

## **GUIDE TO SCRABO**

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## **Introduction**

### **What is the Purpose of the Guide to Scrabo?**

This short guide is designed primarily for those who have recently become Christians or transferees from other churches who have little knowledge of Scrabo. Should you decide to commit to Scrabo we would like your decision to be a reasonably informed one. The guide sets out our vision, purpose, values, Statement of Faith and how we seek to fulfil these through our relationships, practices, activities and meetings. It provides an overview of our structures, ministries and beliefs demonstrating our focus on biblical fundamentals. We are conscious that the guide will evolve as we seek to remain relevant in a society that is constantly changing (1 Corinthians 9:22-23).

### **What type of church is Scrabo?**

Scrabo Hall is the name of the premises where we meet as a New Testament Church – a local expression of the one universal church. As a local church we seek to be focused on people rather than programs or buildings.

In 1905, as a result of a mission in the Methodist Church in Newtownards, a number of people became Christians and began to meet informally, in the open air, on Sunday afternoons at Killynether adjacent to Scrabo Tower. In 1907 a corrugated steel building was erected on Scrabo Hill to accommodate the group and this structure still stands today. With the development of the Scrabo Estate in the late 1950s it was considered appropriate to move nearer the population. In 1960 we moved to our present location in Mill Street where the work among young people grew with the establishment of Every Boys and Every Girls Rallies as well as the continuation of Sunday School. This led to the construction of a Sports Hall and later a number of classrooms. In 2006 the church took a further step of faith to help meet the growing needs of members and the wider community. The Youth Hall, although adjacent, had stood apart from the main building and a fundamental consideration in design was the linking together of all the facilities with a new auditorium including an entrance porch, large central foyer, training room / library, kitchen and toilets. The original building has been completely refurbished to provide a youth loft, crèche, store and a multifunctional breakout area.

Scrabo is an autonomous and independent fellowship, separate from any particular denomination. However, the leadership and congregation at Scrabo are thankful to God for our heritage within what some have described as the Brethren movement. The simplicity of celebrating the Lord's Supper together, baptism, plurality of leadership and autonomy of the local church are characteristics that remain important to the church here at Scrabo. However, we thank God that we have had the privilege of having interaction with other churches from different traditions who may 'do church' differently from us but who have a shared appreciation of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **What is the Vision, Purpose & Values?**

### **Vision**

To glorify God through adoration and service, to love one another and to make disciples.

### **Purpose**

Worship: Worship is central to everything. Our purpose must be that we magnify God in all that we do in the power of His Spirit.

Fellowship: Fellowship with one another helps to create an environment of pastoral love and support. As members of the body we seek to be a caring community. For this purpose we have a clear position on membership of the local church (see section below).

Mission: Evangelism is the call to 'Go into the world with the gospel'. Our mission is to reach into our local communities and the wider world with the message of God's love.

Discipleship: It is our desire to see people won for Christ and growing on their journey as Christians. We want to teach and train people so that they grow in maturity in their faith.

Service: Service (or ministry) is essential if the church is going to fulfil its mandate. We want to help everyone find their place so that they can use their gifts, talents and resources to make a difference.

### **Values**

It is our desire to function as an autonomous, Bible-based, evangelical church that holds and displays the following values:

- Devoted to God
- Love for one another
- Concerned for the lost
- Welcoming to guests
- Accessible and involved in local communities
- Accountable to God and each other

## **What do we believe? – Statement of Faith**

**The Bible:** The Bible, as originally given, is inspired by God and every word is infallible. Through it God speaks to us today. It is the only authority for what we believe and practice.

**God:** There is only one God, revealed in the Bible as three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, co-eternal and co-equal. God is sovereign and absolutely Holy.

**The Lord Jesus Christ:** The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became man, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He is both eternal God and a perfect, sinless man.

God is love, and through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross he has provided the way by which sinful people can be brought into a right relationship with Him. The death of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only sacrifice for sin and through it there is freedom from the guilt and penalty of sin.

On the third day after his crucifixion the Lord Jesus Christ was raised bodily from the dead. He appeared to many in His risen, glorified body. He ascended into heaven to the right hand of God the Father. He now intercedes for us and represents us as our advocate. The Lord Jesus Christ will return in person for those who have believed in Him, both those who have died and those who are alive, and together they will be with Him forever.

**The Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit indwells every believer from the moment of conversion. His major task is to glorify the Lord Jesus in the life of the believer, producing increasing likeness to Christ in character and behaviour. The Holy Spirit gives the power to fight against sin and witness to the world. He also gives gifts to build up the church.

