

# 9 Journey to Membership

## The Mission of God through His People: The Covenant

### Goals of the Membership Sessions

- Explore what it means to join and be a member of Restoration Covenant Church
- Emphasize our commitment to God's mission in the world
- Introduce the group of churches we are a part of (denomination)
- Take a deeper look at our congregation
- Increase the sense of belonging, ownership and commitment to Restoration
- Build and deepen friendships

### Objectives for this Session

- Become acquainted with the Covenant's history, theology and distinctives
- Explore how the Covenant's distinctives are expressed at Restoration
- Continue the process of discovering membership at Restoration

### Discussion Starter

Let's reintroduce ourselves. Give your name and then share:

What you know about your first, middle and last names. Where did each come from and why were they chosen?

Share a unique church story. It can be good, bad or ugly—just don't use the name of the church, please.

## *The Invitation to God's Mission through Jesus: To Be the Church*

God's mission has always been \_\_\_\_\_ with people. Since people rebelled, it has been a mission of \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Differences in Faith, Doctrine and Conduct**

Christ-followers have sought to live faithfully in response to the love and grace God extended to them through Jesus Christ. In each new era, location and culture, pioneering groups of Christians have adapted the expression of their faith, beliefs and behaviors in order to declare and demonstrate the good news of Jesus, salvation and God's kingdom in a way that the world around them could understand so that they might be restored with God.

Just as the early Christians grappled with faith in Christ, doctrine and conduct in and outside the church, the Church today grapples with the same core issues. One of the benefits to being a part of a larger group of churches, a denomination, is we are less likely to bring harm to the gospel, ourselves or others. If you would like further study on how the early church did this, read Colossians 2:8-9,16-22 and see what one group of Jesus followers were struggling with.

## *God's Mission through the Covenant*

The "Covenant" is the shorthand name of the Evangelical Covenant Church, a church denomination which began as an community of mission friends.

### **church**

A group of people who:

- know and love God by believing in Jesus and living in the power of the Spirit
- invite others to discover and follow Jesus, especially the lost, lonely and hurting
- create hope-filled communities where people can experience God's love, grace and power
- partner in God's mission to restore hope to the broken places and people of our world

### **denomination**

A group of churches who have enough unity in their faith, doctrine and conduct to work together in fulfilling God's mission in the world.

"The Covenant is not a church organization in the ordinary sense, but a mission society having churches as its members. These churches have consolidated together because of the missionary spirit which led them to missionary enterprises too large for any single church to undertake." —*The Covenant's description of itself from the 1893 World's Fair.*

### **expression**

The Covenant began in Sweden as a group of people who expressed love for God, love for God's word and love for neighbor.



4. We affirm the church as a fellowship of believers.

5. We affirm a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.

6. We affirm the reality of freedom in Christ.

### **Key Distinctives**

The Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) is known for:

- emphasizing what unites Christians, rather than what sets them apart from each other. The essentials are Jesus and the Bible, stated historically in two questions: Who is Jesus and how are you walking with him? How is the Bible affecting your life?
- its stance on baptism. We affirm both infant and believer baptism. We see the Scriptures as unclear on modes of baptism and we have decided not to be divided over this.
- its affirmation of women in ministry at all levels of leadership, including the role of lead or solo pastor.
- its authentic and growing ethnic diversity.
- its congregational polity, meaning the local congregation holds the highest authority over its mission and ministry, while churches work together in mission.
- understanding that discipleship fully embraces evangelism together with compassion, mercy and justice.

### *God's Mission through Restoration Covenant Church*

Restoration's dream is to see all people living in a restored relationship with Jesus and creativity sharing their God-given abilities to bring hope to the broken around us. We'll talk about Restoration's key distinctives in Session 4.

## *Going Deeper*

### **Common Christian Affirmations**

You may be interested in familiarizing yourself with these common Christian affirmations.

