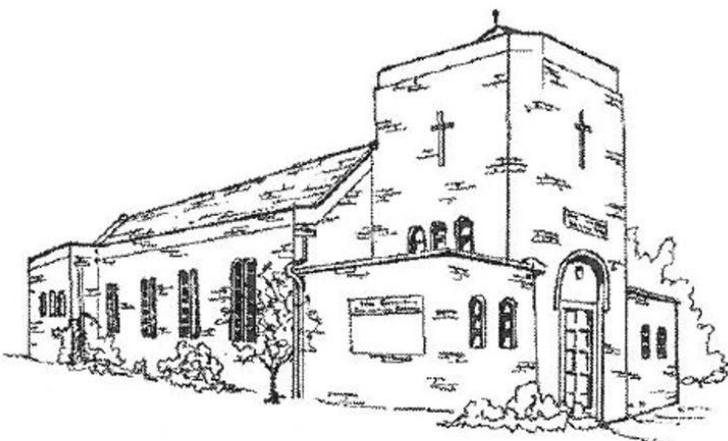




South Chingford
Congregational Church

**Are you looking for
a church to join?**



INTRODUCTION

We meet lots of people who, for whatever reason, find themselves looking at churches with a view to finding a suitable place of worship. Perhaps you have recently moved to the area, perhaps you have simply decided to get involved with a local church. We would love to help with this process in any way we can.

Two of the most important decisions you will make this side of eternity involve who you marry and joining a new church. One is certainly more permanent than the other, but both are vitally important and should not be viewed as disposable decisions. When joining a new church it should be obvious that the decision should be based on more than the name above the door, the quality of the website, or the denominational affiliation.

As well as the immediate bits of information people often look for (where the church is, service times, whether it is suitable for families and children etc), we believe there are deeper questions which are important to ask before committing to a church. We list some of these questions in the hope that you may find them helpful questions to ask and reflect on as you visit different churches – and give brief answers to those questions for our own church.

Whether you find that this church is the right place for you or decide to worship elsewhere, we pray that God would bless you, keep you, lead you and use you!

If you have any questions that are not covered in this booklet, or if you would like to discuss anything in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact our Pastor: call 020 8524 6753 or email pastor@chingfordcong.org.uk

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE CHURCH?

We are a **multi-cultural** church made up of individuals and families from all sorts of backgrounds. We are a **Bible-believing** church who place great importance on the teaching of Scripture. We are an **inclusive** church – the Bible describes the church as a body, and each of us as parts of said body with a vital role to play. Our church isn't complete unless everybody is involved and playing their part! We are an **outward-looking** church, passionate about engaging our local community, and in addition to our own outreach events we support a range of local and global mission partners. And we are a **growing** church – far from perfect, we make mistakes, and we learn as we

grow. But hopefully you will find us to be a **genuine, warm and welcoming** church!

COMING TO CHURCH – WHAT TO EXPECT

Our services are every Sunday @ 11am. For basic information and suggestions about what to expect when you visit us – including service details, children's groups, car parking etc, see our website: **chingfordcong.org.uk/what-to-expect**

FURTHER QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE JOINING A NEW CHURCH

Is the doctrinal position of the church clear and precise?

Our full Statement of Faith is available on our website: **chingfordcong.org.uk/what-we-believe**.

What is the main preaching philosophy of the leadership? We place great importance on preaching. We maintain a steady balance between the Old and New Testaments to ensure we teach the whole Bible, not just the easy/popular bits! Sunday teaching is a mixture of expository preaching (verse by verse through books of the Bible) and short topical series (applying God's word to specific questions and contemporary themes). We aim to strike the right balance between feeding the sheep and proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers.

Does the church practice church discipline? [Are there instances of church discipline on record in the last 10 years of the church's existence?] Yes, we do. Anybody and everybody is welcome to attend worship, but those who commit to Church Membership commit to living in obedience to the teaching of Scripture. It is the responsibility of the Pastor and Elders to hold Church Members to this, and where necessary we practice church discipline as per the teaching of the New Testament (including Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; Titus 1:13, 2:15, 3:10).

Is it too easy to join and too easy to leave the church? Is there a membership class or any other requirement to fulfil prior to becoming a church member? We encourage believers who see our church as their place of worship to commit to Church Membership. In order to ensure that we maintain a healthy and biblical system of membership rather than simply pushing numerical growth, the process of becoming a church member is as follows:

- Anybody wishing to become a church member must attend worship regularly for a period of time and demonstrate their commitment to the church.
- Anybody wishing to become a member will be interviewed by the Pastor and/or Elders, who will make a recommendation to the Church Meeting once they are satisfied with the individual's commitment to Christ and understanding of church membership.
- Recommendations of the Pastor and/or Elders must then be considered and approved by the Church Meeting before an individual is accepted into membership.
- Failure to regularly attend Sunday Worship and Church Meetings may result in an individual's membership being questioned and possibly terminated. Termination of membership may also occur in cases of sin where the biblical process of church discipline and restoration is unsuccessful and reaches this final stage.

What is the church government structure? Is the church led by one CEO pastor or a plurality of pastors? We operate a plurality of pastoral leadership. We have one full-time stipendiary Pastor, but spiritual oversight is the shared responsibility of our Pastor and Elders (the New Testament does not distinguish between these roles). Day-to-day management of the church is the responsibility of a team of Deacons, who also act as our Charity Trustees. As a congregational church, final authority rests with the Church Meeting – Church Members share the responsibility of discerning the mind of Christ.