**Man:** Man, created by God in his image and likeness, sinned. As a result all men are sinful, guilty and separated from God. All are subject to God's righteous condemnation.

**Salvation:** Salvation cannot be earned or deserved. It is God's free gift, given when a person repents and trusts Jesus Christ, acknowledging him as both Saviour and Lord. Because of God's undeserved love and mercy the person who trusts in Christ receives complete forgiveness of sins, becomes a child of God and receives eternal life. This eternal life cannot be lost provided the basis of a profession of faith is genuine and should be evidenced by a righteous life, love and correct doctrine (1 John). There will be a final judgment when those, who have not been saved and whose names are not found in the Book of Life, will suffer eternal separation from God.

**The Church:** There is one universal church, with many local expressions and together they form the body of Christ. Into this body, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is Head, all believers are baptised in the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion. This church is invisible in the sense that only God knows those who are true believers. Scrabo Hall holds a traditional view on marriage and values all human life from the point of conception.

## Ordinances

### **Lord's Supper (Communion)**

It is the privilege of every disciple to meet with other believers to worship the Lord. We invite all genuine believers to participate in the Lord's Supper because Christ accepts us. The Bible gives little detail on how this service should be conducted. Our worship is participative and people are free to lead as directed by the Holy Spirit, exercising the spiritual gifts God has given. We use the time to express our worship to the Lord Jesus and God the Father, principally through praise, thanksgiving, reading and sharing from Scripture. The focus of our Communion service is on worship and remembrance rather than on teaching or exposition. On the basis of scripture we believe that the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are for Christians only although non-Christians are welcome to attend the Communion Service as observers.

### **Baptism**

Baptism does not make us a Christian or bring forgiveness of sins. However, the New Testament does not envisage Christians who are not baptised by immersion. We consider it to be the responsibility and privilege of every believer to participate in this ordinance.

## Service

### **Evangelism / Mission – local & international**

Jesus expects us to continue His mission in the world. Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:18 and said, *"In the same way you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world."*

We have a responsibility in at least three spheres: immediate, local and global.

*Immediate world.* Most of us have family, friends, neighbours, class or work colleagues. These are our immediate world where our demonstration of the gospel will be visible as well as vocal.

*Local community.* There is the local community in which we live. Based on the addresses of the existing membership we judge this to cover a ten mile radius from Scrabo. There are some 160,000 non-regular church attenders in this catchment area. A significant mission field! In the immediate vicinity of Scrabo Hall there is a local population that is our responsibility to reach for Christ. A number of activities and events are organized with the view to reaching this local community.

Our primary opportunity to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to our local community is the Sunday Morning Service. We expect members to attend and encourage them to invite people from their immediate world. In addition there are a number of targeted ministries -- these are listed in the Schedules of Ministries and Activities at Appendices B & C. We arrange strategic outreach services, particularly at Christmas and Easter.

*Global mission.* Northern Ireland has a special responsibility to cross-cultural/global mission given its rich heritage. We take seriously the words of the Lord Jesus "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1: 8). It is for these reasons we are committed to global mission

### **Exercise of Spiritual Gifts**

We recognize that all members of the local church have important roles to play, gifts to exercise and functions to fulfil. Each of us has been uniquely designed and shaped by God to do certain things (Romans 9:20). There are a wide range of ministries / activities / necessary duties in Scrabo and these provide opportunities for service. Members are encouraged and expected to identify and exercise their gift(s). There are no unimportant people in the body of Christ and no "insignificant" ministries (1 Corinthians 12:18-22).

Our primary objective is the glory of God and to that end we seek, across the various ministries, to work together in fellowship and harmony. As members of "one body" we are intrinsically dependent on each other (1 Corinthians 12:14) and we endeavour to encourage one another as we live and serve together (Heb. 10:25).

### **Participation in church meetings**

All members of a local church have important roles to play, gifts to exercise and functions to fulfil. At our breaking of bread service and prayer meetings our desire is to encourage all members of the church family to participate as the Holy Spirit leads; men and women, young and old...and those in between. Our breaking of bread service is not an occasion for Bible teaching; rather it is our opportunity to collectively worship God through prayers, sharing of scripture and song as we remember and magnify the Lord Jesus. This is not primarily a time to receive but rather to give and it is good to come prepared but not determined to participate. Other roles that all members can profitably engage in include the chairing of meetings and conducting interviews. We are not prescriptive regarding the wearing of head coverings by ladies encouraging them to exercise their considered personal conviction before the Lord in this matter without discord. In Romans 14 the principle of accepting one another is commended on matters that are not fundamental to the faith.

We recognise the role of 'elder' within the church to be male (1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:6-9) and teaching at church meetings to be the responsibility of the elders and other men (1 Timothy 2:12) invited by them to do so.

