



# BECOMING A *Beloved* COMMUNITY

## SIX-FOLD TEST FOR MULTIETHNIC MINISTRY

### BIBLE STUDY

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#### INTRODUCTION

*This small group discipleship resource is intended to help Covenant churches and affiliate ministries deepen their understanding and application of the Six-Fold Test for Multiethnic Ministry (SFT), increase intercultural agility, and catalyze the pursuit of justice, equity, and racial righteousness. When taken together the Six Ps can be a powerful tool to help the Evangelical Covenant Church lead with equity and cultural intelligence, and to leverage diversity.*

#### Pressing Forward in Ethnic Ministry and Diversity

The Covenant takes seriously both the mission of Christ and the unity of Christ's church. These two burdens converge at the point of pressing forward in ethnic ministry and diversity in our mission. The range of population composition in the United States and Canada compels us to make sure we are able to address unique mission opportunities among multiple populations. It is likewise motivated by our commitment to the unity of Christ's church.

The world is fractured along the lines of ethnicity, culture, language, class, and gender. But Christ has broken down the dividing walls! We find unity in him. Likewise, his coming kingdom will transcend all that divides us. We believe the church here on earth is richer and stronger as it lives in the light of that future reality.

The Covenant has made significant strides in the past several years. Yet we believe that multiethnic ministry has multi-dimensional implications. Unless this dimensionality is approached with wisdom and resolve, the Covenant cannot expect to fare differently than other groups who have had similar intent, only to pull back. Therefore, the Covenant has adopted a six-fold multi-dimensional test. The Six-Fold Test is not meant to be sequential but rather with action moving forward on multiple fronts.



## LESSON ONE

# Population

*Is the Covenant reaching increasing numbers of people among increasing numbers of populations?*

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SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: JOHN 4:1-42

## Learning Objectives

- To understand, believe, and take seriously Christ's call to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19-20). Evangelism is the "what." Reaching people near and far, who are both the same as and different from us in an ongoing, unfolding pursuit is the "who."
- To experience the grace, comfort, and confidence of knowing that Christ-followers are ambassadors of God's love and salvation to all people in every place.
- To engage the spiritual and cultural preparation necessary to make disciples in an increasingly multicultural, multiethnic generationally diverse world.

## The Scene

I've probably heard 50 sermons about this passage and the "woman at well." This encounter with Jesus changed her life. So significant was her transformation that her testimony caused many from her town to believe in Jesus and be changed. Her story was so powerful that some people from that town invited Jesus to stay and visit.

It's a great story, but our understanding is incomplete if we do not consider the geography, ethnicity, culture, and history of the Samaritans and Jews. What makes stories of transformation like this one noteworthy is where they take place and with whom.

## Perspective

Sometimes in life we are compelled to do something that seems to make no sense to other people. This passage begins with this sentence: "Now he had to go through Samaria." (v. 4) Why did Jesus go through Samaria when most of his contemporaries would have gone around Samaria? Jesus was compelled to go to a place and engage with a people whom his culture had taught him to look down upon and avoid at all costs.

Jesus "had to go through Samaria." Where do you have to go? Where is the Holy Spirit leading you? What cultural, ethnic, and racial stereotypes is God calling you to defy in the name of reaching increasing numbers of people among increasing numbers of populations?

## Discovery

- **Describe what you hear, see, and feel as you reflect on this passage.** (Note: Some of these questions may require outside sources or Bible maps.)
  - What is the geographical relationship between Samaria, Judea, and Galilee?
  - When Jesus and the disciples went through Samaria, where were they headed?
  - What do we learn about the relationship between Jews and Samaritans from the dialogue between Jesus and the woman?
  - When did women typically go to draw water from Jacob's well?
  - What does Jesus say about true worship?
  - What does Messiah mean?
- **Reflect on what the story means for you.**  
**Some questions to consider:**
  - Why was it such a big deal that Jesus went through Samaria?