Is the preaching of the church aimed at the heart and the head? Do the pastors of the church expect the members to engage the mind in worship? Yes. Jesus taught that the greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.” (Mark 12:30). We are also warned not to blindly accept what we are taught but to test all things (1 John 4:1). We are therefore careful in our preaching to ensure that scripture is understood, and that sufficient Bible references are given to enable people to verify things for themselves.

What is the temperature of the church regarding local and international mission? How involved is the church in mission? We are committed to local and global mission. We aim to ensure that there are regular outreach events organised by the church, and we encourage all members to get involved in these. In addition to this, we provide prayerful, practical and financial support to a range of local and global mission partners.

Does the church have a ministry to children and young people? We have Children's Church on Sundays (with the exception of the first Sunday each month when we worship all together). This provides age-appropriate teaching as well as games, craft and other activities. There are also a range of midweek groups for children and young people, and our Children's Church team run outreach events each term. All of our Children's Church leaders are mature believers with a passion for working with children. They have been carefully appointed and all hold enhanced DBS disclosures. We prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children, and all who work with children and young people are expected to comply with our Safeguarding policy and procedures at all times.

Is the church complementarian or egalitarian?

[Male leadership/preaching or mixed] **How is this conviction put on display in the leadership of the church?** We have an egalitarian view of church leadership. All leadership roles within the church (Pastor, Elders, Deacons, preachers etc) are open to males and

females. At present our Pastor and Elders are all male (historically the church has only accepted males for these roles, but this rule was changed by the Church Members in 2017). When we add the Deacons, our Leadership Team currently has an equal number of males and females. It is also diverse in age, ethnicity and culture.

What mode of baptism is practiced by the church? We practice believer's baptism by full immersion on the basis of an individual's profession of faith in Jesus Christ. We do not baptise/christen babies, but are happy to offer infant blessing and dedication.

Does the church have a culture of disciple making? We actively discourage seat-warming (turning up and keeping a seat warm on Sunday without any other commitment or involvement!), and encourage all members to grow as followers of Jesus in every area of life. Our Sunday teaching is focussed on living as disciples, and we encourage all members to commit to a midweek Bible study/discipleship group. This is a work in progress – at present approximately 1/3 of our members attend a weekly Bible study/discipleship group, but this is slowly improving.

Does the church take up an offering as part of the weekly worship? How is this process conducted? We believe that giving is an act of worship. We also believe it is the responsibility of Church Members to support the church financially – we receive no external funding and are entirely self-supporting. We take up an offering each week and encourage regular members of our church to give according to their means. This is not laboured, there are no pressure tactics and we do not preach a prosperity gospel. We are not a rich church and do not have extensive funds or financial reserves – historically we have always existed entirely by faith, and we continue to trust God to meet our needs each month.

How often does the church observe the Lord's Supper? Is the Lord's Supper open or closed? We share communion once a month (usually the fourth Sunday each month). We practice an open table

– everybody is welcome to receive communion in this church, you do not have to be a Church Member, be baptised, have your life perfectly in order, or be a certain age. We deliberately word it very simply – if you love the Lord Jesus, if you know that He loves you, and if you would like to receive communion as a way of remembering and giving thanks for His sacrifice for you, then we will gladly serve you communion.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

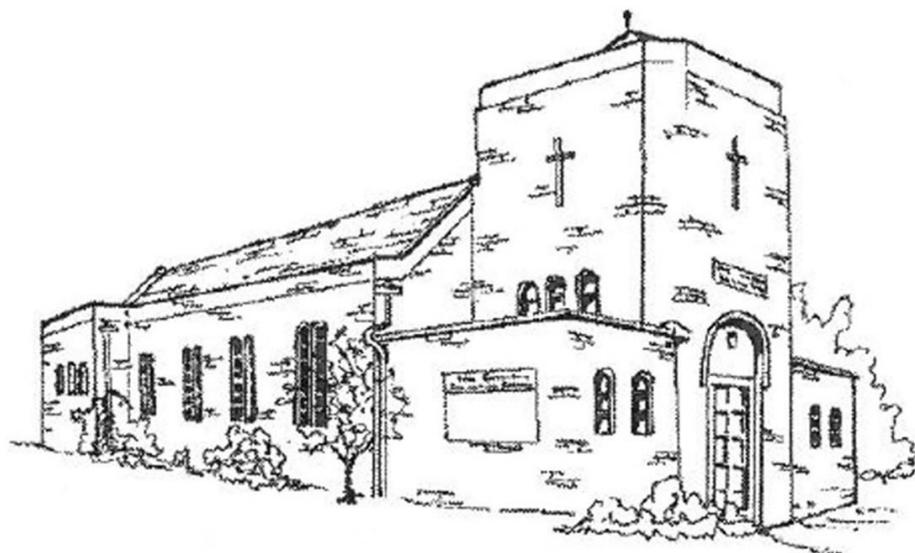
Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of questions, we hope it covers a number of important points which you may wish to consider when joining a new church. Just because a church has a particular name or denominational affiliation does not mean it is a healthy church. Take time to pray, discern and think through the membership of a specific church before committing yourself. That said, don't just hang out with a church indefinitely – commit yourself to church membership in a local church!

When settling into a church it would be a good idea to meet with the Pastor of the church in order to gain clarity on important theological and practical points that you may not be able to gather just by visiting the church for a few weeks.

We wish you the best in your search for a place of worship – if you believe this church may be the place for you, or if you would like any further information or discussion, please contact the Pastor to talk further.

Rev. Dave Simms (Pastor)

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