- We are an **apostolic** church. We confess Jesus Christ and the faith of the apostles as recorded in the Holy Scriptures. We believe the authority of the Bible is supreme in all matters of faith, doctrine, and conduct, and is to be trusted. “Where is it written?” was and is the Covenant’s touchstone of discussion with regard to faith and practice.
- We are a **catholic** church. The word catholic literally means universal. This means we understand ourselves to be a part of the community of believers that began with Jesus’ first followers, is alive today, and will continue until Christ comes again.
- We are a **Reformation** church. We stand in the mainstream of a church renewal movement of the sixteenth century called the Protestant Reformation. Especially important is the belief that we are saved by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, not by anything that we can do. The Covenant Church is also shaped by Pietism, a renewal movement that originated in seventeenth-century Europe and emphasized the need for a life that is personally connected to Jesus Christ, a reliance on the Holy Spirit, and a call to service in the world.
- We are an **evangelical** church. A series of religious awakenings flowered in Europe and America during the nineteenth century and provided rich soil for the early growth of the Covenant Church with our passion for mission. Evangelicals historically have been characterized by a strong insistence on biblical authority, the absolute necessity of new birth, Christ’s mandate to evangelize the world, the continuing need for education and formation in a Christian context, and a responsibility for benevolence and the advancement of social justice.

### **Covenant Affirmations**

Now look again at the list of Covenant Affirmations and think about how your life reflects each one. They are more fully described on the next page.

- The centrality of the word of God
- The necessity of the new birth
- A commitment to the whole mission of the church
- The church as a fellowship of believers
- A conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit
- The reality of freedom in Christ

## *Covenant Affirmations*

**We affirm the centrality of the word of God.** We believe the Bible is the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct. The dynamic, transforming power of the word of God directs the church and the life of each Christian. This reliance on the Bible leads us to affirm both men and women as ordained ministers and at every level of leadership. It is the reason we pursue ethnic diversity in our church and is the inspiration for every act of compassion, mercy, and justice.

**We affirm the necessity of the new birth.** The Apostle Paul wrote, “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17, TNIV). New birth in Christ means committing ourselves to him and receiving forgiveness, acceptance, and eternal life. It means being alive in Christ, and this life has the qualities of love and righteousness, joy and peace. New birth is only the beginning. Growing to maturity in Christ is a lifelong process for both individuals and communities of believers. God forms and transforms us—and it is through people transformed by Christ that God transforms the world.

**We affirm a commitment to the whole mission of the Church.** The early Covenanters were known as “Mission Friends”—people of shared faith who came together to carry out God’s mission both far and near. Mission for them and for us includes evangelism, Christian formation, and ministries of compassion, mercy, and justice. We follow Christ’s two central calls. The Great Commission sends us out into all the world to make disciples. The Great Commandment calls us to love the Lord our God and our neighbors as ourselves.

**We affirm the Church as a fellowship of believers.** Membership in the Covenant Church is by confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ and is open to all believers. We observe baptism and Holy Communion as sacraments commanded by Jesus. We practice both infant and believer baptism. We believe in the priesthood of all believers—that is, we all share in the ministry of the church. We also affirm that God calls some men and women into professional, full-time ministry. The church is not an institution, organization, or building. It is a grace-filled fellowship of believers who participate in the life and mission of Jesus Christ. It is a family of equals: as the New Testament teaches that within Christian community there is to be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, but all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28)

**We affirm a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.** The Covenant Church affirms the Trinitarian understanding of one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The New Testament tells us that the Holy Spirit works both within individuals and among them. We believe it is the Holy Spirit who instills in our hearts a desire to turn to Christ, and who assures us that Christ dwells within us. It is the Holy Spirit who enables our obedience to Christ and conforms us to his image, and it is the Spirit in us that enables us to continue Christ’s mission in the world. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to us as individuals and binds us together as Christ’s body.

**We affirm the reality of freedom in Christ.** The Apostle Paul wrote, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1, TNIV). This freedom is a gift of God in Christ, and it manifests itself in a right relationship with God and others. It is not a private gift to be used selfishly, but is given to serve the community and the world. For Paul, this freedom means that we are set free from the power of those things that on their own tend to divide. United in Christ, we offer freedom to one another to differ on issues of belief or practice where the biblical and historical record seems to allow for a variety of interpretations of the will and purposes of God. We in the Covenant Church seek to focus on what unites us as followers of Christ, rather than on what divides us.

*Many Branches, One in Christ*

