

Ashley Hall Evangelical Church

Introduction
to

*Ashley Hall
Church*



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Introduction to Ashley Church

Who are we?

- We are a group of Christians who attempt to help each other to relate our faith to everyday life without any unnecessary cultural or 'life style' barriers.
- We meet on Sunday mornings as a whole group, at other times in smaller groups and operate a network of mutual support, prayer and healing.
- We want each person to come to 'own' their faith and not have many secondary issues just passed on from a tradition or to conform just to belong.
- We welcome people from all traditions that are dedicated to serving Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Why this booklet?

This booklet attempts to explain the character of our church.

It can be read at various levels depending on your needs and interest. You may just wish to read it quickly to get an overview or go through it in detail and discuss it with others in the church.

More detail and more specific information is given in Information Sheets which will be referred to in the text. These are kept in a loose-leaf folder in the church library for your reference.

Roy Gregory
Church Leader

How did Ashley start?

The original church started in 1939 as an evangelical witness to the Fleetville area and was, in character, like a Baptist mission with a strong interdenominational sense. It started in the only original part of the building left after the re-building in 1991 - the small hall and upper room. The building was originally owned by 312 Hatfield Road and was a laundry with the laundry girls living in the house. After that the house was bought by Mr. Pollard, a grocer, who used the building as a grocery store with a small garage on the side. This was cleared and became the first meeting place of the church.

In 1953 the building was extended and put into a Deed of Trust. During the seventies the church was effected by the nationwide move of the Holy Spirit. An eldership was installed with no full time pastor.

The eighties saw growth in church membership from 30 to over 100. A 'house church' influence gave it growth and stability from 1980 through to about 1986. After that, John Wimber's ministry was important and the church learnt more about the practical working of the Holy Spirit in people's lives.

In 1991 the church was rebuilt when membership had grown to 180. A new separate church was 'planted' in 1994. This congregation is now independent and has developed its own 'cell church' character. Between 1994 and 1998 the church took time to adjust to a new role which culminated in 1998 in a re-appraisal of vision and a re-affirmation of calling to be a church based on relationships and a faith that is integrated with daily lives. Ashley Hall Church celebrated its 60th Anniversary in 1999.

Throughout all these changes God has given the church a number of pictures and prophecies. The most significant and lasting one was seeing the church in the

light of Ezekiel chapter 47: a river flowing from a temple of worship, creating an ever deepening experience producing an expanding healing ministry to all peoples.

The church's character has been responsive to God's leading, to the gifting of the individuals involved and to the circumstances in the City. Because of our independent and self-governing status our character is always evolving to meet the current needs and circumstances given to us by God.

We have a lay leadership and the church has always emphasized a core faith in God with an ethos of inclusivity and acceptance. We seek to make the historic Christian faith accessible to as many people as possible.

What are our foundations?

We have a foundation in the evangelical church tradition and the doctrine, which reflects that, is part of our Deed of Trust for the building. A copy of our Declaration of Faith is reproduced at the back of this booklet. This is the secure Christian base from which we can explore and interpret our faith and relate it to our contemporary world.

Our community has always come from a mixed background of Christian traditions, which we value. We do not align ourselves too firmly to any particular stream or style and encourage variety in our expression of spirituality. Many of the differences between Christian traditions we regard as personal taste and style recognising that the spiritual life comes primarily from within not from external performance.

How do we relate to God?

In a Christian community we are all ultimately trying to help each other to obey the two great commandments:

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Mat 22:37-39).

The first part is how we relate to God, and the second how we relate to other people, inside and outside the church, and to the creation in the world around us.

We believe that God made us as physical, spiritual and rational beings and that all three aspects need to be developed and used to help us attempt to obey the two great commandments of Jesus. We believe in the supernatural works of God as well as God working through the mind, emotions and intellect. We encourage a thoughtful, reflective and discerning faith giving individuals 'space' to grow as they find their own way to express their faith.

We value prayer, bible study, service and worship. We do not separate the 'spiritual' from the physical or the emotional and attempt to relate to God in an 'holistic way' through areas such as service, the creative arts, liturgy, etc.

We suggest that people consider, on a regular basis, each aspect of their lives, and change where necessary. A suggested list of topics is given in Information Sheet 1.

Jesus' message was that everything we do can be sacred, irrespective of whether it is a worship time or a coffee time. We believe all of creation has the potential to be 'sacramental' - a window through which we can see something of God.

The teaching and leadership are 'facilitating' in style. We do not 'tell' people what to do and expect a growing maturity. Easy or 'pat' answers are not given to difficult questions and we encourage everybody to test everything with a degree of reality.

We do not take stands on issues where Christians obviously disagree and avoid a 'party line' (eg abortion, divorce, Sunday

observance, euthanasia, pacifism, politics, drugs, etc). We believe that for many of these issues the 'process' of trying to understand each other can be more important than the final 'position' which is so often coloured by our own perceptions and prejudices.