- What is the historical significance of Jacob's well?
- Jesus asks the woman for a drink of water. What might this suggest about the role of hospitality particularly in the context of cultures in hostility with each other?
- Why were the disciples surprised to find Jesus talking with the woman?
- Why did the woman abandon her water jar and head back to town?
- Jesus describes doing God's will as "food." How is doing God's will spiritually satisfying and nutritious?
- What does Jesus mean when he says the fields are ripe for harvest?
- What is the significance of the woman telling her story to members of her community? What was the impact of her doing so?

- **Apply this passage to your own life, work, and faith community. Some questions to consider:**

- What might it look like to follow Christ's example to engage people where historic tension or discomfort exists?
- What are some tools to effectively engage cross-cultural and multiethnic relationship building? How is your church doing this?
- What does "Samaria" look like in your community? Who lives in the place without the best reputation, or the area people tend to avoid?
- What are you thirsty for? How do you plan to satisfy this thirst?
- How are you finding ways to bear witness to the changes Christ has made in your life with others?

- What are you willing to "leave" to follow Jesus and to share the good news with others?
- What are the characteristics and patterns of "true worshipers"? How is this reflected in your faith community?
- Jesus accepted the Samaritans' invitation to stay with them. What does changing our plans to reflect God's plans look like for us today?

## Sending Out

- What are some practical ways your community can follow Christ's example as reflected in this passage?
- What would reaching increasing numbers of people among increasing numbers of populations look like in your context?
- How will you evaluate and measure progress toward this goal?

Invite participants to share their prayer requests in response to the Spirit's leading. End your time in prayer.

## LESSON TWO

# Participation

*Are we finding ways to engage life together through denominational, conference, and local events, service, and fellowship?*

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SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15

## Learning Objectives

- To understand that partnerships fueled by God's grace result in generosity to advance the gospel.

- To celebrate the economy of God where poverty does not preclude giving and service.
- To encourage models of service that encourage others to pursue sacrificial community.

## Scene

Paul is writing to the Corinthian church during a time of drought and famine in Palestine, which was devastating for their agrarian culture. Christians in the Jerusalem church lacked enough food to eat, and Paul appealed to Christians in Gentile churches for their help. Paul's effort was successful in raising funds, and it also connected different cultures and brought Jews and Gentiles closer.

## Perspective

The Bible has a lot to say about giving. The demands of ministry often require us to invite people to give to support it. Paul's ask in this text is not to cover his ministry expenses but for the poor saints in Jerusalem. The Evangelical Covenant Church's Three Strand Strong giving focus invites us to serve people who are in need both near and far. The invitation to partner includes pursuing ministry efforts that leverage the full spectrum of Covenant resources.

## Discovery

- **Describe what you hear, see, and feel as you reflect on the passage. (Note: Some of these questions may require outside sources or Bible maps.)**
  - Where is Corinth and how far is it from Jerusalem?
  - What problems were members of the church at Corinth experiencing?
  - How does Paul use the example of the Macedonian church to inspire the Corinthian church?

- What does Paul define as grace in this passage?
- How was Titus serving the church?
- What was Paul encouraging the Corinthians to complete? (v. 6)

- **Reflect on what the story means for you. Some questions to consider:**

- How have you managed conflict with others in the church?
- What has been a challenge as you address conflict with others in the church?
- Share an example of your experience of God's grace in your life.
- How does giving yourself to the Lord "first" prepare you to engage life with others?
- Share an example of how you've experienced the grace of God through the generosity of others?
- How has God given you grace to be generous to others?
- Why is it important to fulfill the commitments we make when engaging life with others? (v. 6)

- **Apply this passage to your own life, work, and faith community. Some questions to consider:**

- The cultures of Corinth, Macedonia, and Jerusalem were very different from each other. What connected them and why?
- Why is follow-through (completion) so critical as we engage life together?
- Why is giving so important to Christians?
- How can we be generous while experiencing poverty?
- How is it a "privilege" to share in serving the Lord's people? (v. 4)



- Discuss the impact of putting the Lord “first” in preparing to serve others. (v. 5)
- How does the poverty of Christ make us rich? (v. 9)
- What role does eagerness and “willingness” play in engaging life together? (v. 11)

## Sending Out

- What are some practical ways your community can follow Christ’s example as reflected in this passage?
- What does it look like to engage life together through denominational, conference, and local events, service, and fellowship for your ministry?
- How will you evaluate and measure progress toward this goal?

