



THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP

session two

The Mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church

Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.



ECC THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP — SESSION TWO

**Membership is a commitment
to grow deeper in Christ
and go further in mission
together as the church.**

Gather

OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION

Acquaint the group with the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC)

- History
- Distinctives and theology
- Structure and resources

Explore how the ethos of the ECC finds expression in your local church.

Family Name Discussion

What do you know about your family name?

Interact

MISSION OF THE ECC: INTRODUCTION

A Denomination

The Ethos of the ECC—"Mission Friends"

The term "mission friends" was an early nickname given to Covenant people. From the beginning Covenanters have sought to build a culture of friendship in Christ, pursuing the mission of God together. We hope to embody that same spirit today in this congregation.

We know that we can accomplish far more by joining a missional movement with others than we could ever accomplish on our own. We are a people who are "in it together," joining God and each other to fulfill God's mission in the world.

The Covenant Describes Itself

“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

The Mission of the ECC

From our inception the Evangelical Covenant Church has been in it together to see

- ...more disciples,
- ...among more populations,
- ...in a more caring and just world.

Physical Description—Quick Facts

- 885
- 11
- Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East North Africa
- More than 850
- 33%
- Growth
- Chicago

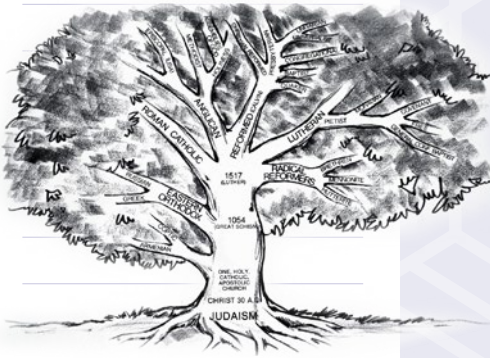
MISSION OF THE ECC: OUR ROOTS

Character Description: The Identity Question

What is at the heart of the ECC? What makes the Covenant the Covenant?

The Enduring Commitments of the Covenant

	COMMITMENT	HISTORICAL INFLUENCE	SENTIMENT	COMMITMENT SUMMARY
1)	The Authority of Scripture	Protestant Reformation	Where is it written?	Biblical
2)	New/Deeper Life in Christ	Pietism	How goes your walk?	Devotional
3)	Evangelism/Compassion	Moravian Mission	Lost/found; hurting/helped	Missional
4)	The Body of Christ	Founding Rationale	“I am a companion to all who fear thee” (PSALM 119:63, KJV)	Connectional



WESTERN DENOMINATIONAL ROOTS

Historical influences

- The Protestant Reformation
- Pietism
- Moravian mission
- Founding rationale

Continuing influences of the Evangelical Covenant Church today:

- The Evangelical Movement
- The Global and Multiethnic Kingdom of God

MISSION OF THE ECC: OUR CORE BELIEFS

The Covenant's essential beliefs are summed up in six affirmations.

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

The Centrality of the Word of God

We are people of the Book. Our first affirmation is the centrality of the word of God.

As we read in the brochure *What Does the Covenant Church Believe? A Brief Look at 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 in 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.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 TIMOTHY 3:16).

See also PSALM 19:7-11; HEBREWS 4:12; ISAIAH 55:11.

Reflection:

- 1) How have you seen this belief in the centrality of Scripture lived out in our church?
- 2) How does God's word influence your life?

The Necessity of New Birth

We believe that God desires a personal relationship with us. This is expressed in the affirmation of the necessity of the new birth.

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, NIV). New birth in Christ means committing ourselves to Christ 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 individual and community believers. God forms and transforms us, and it is through people transformed by Christ that God transforms the world. —*What Does the Covenant Church Believe?*

A Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit**The Holy Spirit animates us to go deeper in Christ.**

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 this 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. —*What Does the Covenant Church Believe?*

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."—EPHESIANS 3:16-19, NIV

See also JOHN 15:5; MATTHEW 21:13.

Reflection:

- 1) How have you seen our beliefs in the necessity of new birth and our conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit lived out at our church?
- 2) How are you going deeper in Christ in your own life?

A Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church

We have always been a missional people. From the very beginning, we have recognized God's gracious invitation to join in the mission. As a result, we affirm our commitment to the whole mission of the church.

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, and the Great Commandment calls us to love the Lord our God and our neighbors as ourselves. —*What Does the Covenant Church Believe?*

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." —ACTS 1:8

"He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." —MICAH 6:8

SEE ALSO: COLOSSIANS 1:28; MATTHEW 10:39.

Reflection:

- 1) How have you seen us being missional at our church?
- 2) How do you see the church helping you to reach the lost, help the hurting, and address the causes of that hurt?

The Church as a Fellowship of Believers

We are people who go deeper in Christ and further in God's mission together.

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 nor female, but all are one in Christ Jesus (GALATIANS 3:28). —*What Does the Covenant Church Believe?*

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” —ACTS 2:42-47

SEE ALSO EPHESIANS 4:11-16; HEBREWS 10:24-25.

Reflection:

- 1) How have you seen us being connectional at our church?
- 2) What does it mean to you to become part of a community of faith?