For clarification we see a distinction between church meetings and church activities. All members, including the leadership, may be expected to endeavour to attend church meetings (the breaking of bread, prayer times, Sunday morning and

evening services) whereas other church activities are generally for specific groups within the church. In 1 Corinthians 1:2, and elsewhere in that letter, we understand Paul to be referring to occasions when the whole church in Corinth would be gathered together. We recognise that attendance at church activities is restricted and explains our practice of permitting women to, for example, teach in Sunday School and preach at ladies' meetings.

### **Stewardship (Money Matters)**

As Scrabo is an independent and autonomous church we meet all our expenditure from members offerings and gifts. We believe that the work of God should be funded by the people of God. Giving, we believe, is not primarily a financial issue but a spiritual one. What we give, in proportion to our means, is a reflection of our appreciation of God's grace and our sense of spiritual wealth in Christ. We have been entrusted with resources that are God's rather than possessions that are ours.

There are offerings boxes adjacent to the rear doors of the main auditorium.

Our treasurer can provide details of standing order arrangements and how giving can be maximised through the use of gift aid for tax payers. If we consider Scrabo to be our spiritual home, where we are fed and meet our spiritual family, we suggest it is fitting to make a contribution as the Lord enables.

A Finance Team (made up of the treasurer, assistant treasurer, accountant, a trustee (who is also a deacon) and a liaison elder) manages and provides support to the elders on all matters of church finance. The Finance Team provides a full report to the church on an annual basis. Church accounts are independently audited every two years and the annual accounts are available to any member upon request and in the members' sections of the Scrabo website.

A full financial policy is available upon request from the treasurer or one of the elders.

### **Relationships**

#### **Pastoral Care**

Each member of the church is part of the body of Christ and therefore we are all inter-dependent and should have equal concern for each other (1 Corinthians 12). Also, Galatians 6:2 encourages us to carry each other's burdens.

We recognize that pastoral care is essentially about people and their importance as individuals and how they are shepherded within the church fellowship. We also recognise that this applies to both spiritual and temporal needs.

While the elders, as shepherds of God's flock, clearly have a particular responsibility for pastoral care (1 Peter 5:2), we have developed a pastoral care strategy that seeks to involve others in this important ministry. The elders are

supported in a structured way by a Pastoral Team, which meets monthly, and by other members of the fellowship who quietly go about the work of caring.

Pastoral care is therefore exercised at 4 levels:

- Elder visit / contact
- Pastoral Team member visit / contact
- Home Group support
- Visits / contact by caring individual members

We want to provide appropriate responses to pastoral needs by way of help or encouragement. It is important to have a flow of relevant information for prayer. We fully recognise the need for confidentiality and only share sensitive matters for prayer as appropriate.

As a fellowship we trust our pastoral care ministry operates in accordance with our Lord's 'command' of love for one another (John 13: 34 - 35)

The Pastoral Care Strategy is available upon request from one of the elders.

### **Maintaining Unity, Resolving Differences & Discipline:**

In any community, including a community of believers, it may be that relationships become strained, or indeed, break down for a variety of reasons. In handling such difficulties there are biblical principles to follow and a brief summary is given below. The aim in all of the steps is that there will be reconciliation and restoration.

1. Go to the individual(s) personally, as the first step in the reconciliation process. This should be done graciously, directly and privately (Matthew 18:15, Luke 17:3-4).
2. If no confession or restoration is effected a second meeting should be arranged taking one or two others with you letting the person(s) know (Matthew 18:16)
3. Should there still be no resolution, then bring the matter to the attention of the elders (Matthew 18:17a). "Tell it to the church" means that the whole church becomes involved and to be done in an orderly way the elders should give a lead to the church.
4. If no confession or restoration is effected on the third visit by the elders it may be that church discipline becomes necessary. The exercise of church discipline has a number of aims but primarily restoration of the offender and it should ideally be a temporary measure rather than a permanent state (2 Corinthians 2:5-11)

The purpose of all of the above is to "gain" or "win over" the person.

### **Marriage**

We consider the institution of marriage to be central to God's plan for the stability of family life and the purity of intimate relationships between a man and a woman who are fully committed to each other in love. The commitment to each other and to God in a marriage relationship is the fundamental building block for the well-being of the family, local church and wider society.

We believe in the biblical teaching of the principle of the 'unequal yoke' (2 Corinthians 6:14) i.e. it is not in God's purposes for those who are truly saved to enter into marriage with those who do not share their faith.