Invite participants to share their prayer requests in response to the Spirit’s leading. End your time in prayer.

## LESSON THREE

# Power

*Are the positions and structures of influence of the Covenant Church influenced by the perspectives and gifts of diverse populations?*

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SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: ACTS 6:1-7

## Learning Objectives

- To understand the importance and power of diversity, equity, and inclusion in positions of power and influence.
- To understand the role of culture, ethnicity, and power within dominant and non-dominant groups.

- To encourage a commitment to leadership development especially among underrepresented populations.

## Scene

The post-resurrection Spirit-filled church of Jesus Christ is experiencing miracles, signs, and wonders. People are daily being added to the church as the Word of God is being powerfully preached. As is the case with most rapid growth, the church also experienced some growing pains that were complicated by the fact that the church included people from different cultures and customs. These challenges are famously exposed in the daily distribution of food.

## Perspective

What if you were invited to a meal after church but everybody wearing a white piece of clothing wasn’t served? To make matters worse the people eating don’t even notice that people wearing white aren’t eating. In this passage, those “wearing white” were the Greek widows of the quickly expanding multicultural New Testament church in Jerusalem. This story gives a bird’s-eye view of both the challenges and rewards of intentional cross-cultural ministry.

## Discovery

- **Describe what you hear, see, and feel as you reflect on the passage. (Note: Some of these questions may require outside sources or Bible maps.)**
  - What elements contributed to “the number of disciples increasing” in the early church? (v. 1)
  - What were some of the differences between the Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews?
  - What did Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews share in common?

- Why is it important for people to be included in the decision-making that affects their lives? (vv. 2-4)
- What is the significance of the “laying on of hands” for those called to serve their community? (v. 6) What does this action signal, and what does it require of those who receive this blessing?
- What happens when opportunities to lead are extended to the nondominant (Spirit-filled, wise, respected, and Greek-speaking) members of the community (vv. 7-15)
- How does God leverage diversity? (See Acts 2.)

• **Reflect on what the story means for you. Some questions to consider:**

- Talk about a time when you were overlooked or you felt overlooked. What did you learn about yourself, others, and managing conflict?
- All humans have culture. What is your working definition of culture?
- Does your normal day-to-day life include being a member of the dominant or nondominant culture? What privileges and disadvantages are attached to your status?
- How can we leverage our status in the dominant culture to open doors for people who are historically marginalized and left out? (v. 2)
- How can people in the nondominant culture make a difference in the face of inequitable systems? (v. 1)
- What is ethnicity and how is it different or the same as culture?
- What was the nature of gender roles within the context of the culture?
- What is ethnocentrism, and how does it relate to other forms of oppression such as racism or sexism?
- **Apply this passage to your own life, work, and faith community. Some questions to consider:**
  - How can dominant culture groups position themselves to hear and act on the perspectives of those in the nondominant group?
  - How does your church manage conflict? What approach does your church use to work through conflict? How is it working?
  - The food distribution challenge the early church faced was the byproduct of a relief effort aimed at serving a vulnerable population (*widows*). How is your faith community providing relief to vulnerable people in your midst?
  - The disciples (*dominant culture*) pulled the whole community together and invited them to contribute to solving a problem that threatened peace and progress. How are decisions made in your congregation? How do you ensure that the decisions made reflect God’s will and include those who are impacted by those decisions?
  - The primary “actor” in the book of Acts is the Holy Spirit. How do you see the Spirit acting in your church?
  - How is your group cultivating a culture where wise, Spirit-led people with good reputations are given opportunities to lead? (v. 3)
  - How are historically underrepresented people (*including BIPOC and women*) reflected in positions of power, influence, and leadership in your church?
  - Are homogeneous groups and communities “exempt” from pursuing ethnic, cultural, and



racial representation in positions of power and leadership? Why or why not?

