

Belonging to Ilam Baptist Church



As the people of Ilam Baptist Church our vision is to...

Grow as an authentic community of Christ-followers, deeply engaged in the world

We aim to do this by

- ✚ engaging deeply with our faith and its implications
 - ✚ nurturing and caring for one another
- ✚ joining with Christ, already active in the world, in mission
 - ✚ expressing God's love for all creation

The values which underpin our commitment to being church together are:

belonging

Being a community where everyone experiences grace, feeling loved and wanted, connecting to each other and with God.

accepting

Affirming each other in our joys, sorrows, struggles, strengths and weaknesses, allowing our true selves to be known so that we can be Christ for each other.

sharing

Everyone participating together in community life, and in so doing discovering and using our gifts and drawing out and developing each other's strengths and passions

engaging

Grappling with our understanding of theology and our place in God's kingdom, endeavouring to discern how best to live and serve in a Christ-like way

serving

Demonstrating God's love outside the church in our workplaces, communities and overseas, through mission, creation care, commitment to social justice and ethical living

What belonging means for us in practice

We see ourselves as an intergenerational community of people gathering together with Christ at our centre - not as an institution or organisation. We recognise that each of us is at a different place in our journey of faith, as well as our understanding of what it means to be followers of Jesus. For this reason, we see our community as being very open to anyone and everyone who also wishes to gather in a community of fellow journeyers engaging more fully with Jesus in our lives. It is our desire to draw closer to Christ, and it is our commitment to do so together as a community, which gives rise to that sense of belonging. It is as a community, also, that we affirm, and seek to live out our part in, the unfolding story of God's interaction with the whole of creation.

Many churches have a formal process of 'membership' to specifically recognise what it means to belong in that church community. This more formal term 'membership' - as it is sometimes described today - doesn't overtly appear in the Bible; it's not completely clear how New Testament churches formally organised themselves. What can be seen from the New Testament, though, is that early Christians were strongly committed to each other. Acts 2 sets the tone: 'They devoted themselves to . . . fellowship.' We read about how they shared their property, their possessions, their homes, and their lives. Whether we look in 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 1 or Acts 8, we see a community of Christians being formed around commitment to one another in *relationship*, rather than under autocratic leadership. And this has been the pattern that Baptist churches have adopted for over 400 years—operating through congregational 'government': we discern the mind and will of God together and participate collectively in seeing God's purposes worked out through the local church.

In practical terms, this means that we occasionally gather more formally for "meetings" (normally twice each year and, generally, on a Sunday after the morning service) in order to make communal decisions about the church and church life. The purposes for meeting in this way include (for example) presenting the finances to the church or voting for people to fill the positions on the Governance Team. When formal decisions need to be made at these meetings, all who identify as part of Ilam Baptist Church and who participate regularly in the life of the church (and who are aged 14 and over) are regarded as 'members' and encouraged to take part in the discussion and voting.

As a church, being community together means that we regularly celebrate communion, welcoming all present to participate. In addition, although as a Baptist church our regular practice is to baptise those who profess their faith, we also welcome and include those who may have made a profession of their faith in Jesus in a different church denominational context (where baptism of believers may not be the regular practice).

Our hope is that we will walk together under the lordship of Jesus and look out for each other along the way, seeking to:

- grow in our faith as disciples of Jesus Christ and nurture each other's spiritual growth, respecting each other's differing perspectives as well as ages and stages in life
- regularly participate in and contribute to our community life – in worship, prayer, welcoming new people, serving, small groups, community ministries, social justice, mission and evangelism
- foster deepening, self-disclosing relationships in this community
- work through our conflicts and disagreements
- cheerfully give our gifts, money and time towards the church and its work
- discern together what Jesus is saying to us
- love, encourage and care for one another and be open to receiving love in return
- To challenge and be challenged by those closest to us in the community in the way we orient our lives towards Jesus.
- support each other in our lives – at home, in our families, at work, in church, in other ministries, and in our broader social responsibilities.
- Be inclusive and welcoming of each other irrespective of age, race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, physical or mental ability, economic status and social context, or stage of faith.

The Legal stuff

In addition to being a community built on our relationships with each other, we are also a Baptist Church registered with the Baptist Union of NZ and part of the wider family of Baptist churches in New Zealand. For the purposes of New Zealand law, we operate as an “unincorporated association” which enables us to own property, operate bank accounts and be registered as a charity. To maintain this legal recognition, we have an approved Constitution, lodged with the charities commission and publicly available, which sets out the formal processes under which we operate, where appropriate, for legal compliance.

Our Constitution sets out (amongst other things) requirements and processes around our purposes and structure, our meetings and decision making, the appointing of staff and of leaders and the responsibilities of each, and provisions around the ownership of property. Please ask if you’d like to see a copy.

Our aim is to enable all our church decision making to be as inclusive as possible of all who identify with Ilam Baptist Church. We encourage everyone who identifies with Ilam Baptist Church to allow their name and contact details to be included in our Church Directory, *We Are Ilam* which operates as a record of those who identify as belonging. Please contact the church administrator if you would like to be added. A link to a digital copy of *We Are Ilam* is included in the weekly newsletter with the latest updates.

