

HOW WE DO FRAME A STATEMENT OF FAITH?

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Not so long ago a visitor asked me what we as a church believed. This set me thinking. I turned to our Trust Deed and saw that there the church is defined as “a Society of Protestant Dissenters consisting only of persons who hold the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and the sole authority of the Holy Scriptures and that interpretation of them usually called Evangelical in contradistinction to Unitarian and Roman Catholic and have made a confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ”. It went on to stipulate that the pastors of the church should be persons “having been baptised on a confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and maintaining and practising the doctrine and rite of the Baptism of Believers and no other baptism”. Wow – this may have made sense at one time, but it would baffle an ordinary ‘punter’ today!. So I tried my hand at drawing up a statement of faith with a view to showing what we have in common with all Christians; what we have in common with Christians of an ‘Evangelical’ persuasion; and what we have in common with fellow Baptists. It ran as follows: “As Christians we affirm the historic creeds of the faith and together with all other Christians ‘confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father Son and Holy Spirit’ (WCC basis of faith). As Evangelical Christians we believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God and as such is the supreme and final authority for what we believe and how we live our life together. We proclaim the crucified and risen Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. As Baptists we practice believers baptism. Baptism is the occasion when we commit ourselves to Christ and to his church. It is normally by immersion and is a symbol of the believer’s resolve to die to self and to live for Christ. For Baptists the church is a local community of believers, who have committed themselves to Christ and to one another. We come together in church meeting to discern God’s will for our life together. Under Christ the church meeting the final authority for the church’s mission and ministry. As Baptists too we believe in the ‘priesthood of all believers’. Every member has been gifted by God’s Spirit and has a role to play in the life of the church. In particular every member is called to witness to the Good News of Jesus”. I felt quite pleased with it, but my deacons felt that it was far too complicated, so I produced the simplest of statements: “We believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God; we proclaim Jesus Christ the Son of God and the Saviour of the world; we practice the baptism of believers; we seek to live our life together in the power of the Holy Spirit”. Hopefully this makes sense to the ordinary ‘punter’!.

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