## Sending Out

- What are some practical ways your community can follow Christ’s example as reflected in this passage?
- How are the positions and structures of influence (boards, committees, and positions) in your church influenced by the perspectives and gifts of diverse populations?
- How will you evaluate and measure progress toward this goal?

Invite participants to share their prayer requests in response to the Spirit’s leading. End your time in prayer.

### LESSON FOUR:

# Pacesetting

*With additional perspectives, burdens, and gifts in our midst, what new ministry opportunities is the Covenant Church positioned to strengthen and initiate?*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: ACTS 16:6-40

## Learning Objectives

- To see how Christian pacesetting is informed and led by the Holy Spirit.
- To understand how Christian pacesetting is intended to expose and disrupt oppressive systems and structures.
- To celebrate the courageous practice of pacesetting as a tool to leverage additional perspectives, burdens to advance ministry, and release those who are captive.

## Scene

Ten men were necessary to establish a Jewish synagogue. In the absence of this threshold and without a physical structure, people could gather outside for prayer on the Sabbath. It was at such a gathering near a river that Paul and Silas’s adventure in Macedonia began. Philippi was a Roman colony and Paul was able to establish a Christian church there. The Greek-speaking Christians he wrote to later in Philippians would have not enjoyed the benefits of Roman citizenship such as voting or access to the Roman legal system. Philippi was a strong economic center at the time of Paul’s visit. The slave girl whom Paul and Silas eventually confront made a “great deal of money” for her owners through fortune-telling. Lydia and this unnamed girl stand in stark contrast to each other, but both experience the power of God that would change the course of their lives.

## Perspective

Have you ever received a gift that surprised you with its packaging or wrapping? Paul’s decision to go to Macedonia was prompted by a “vision of a man” begging him to come. Upon Paul’s arrival in Macedonia, the first people he meets are a group of women gathered to worship on the Sabbath down by the riverside. Lydia, a businesswoman and one of the leaders of this group, comes to faith after listening to Paul. She is baptized along with her household. Lydia invites Paul and Silas into her home, and it is from this base that Paul and Silas get into “good trouble” for Jesus.

## Discovery

- Describe what you hear, see, and feel as you reflect on the passage. (Note: Some of these questions may require outside sources or Bible maps.)

- What do you see the Holy Spirit doing in this story?
- What does it mean to be a “worshiper of God”? (v. 14)
- What were the key elements of Paul’s message? (v. 14)
- What are the characteristics and expectations of Middle Eastern hospitality? (v. 15)
- Paul was responding to the Spirit’s leading to help those in need. Who was helped and how as result of Paul’s obedience?
- After being beaten, Paul and Silas were shackled and thrown into prison. Despite their treatment, these men begin to sing and pray. How does this action affect them, the other prisoners, the jail, and the jailer?
- Why do you think Paul and Silas didn’t leave after their chains fell off and the prison doors flew open?

• **Reflect on what the story means for you. Some questions to consider:**

- What are the characteristics of pacesetting people?
- What are the risks and rewards of pacesetters (*pioneers*)?
- Share an example where you took bold leadership.
- What would it look like for you to cause an “uproar” for Jesus? (v. 20)
- Talk about an experience when evil practices or systems was confronted. What was the outcome?
- How can our perspective inform our behavior? (v. 25)

- What role do prayer, praise, and worship play in your faith walk? Share one example of freedom you or someone close to you has experienced as a result of prayer, praise, or worship.
- What threatens to enslave us that we must guard against?

• **Apply this passage to your own life, work, and faith community. Some questions to consider:**

- Why do you think it took so long for Paul and Silas to confront the evil spirit possessing the girl who was enslaved?
- Who are the pacesetters in this story?
- What are the characteristics of pacesetting ministries?
- What do we learn from Lydia’s example about faith, leadership, and hospitality?
- The young girl was part of a profitable but evil business scheme. How is your church disrupting evil systems and structures that prevent people from living their best lives?
- Who are the winners and losers that make up the legal, legal but unethical, and illegal economies of your community?
- Who takes a “beating” in your community when they call out unjust systems and structures?
- How is your ministry engaging incarcerated and post-incarcerated people?  
(MATTHEW 25:36)
- Baptism shows up twice in this story. How is your faith community actively engaged in the work of evangelism?