This tolerance and acceptance does not, however, extend either to a blatant disregard of our basic Christian doctrines or to clear expressions of abuse and prejudice in areas such as sexism, racism, etc. where the respect and value of human beings is at stake.

How are people cared for?

We try to put into practice the 'priesthood of all believers' and make sure that leadership is seen as a service and not a position of status. Pastoring is based on trust and not control since we believe motivation should be 'want to' not 'have to' There should be 'freedom to fail' not 'pressure to succeed'.

Ashley has had no full time clergy for over 25 years and in that time it has been demonstrated that this can work successfully. The Elders have the overall pastoral care within the church. They facilitate a policy of mutual care which requires that all members take responsibility for their own lives and for the 'pastoring' to be shared around and based on relationships and networks. This calls for a high degree of community involvement and personal responsibility in every part of the church.

The way this is worked out is explained more fully in Information Sheet 2.

What meetings do we organise?

We meet together as a whole church and in small groups, believing that both are important and meet different aspects of our spiritual needs. We hold 'going to meetings' lightly and not as the focus of our spiritual lives.

We recognise the value of 'meetings' but also that they can be a retreat from being a Christian in everyday life. God is at work at all times in our lives no matter where we are. We expect and trust each person to work out their own priorities and their own way to fulfil God's purpose for their lives.

What about sharing our faith with others?

Christianity is a faith to be shared with others and lived out by us. We are called to fully become the person God made us to be and to live that out transparently in the world around us.

We believe that an important part of the Gospel is to bring justice and love to all humanity in Christ's name and that a local expression of this is important. We are involved in supporting organisations which help the disadvantaged and poor in society.

What about adult and child baptism?

We practice adult baptism but accept other traditions as part of the diversity of the Christian Church. We believe in 'believers baptism' and we would ask all that join the church to seriously consider taking this step.

We practice 'believers', not 'infant' baptism. Dedications for babies are carried out by

the Elders at the parents' request.

A fuller justification of our position on baptism is given in Information Sheet 3.

What about baptism in the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts?

We believe that the Holy Spirit is vital to the Christian life for every believer but we are not dogmatic about the means by which the gift is received and expressed. We attempt to create an atmosphere which encourages creativity not conformity.

The Holy Spirit is vital to the Christian Life and being 'filled with the Holy Spirit' is for every believer. We are not, however, dogmatic about how the 'gift of the Holy Spirit' is received and we recognise that individuals experience God's Holy Spirit in many different ways. We accept them all - the spectacular, the gradual and those expressed through practical and spoken gifts, etc.

We encourage all to exercise their God given gifts and in doing so to be able to accept the mixture of 'self' and 'God' in them and to welcome others discerning for themselves what is 'of God'.

We practice 'laying on of hands' for healing as a sacramental way of receiving God's Spirit and healing.

Some notes on Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts are given on Information Sheet 4.

How is the church financed?

We do not have regular collections for church funds at public meetings although we do have special ones for those in need outside the church and sometimes for Christian Workers and their ministries.

Church members are expected to give of their resources of time, energy and money although the proportions and quantity will vary from person to person depending on their circumstances.

A list of the areas of work supported by the church is given on Information Sheet 5. There are, of course, many other organisations supported by individuals in the church.

We ask that all members, as part of their Christian commitment, make some regular financial commitment to the church preferably through bank transfer.

Further information about the use of funds and the way to give can be found in Information Sheet 6.

What about the small group meetings?

We believe it is useful for us all to meet in small groups and it is a vital part of the life of the church. We have found, however, that many of our lifestyles can not support attending groups every week. We now have a variety of groups to meet the various needs. Each year we have series of small group bible studies which last about six to eight weeks when we encourage as many as possible to attend. The material is written by church members. More about small groups can be found on Information Sheet 7.

What about children and young people?

Ashley is a family church and we regard our work amongst the children and young people and their place in the church and services as very important. Our church services reflect this.

The work is divided into a number of areas on the basis of age. Details are given on Information Sheet 8. We share this ministry around as far as possible to give the children and young people relationships with many in the church.

What about guidelines for working with children?

Guidelines for working with children have been drawn up to protect and keep adults and children safe. These are given in Information Sheet 9. These guidelines are designed to work in the context of a relational church where the children do tend to trust adults. In view of this, we should be careful concerning our own behaviour and 'sensibly vigilant' of others, particularly strangers. We have public meetings where it is possible for anyone to attend.

What about the world outside the church?

We encourage all members of our community to participate in work outside the church. This provides a means of outreach to the surrounding community and participation in the church's world-wide mission.

