equally called to serve God in the local church – and in the wider world. Equality of status, however, does not mean that all have the same role. Each local Baptist church appoints its own leaders – or ‘ministers’ – to have particular responsibility for preaching, teaching and pastoral care. Working alongside these ministers are also ‘deacons’, who together with the minister(s) form the leadership team of the local Baptist church.

In other Christian traditions, church membership is not always clearly defined. In a Baptist context, baptism involves not only commitment to Christ, but also commitment to Christ’s Church.

For Baptists, church membership involves a commitment not only to work together to extend Christ’s Kingdom, but also to love one another and stand by one another whatever the cost.

Baptists are very much grass-roots people, with a particular emphasis on the local church which is self-governing and self-supporting. The Baptist way of being the church is living together in community – in a family if you like.

So what do Baptists believe?

Firstly, there is no one distinctive Baptist belief! Although probably most people think of believers’ baptism as the primary Baptist distinctive, Baptists are not the only Christians to practice believers’ baptism. Nor are they the only Christians to believe in congregational church government, the priesthood of all believers, or the separation of church and state. It is the combination of these various beliefs which make Baptists distinctive.

1. The Lordship of Christ

‘Jesus is Lord’ is the distinctive confession of faith. As individuals and as churches, Baptists seek to make Jesus Lord of every aspect of their lives.

2. The authority of the Bible

Baptists believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that the Holy Spirit through the scriptures shows us God’s way for living. As radical believers Baptists seek to root their lives in the revelation of God’s truth.

3. Believers’ baptism

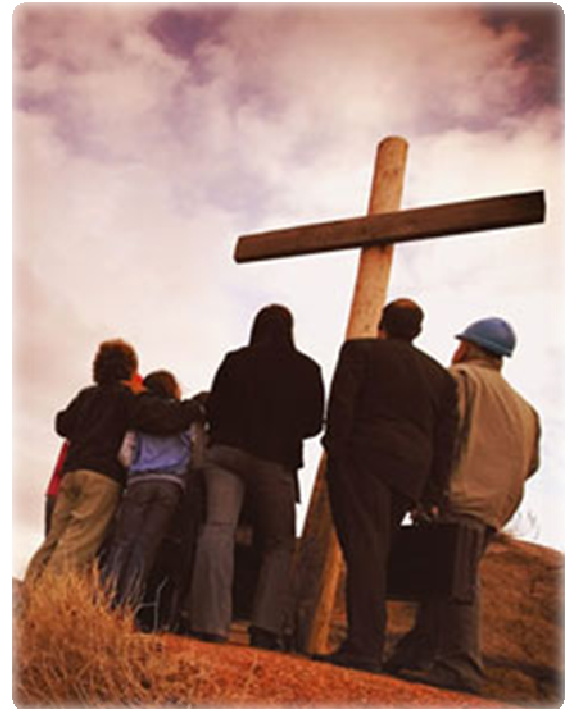
On the basis of the New Testament, Baptists claim that baptism is for believers only. Baptism is only for those who are able to declare ‘Jesus is Lord’. As a symbol of Jesus’ claim on their lives, Baptists practice baptism by ‘immersion’, in which candidates symbolise their desire to ‘die to self’ and to live for Christ.

4. A believers’ church

Baptists understand the church as a community of believers gathered by the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ for worship, witness and service. Central to Baptist worship is prayer and praise, the listening to God’s word in preaching and a gathering around the Lord’s Table.

5. The priesthood of all believers

In the Baptist model of a believer’s church every member has a role to play, whether in teaching, faith-sharing, evangelism, social action, pastoring, guiding, serving, prophetic insight, praying, healing, administration or hospitality.



6. The church meeting

In a Baptist church, one expression of the 'priesthood of all believers' is the church meeting. This is the occasion when members come together to prayerfully discern God's will for their life together. In Baptist churches the final authority rests not with the ministers or deacons but with the members gathered together in church meetings. It is the church meeting which, for instance, appoints leaders, agrees financial policy and determines mission strategy. Church meetings tend to take place mid-week, normally on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.

7. Associating together

Baptist churches have always come together in regional, national and international 'associations' for support and fellowship. On the basis of the New Testament, Baptists believe that churches should not live in isolation from one another but rather be 'inter-dependent', both as Baptists and as part of the Church Universal.

8. The missionary task

Compelled by the Holy Spirit, Baptists seek to be missionary communities. Baptists believe that each Christian has a duty to share their faith with others. William Carey was a Baptist who is known as the father of the modern missionary movement. Along with this emphasis on evangelism, however, Baptists recognise that mission includes social action and involves promoting justice, social welfare, healing, education and peace in the world.

9. Religious freedom

Religious freedom for all has always been a keystone of the Baptist way. Within Baptist churches, tolerance for differences of outlook and diversity of practice is encouraged.

We believe the Christian faith begins with a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. This personal commitment, dramatised in a service of believer's baptism, works itself out in a life of service to God.

For more information fill out a "Connect at HBC" card in church, contact the church office on 0208 759 9583 or E-mail Ministries@HarlingtonBaptist.org.uk.