## Sending Out

- What are some practical ways your community can follow Christ’s example as reflected in this passage?
- How is your church leveraging perspectives, burdens, and gifts to catalyze new ministry opportunities aimed at strengthening the church, community, and advancing the gospel?
- How will you evaluate and measure progress toward this goal?

Invite participants to share their prayer requests in response to the Spirit’s leading. End your time in prayer.

### LESSON FIVE:

# Purposeful Narrative

*How do the stories of new backgrounds become incorporated into our overarching history? How do all of these streams flow together into one story moving forward?*

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#### SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: ACTS 10

## Learning Objectives

- To understand that God’s invitation extends to all nations and that we are stewards of that invitation.
- To reaffirm that everyone and every people group has a story that matters. To celebrate God’s invitation to all people into his grand story of grace, salvation, and redemption.
- To celebrate God’s commitment to use all sorts of people, regardless of their background, story, or place in society.

## Scene

In Acts 10 we meet Cornelius, a Roman centurion who led a group of 100 men. Though a Gentile, Cornelius was “God-fearing” and devout. His devotion was not just limited to attending the synagogue and prayers; it was backed up with generous giving to those in need. God chose the Gentile Cornelius to send for Peter, who was a Jew and top leader in the Christian church.

Peter was staying with a tanner. Tanners were craftsmen who processed skins and hides of animals to produce leather. So the fact that he stayed with a tanner is likely a clue that Peter’s views about Jewish ceremonial rituals had softened. Cornelius, Peter, Simon the tanner, and the unnamed men sent to retrieve Peter all have very different stories (*narratives*), yet God uses each to accomplish God’s will.

## Perspective

Imagine what it would have been like to adhere to a diet that God had created for as long as you can remember. It is a diet that your ancestors and their ancestors followed strictly—then overnight the diet was changed. Imagine the questions that would evoke! As it turned out, Peter’s vision wasn’t about a change in diet. It was a metaphor intended to help the church understand God’s inclusive vision for all people, not just Jews.

## Discovery

- Describe what you hear, see, and feel as you reflect on the passage. (*Note: Some of these questions may require outside sources or Bible maps.*)
  - What benefits of obedience do you see in this story?
  - Cornelius’s devotion to God and the poor was not a secret to those around him (v. 7). Why is it important to identify partners and helpers in life and ministry?

- What do the animals in the net in Peter’s vision represent?
- Cornelius enjoyed the respect of the Jewish people (v. 22), despite being a Gentile and agent of the Roman government. What does this reveal about the power of the individual narratives we can create that are tension with stereotypes about certain groups?
- How do you see the Holy Spirit acting in this story?

• **Reflect on what the story means for you. Some questions to consider:**

- Cornelius along with “all his family” were devout. (v. 2) What works and what doesn’t while doing life with family members who don’t know the Lord?
- Cornelius was an atypical contributor to the narrative of the early church. Does the culture of your ministry welcome input from “atypical persons” who are called by God to serve?
- Cornelius and Peter both had undeniable experiences with God. When have you experienced God communicating to you in a way that was crystal clear?
- When have you experienced a complete change of mind about something important?
- Peter’s confession in verse 28 reveals bias and prejudice. What is required for us to be free from perceptions about groups of people that are inconsistent with God’s view of them?

• **Apply this passage to your own life, work, and faith community. Some questions to consider:**

- In what ways does your ministry create opportunities for corporate prayer and other devotional practices?
- Discuss some memorable answered prayers

that your community can bear witness to.

- What are stereotypes and why are they not helpful in embracing the purposeful narratives of others?
- Peter says that God “does not show favoritism.” (v. 34) Which people enjoy favored status in your community? Who doesn’t? Why?
- What does your ministry do to welcome and accept people from “every nation”? (v. 35)
- Cornelius was a devout man who became a follower of Christ and was baptized after hearing Peter’s message. How are people disciplined, growing in racial righteousness, and learning to do justice in your ministry?
- How are unbelievers exposed to the gospel message in your ministry?
- Cornelius’s commitment to serving the poor is noteworthy. How does your ministry serve the poor and other vulnerable populations in your community?
- What vision has God given your ministry to reach all nations?