Individual members are encouraged to start and take responsibility for new ministries within the church and also seek out opportunities outside the church such as counseling groups, parent associations, parent governorships, etc.

What about support for Christian Workers?

Some individuals may engage in work that is not, by its very nature, self supporting and requires support from the church. We would, however, expect them to provide some of the resources themselves. We have designated these individuals as Christian Workers, to move away from the more 'specialised' ministry idea, while recognising that everyone who is working where God wants them is a 'Christian worker' in one sense of the word.

Guidelines for the support of Christian Workers and who they currently are, are given in Information Sheet 10.

What about the ministry of women?

We believe that all ministries and gifts, including those of leadership, are open to all believers. We consider it important to have male and female Elders when this is at all possible, since we consider this gives a balanced leadership team. A more detailed analysis of our position from a biblical perspective is given in Information Sheet 11.

Who owns the building?

The Ashley Hall Church building is owned by a Trust. The Deed of Trust defines the way the building can be used, the way the church should be governed and where the resources should go if ever the church was to cease functioning. A separate Trust, with all the Elders as trustees, administers the church funds and associated resources.

The building is to be kept for the use of the members in anything related to the propagation of the gospel. It also gives

voting rights to all members to elect church officers and appoint Pastors (Elders). A Deed of Trust is held by the Trustees (Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches) and a copy held by each Elder and may be seen by any member on request.

The church has formally agreed that a more biblical pattern and effective method of government is to recognise Elders who will govern the church. One of these Elders should be the leader of the church and have final responsibility for leadership and overall policy. Thus the Elders are given the freedom to lead and govern but with the final power still in the members through their voting rights.

A description of who can use the building and for what purposes, is given in Information Sheet 12.

Why membership?

The Deed of Trust requires that we formally recognise church 'members' and this group has the final authority as body in the church.

Church membership is open to all those who:

- confess repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus
- who assent to the Declaration of Faith
- have been baptised
- are leading a godly life

The list of members is available only to the membership and since it is stored on computer we are registered under the Data Protection Act. The list is updated regularly and is presented annually by the Elders to the Annual General Meeting.

A membership form is reproduced on Information Sheet 13.

The responsibilities of membership are to

- give regularly to the church
- participate in Communion services
- serve in the church community as the individual is able

We also have Associate Members who are defined in Information Sheet 14.

How is the church run?

As mentioned above, the members have delegated authority to the Elders to govern the church. The Elders' names and photographs are on a notice board in the church.

The church is organised and run by four groups; the Church Members Meeting, the Elders Meeting, the Management Group and the Open Elders Meeting.

The Members Meeting usually meets only once a year at an AGM to approve the accounts, the list of members, to approve other significant actions of the Elders (such as the appointment of new Elders). The Management Group looks after the building and surroundings and the equipment within it. The Open Elders Meeting is an open forum for discussions which meets twice a year.

All these functions and responsibilities are defined in more detail in Information Sheet 15.

What about relationships with other churches?

These are very important to us since we want to relate to other Christians in the local area, the country and abroad. These are particularly important to us an

independent church to help us maintain our position within the broader church. This gives us support and also 'safety' in not becoming a 'lone ranger' church.

We are members of the St. Albans Churches Together, the Evangelical Alliance and the St. Albans Praise Celebration.

But what about...?

Having read this you may be completely happy and feel that this is the sort of place you could make your home. If so, talk to one of the Elders about joining the church as a member.

You may still have some 'but what about...?' questions. The Elders or any other members in the church would be pleased to discuss them with you. It is better for you to ask now and also good for us to try to explain.

On the other hand you may want to think about other churches in the City or surroundings and we can help you find them and give you some idea of what they are like. There are many good churches in St Albans.

Ashley Hall Declaration of Faith

We believe in:

- The full inspiration of the Holy Scriptures; their authority and sufficiency as not only containing, but being in themselves, the Word of God; the reliability of the New Testament in its testimony to the character and authorship of the Old Testament; and the need of the teaching of the Holy Spirit to a true and spiritual understanding of the whole.
- The unity of the Godhead and the divine co-equality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the Sovereignty of God in Creation, Providence and Redemption.
- The utter depravity of human nature in consequence of the fall, and the necessity for regeneration.
- The true and proper deity of our Lord Jesus Christ; His virgin birth; His real and perfect manhood; the authority of His teaching, and the infallibility of all His utterances; His work of atonement for sinners of mankind by His vicarious sufferings and death; His bodily resurrection and His ascension for His people.
- The justification of the sinner solely by faith, through the atoning merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
- The necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, conversion, and sanctification; also in ministry and worship.
- The resurrection of the body; the judgement of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the eternal blessedness of the righteous and the eternal punishment of the wicked.
- The observance of the Lord's Supper as an ordinance of Divine institution as taught in the New Testament.
- The personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory.