### **Baby Thanksgiving**

We do not practice the christening of infants however, on request of the parents, we arrange baby thanksgivings. This involves a public commitment by the parents to bring the child up in the ways of God. In order for this commitment to be declared by the parents, it is expected that one or both parents have themselves already come to faith in Christ. This service also involves a personal commitment by the members of the church to help, pray for and support the parents to be faithful to God and to help teach and train the child in the ways of the Lord, so that he/she might one day come to a personal faith in Christ.

### **Governance**

#### **Elders & Deacons**

Responsibility for leadership within the Scrabo church fellowship is carried by elders & deacons. The qualifications necessary for elders and deacons are given in 1 Timothy 3: 2-7 and Titus 1: 6-9. Elders are called to be examples, teachers, pastors and overseers who are to care for the members of the church family in accordance with the Word of God. It is the responsibility of the members of the church to recognise, honour, support and obey their elders in all matters of church life. The elders are responsible to ensure that there is biblical discipline in the church. Deacons are called to the work of practical service, taking responsibility for material aspects and working with and supporting the elders. The current elders and deacons are listed in the overview of Scrabo

#### **Leadership Teams**

The elders and deacons are supported by a number of leadership teams. Each leadership team is led by an elder and made up of other suitable members of the fellowship who have an interest and gifting in particular areas. The leadership teams take responsibility in key areas of church life to assist in fulfilling our purposes. These are:

- Discipleship Team - with primary responsibility for planning and implementing the teaching program with a supporting sub-group that coordinates the Sunday Services.
- Evangelism Team - that supports our current evangelistic ministries; develops and implements an evangelistic strategy in the church and local community.
- Youth Team - that supports our current youth ministries and encourages the discipling of young people associated with Scrabo. This team also develops and implements evangelistic events for youth in our community.
- Care Team - that supports the elders in the exercise of pastoral care within the pastoral care strategy.
- Prayer Team - that encourages prayer as a crucial aspect of church life and co-ordinates prayer ministry within Scrabo.

- Praise Team - arranges and co-ordinates music ministry and thereby encourages adoration, praise and worship within the fellowship.
- Missionary Team - encourages commitment to and participation in, short and long term missionary activity and supports missionaries from Scrabo. The missionary team is responsible for implementation of the Scrabo Missions Strategy – copy available upon request from one of the elders.
- Finance Team - manages and provides support to the elders on all matters of church finance.

### **Trustees**

Scrabo Hall Christian Assembly (Scrabo Hall) is registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland – NIC100354. The governing document is a Trust Deed which details the roles and responsibilities of trustees who have a duty of care to administer and manage the 'Charity'. They have delegated the spiritual leadership of the charity to the elders and they recognize their responsibility to fulfil their duties having regard to the spiritual direction of the charity as set by the elders. A majority of the trustees are, and will continue to be, elders.

### **Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults**

As a church, we commit ourselves to the nurturing, protecting and safekeeping of children, young people and vulnerable adults entrusted to our care. We recognise that all of those involved in working with these groups carry a significant responsibility. The Elders, on behalf of the church, take seriously and are committed to supporting and training those who work with children and young people.

We undertake to comply with all legislative requirements and adhere to relevant codes of practice and guidance set by statutory agencies for the protection, safety and well-being of children, young people and vulnerable adults entrusted to us.

Scrabo Youth Ministries has a Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults policy that has been legally validated and submitted to the South Eastern Education and Library Board (Youth Services) for quality assurance purposes. Each worker is vetted through Access NI.

A full copy of the policy is displayed on several notice boards within Scrabo Hall and is available from the Elders on request.

### **Membership**

#### **Why have a defined membership?**

Membership in a local church involves commitment to worshipping God together, encouraging and serving one another, being involved in mission and being accountable to each other before God. The New Testament presents three strands of evidence for church membership.

1) Church Leadership. The point is that without membership, who is it that the New Testament says must submit to leaders? This is how the New Testament explains the relationship of the church to the leaders. Hebrews 13:17 *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account”*. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 *“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work”*. 1 Timothy 5:17 *“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching”*. This leadership and submission could not function where there is no membership defining who has made the commitment to be led and who have been identified as leaders? The concept of church membership is necessary to take these commands seriously and practically.

2) Pastoral Responsibility. Consider Acts 20:28 where Paul tells the elders how to care for their flock. *“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”* This verse does not say or imply that the elders are not to visit unbelievers or those who are not yet members. However, it does make clear that their first responsibility is to a particular flock. It is therefore necessary for this flock to have definition and limits. The elders need to know who they are responsible for and for whom will they give an account to God?

3) Decision-making and Discipline. Consider the implication of the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17.

*“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and tax collector”*.