The Reality of Freedom in Christ

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, NIV). 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. —*What Does the Covenant Church Believe?*

MISSION OF THE ECC AND THE MINISTRY OF OUR CHURCH

Helping persons grow deeper in Christ so we can go further in mission, reaching out to the lost and hurting. We do this through:

- Global ministries of the ECC
- Regional ministries of our conference
- Local ministries of our congregation

Denominational Offices

The ECC, at both denominational and conference levels, serves local congregations through five mission priorities:

- Start and Strengthen Churches
- Make and Deepen Disciples
- Love Mercy Do Justice
- Develop Leaders
- Serve Globally

Our Conference

Integrate

DISTINCTIVES OF THE ECC

Our Covenant affirmations have shaped a set of key distinctives that set us apart from many other church movements:

- The ECC is known for emphasizing what unites us, rather than what sets us apart from each other. "In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all things charity."
- The ECC celebrates the sacrament of baptism as commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20, and we affirm both infant and believer baptism.
- The ECC is known for its affirmation of women in ministry at all levels of leadership.

- The ECC is known for its authentic and growing ethnic diversity.
- The ECC is known for its sexual ethic that affirms faithfulness in heterosexual marriage and celibacy in singleness as the Christian standard for human sexuality.
- The ECC is known for its congregational polity.
- The ECC is known for understanding that discipleship means fully embracing evangelism together with compassion, mercy, and justice.

Essentially, you could simply say this of the Covenant:

- We love God.
- We love God's word.
- We love God's world.
- We love God's family.
- We strive to obey the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

Together we join in the mission of God to see more disciples among more populations in a more caring and just world.

Going Deeper

The Covenant has five mission priorities.

Which of these areas interests you most and why?

- Start and Strengthen Churches
- Make and Deepen Disciples
- Love Mercy Do Justice
- Develop Leaders
- Serve Globally

Set apart 15 minutes this week to learn more at covchurch.org about the mission priority and ways you can engage with the Covenant in going deeper in Christ, further in mission, together.

Ask God what is a practical way you can engage in the mission priority?

SOME IDEAS:

- **Start and Strengthen Churches.** Pray for new and existing churches. Watch stories of church planters and/or existing churches who are becoming healthy and missional. covchurch.org/what-we-do/strengthen-churches
- **Make and Deepen Disciples.** Read through the Bible with your community group or church with Immerse: The Covenant Bible Experience. To learn more and to purchase books, go to immerse.covchurch.org. Or to learn more about BLESS, an intentional pathway for persons of all ages who follow Jesus to become like Jesus and join the mission of Jesus, at covchurch.org/bless.
- **Love Mercy Do Justice.** Read a resource from this list: covchurch.org/justice/resources/. Learn more about racial righteousness and sign up for Sankofa or Journey to Mosaic at covchurch.org/justice/racial-righteousness.
- **Develop Leaders.** Pray for the pastoral leadership of your local church and the Covenant denomination. Learn more about Project Deborah, which identifies and encourages women pastoral leaders, at covchurch.org/vocational-ministry/women/project-deborah/.
- **Serve Globally.** Join Covenanters in praying for missionaries and national partners for the transformation of the world through God's power. Sign up for daily prayer emails, order the Serve Globally prayer calendar, or access other resources here: covchurch.org/sg/resources/. Give financially to extend the whole mission of God through Serve Globally partners, ministries, and missionaries around the world at covchurch.org/sg/get-involved/#give

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Additional resources can be found in the appendix on the next page.

We encourage you to go to covchurch.org to explore more of who the Covenant is and what the Covenant does.

APPENDIX

The Meaning of Membership: Session Two Resources

Denominational tree diagram from *One Body, Many Members*

covchurch.org/One-Body-Many-Members-Diagram.pdf

Historical Influences of the Covenant

covchurch.org/Historical-Influences.pdf

What Does the Covenant Church Believe? A Brief Look at Covenant Affirmations

covchurch.org/Covenant-Affirmations-Brief-Form.pdf

***Covenant Affirmations* booklet**

covbooks.com/products/covenant-affirmations-booklet

Called and Gifted (Women in Ministry)

covchurch.org/resources/called-and-gifted-material/

Policy on Baptism

covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2011/02/2-Policy-on-Baptism.pdf

What Does It Mean Receive a Child into the Church?

covchurch.org/Infant-Baptism.pdf

Six-Fold Test

covchurch.org/resources/six-fold-test

Embrace (human sexuality)

covchurch.org/embrace



The Evangelical Covenant Church

MAKE & DEEPEN DISCIPLES

The purpose of *The Meaning of Membership: Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.* resource is to identify what it means for individuals to become members of an Evangelical Covenant Church. Membership is a commitment to grow deeper in Christ and further in mission together.

***The Meaning of Membership* covers:**

SESSION ONE: The Mission of God

SESSION TWO: The Mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church

SESSION THREE: The Mission of Our Church

SESSION FOUR: The Mission of a Member

It is our prayer that together we will grow deeper in Christ and further in mission. Thank you for taking the time to explore what it means to be a part of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

CovChurch.org/Membership