Church membership is therefore essential to define the group that will have to deal with this sensitive matter of exhorting an unrepentant person, and finally come to a conclusion regarding their standing in the community. This passage provides guidance and authority for excluding a person from the church so that he becomes to you “as a Gentile and tax collector” – that is an unbeliever. The same kind of exclusion is referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:1 –5. By strong implication therefore someone needs to be a member of the church from which they can be excluded (but clearly as a last resort). The person’s liability to exclusion from the church implies that the one being charged is a member of a group (the church).

### **What are the benefits of Church membership?**

The Christian life is not simply a matter of believing; it is also belonging. Our perspective on membership is more than simply attendance; rather it is active participation in the ministries of the local church. In a society that is fragmenting and falling apart it is good to know that we have a spiritual home and family to support us.

The benefits of being identified with a local group of Christians are significant and enable us individually and collectively fulfil the purposes of the church at Scrabo:

Worship: We are able to join with other Christians and demonstrate our gratitude to God for his character and works by thanking him with our words and serving him with our lives.

Fellowship: Fellowship with one another helps to create an environment of pastoral love and support. Membership provides a spiritual family to support and encourage us in life's crises and good times (Galatians 6:1-2; Hebrews 10:24-25).

Mission: Membership enables us to support each other in fulfilling our mission to reach our immediate, local and global world for Christ.

Discipleship: Membership helps identify our commitment as members of the body of Christ (Ephesians 2:19; Romans 12:5) and strengthens our faith by learning the truth of God's Word and applying biblical principles to our lifestyle. It places us under the protection of a leadership who consider themselves responsible before God for the spiritual well-being of the flock (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28-29). Membership also gives a degree of accountability to help us grow (Ephesians 5:21).

Service: Service (or ministry) is essential if the church is going to fulfil its mandate. Membership enables people to find their place so that they can use their gifts and talents to make a difference.

### **How do I become a member?**

The first step is to attend a Membership Class. Attending the membership class does not commit you to church membership – rather it is an information session and opportunity will be given to ask questions. Should you decide to pursue membership, the process is as follows:

- i) Read the Scrabo Guide.
- ii) Let the church leadership know of your interest to join the church.
- iii) Meet with a couple of elders (some of the matters that may be covered at this interview are outlined in a membership pack which you will receive at the membership class)
- iv) Following the interview, a recommendation is made to the full eldership.
- v) Upon acceptance, you will be formally welcomed into the church family. Normally this will take place both at the Lord's Supper and at the Family Service.
- vi) Your name will be added to the membership list in the members section of the Scrabo website and will be formally notified to the trustees at the next trustees' meeting.

### **Personal Covenant**

It is optional to sign the Personal Covenant below, which is between you and the Lord only. It is not used as any form of contract but rather as a confirmation of what you have committed to in membership of the local church that meets at Scrabo Hall.

**In my Christian life and through membership of the local church that meets at Scrabo Hall I will seek to glorify God through adoration and service, loving other members and making disciples.**

I will seek to fulfil this personal and collective vision by committing myself to the following purposes:

**Worship:** I will join with other Christians and demonstrate my gratitude to God for his character and works in corporate worship by thanking him with my words and serving him with my life. In this regard attendance and participation at the Lord's Supper will be a priority for me. I will also seek to worship God in my life through involvement in at least one ministry within Scrabo.

**Fellowship:** I will seek to create an environment of pastoral love and support. My support for the church at Scrabo will be through encouraging, showing practical support where appropriate and praying for other members both privately and in attendance at the church prayer meeting and/or Home Group when possible. I accept responsibility for maintaining unity within the church and I will respond to any differences of opinion in a way that restores unity in a biblical way by "having the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus".

**Mission:** I will, commensurate with my gifting, actively support the great commission to 'Go into the world with the gospel'. I will pray for local and international mission and will contribute to the extension of God's kingdom world-wide through the talents, gifts and resources that God has given me.

**Discipleship:** As a member of Scrabo I wish to be identified as a genuine believer being strengthened in my faith through learning the truth of God's Word and applying biblical principles to my lifestyle. I accept my responsibility to other members of the fellowship and subject myself to the authority of the leadership at Scrabo as I seek to grow in my walk with God. (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28-29 & Ephesians 5:21).

**Service:** I will commit myself to the service of God, the community and the church at Scrabo by identifying and using my gifts, talents and resources to build up the local church and to glorify God.

**SIGNED.....DATE.....**

**Appendix A – Overview of Scrabo Teams – see Members Section**

**Appendix B -- Schedule of Activities/Meetings – see Members Section**

**Appendix C – Team and Ministry Contacts – see Members Section**