## Sending Out

- What are some practical ways your community can follow Christ’s example as reflected in this passage?
- How do the stories of new backgrounds become incorporated into your overarching history? How do all of these streams flow together into one story moving forward?
- How will you evaluate and measure progress toward this goal?

Invite participants to share their prayer requests in response to the Spirit’s leading. End your time in prayer.



## LESSON SIX:

# Practicing Solidarity

*In what ways are we standing with and advocating for the multiethnic mosaic? How are we sharing in the suffering of others on both individual and communal levels?*

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SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: LUKE 10:25-37

## Learning Objectives

- To embrace the values that inform what being a good neighbor requires.
- To understand and commit to the practice of loving our neighbors as ourselves and without regard to race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, sexual identity or citizenship.

## Scene

You can guess that things aren't going to end well when you stand up to "test Jesus." (v. 25) But that is what the "expert in the law" was attempting to do. Asking good questions was a part of robust debate and entirely consistent with the scholarly tradition. Asking questions in an attempt to outwit God is a fool's errand. Jesus uses the persistence of the lawyer to tell a timeless story about sacrifice and service.

The scene of the story is believed to have been a notorious 17-mile journey on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Common wisdom of the day was not to travel that road alone as it was frequented by thieves seeking to take advantage of others. The enemy of our soul continues to attack, strip, beat, and leave people half-dead today. Jesus calls us to not pass by these people and the communities where they live.

## Perspective

Several years ago I was rear-ended—my car hit so hard that it launched off the roadway into the ditch that served as median between the opposite lane of oncoming traffic. I had a split second to anticipate the crash as I glanced in my rearview mirror. With no time to think, I called out, "Jesus!" as loud as I could. It was a moment when I desperately needed help. (I walked away with some bruising and back problems that continue to this day, but my car didn't make it.) Like the unnamed man in today's passage, so many people in our communities are desperately in need of help. Christ's celebration of the Samaritan traveler reminds us that as followers of Jesus, we are called to respond to those in need.

## Discovery

- Describe what you hear, see, and feel as you reflect on the passage. (*Note: Some of these questions may require outside sources or Bible maps.*)
  - Describe the relationship between Jesus and the "experts in the law" (v. 25) throughout the New Testament.
  - In answering Jesus's question, the lawyer quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. How does Jesus expand the understanding of "neighbor" in his story?
  - What do we know about the relationship between Jews and Samaritans? What do you think it meant to Jesus's listeners that the good neighbor in the story turns out to be a Samaritan?
  - What do you think his listeners might have understood to be revealed by the responses of the priest and the Levite?

- **Reflect on what the story means for you.**

- **Some questions to consider:**

- The lawyer and other religious elites represented the dominant culture in this story. What do you think it means that the hero is a Samaritan man from the nondominant culture?
- Being attacked, stripped, beaten, and left for dead has both literal and figurative applications. What might you do or what have you done for others whom the enemy has attacked?
- Why is it easy to pass by the hurting? Why is it hard to pass by the hurting?
- What do you think sacrificial living looks like, and how is success measured?

- **Apply this passage to your own life, work, and faith community. Some questions to consider:**

- Who are the “Samaritans” in our context? What is the profile of the communities where they live?
- How do the systemic and structural realities of our country contribute to some people and communities being “passed by”?
- How do technology and social media redefine what it means to be someone’s neighbor?
- How is your church or ministry practicing solidarity with marginalized and vulnerable people in your community?

- Would the community (*not members and worshippers*) consider your church a good neighbor? Why or why not?
- Organizational budgets are moral documents. How much is your church investing in ministry aimed at helping those who are stripped, beaten, and left for dead?
- What factors contribute to the dynamic where our neighbors are likely to be people who are like us? How do we change this in order to be good neighbors to people with stories (*purposeful narratives*) that are very different from ours?

## Sending Out

- What are some practical ways community can follow Christ’s example as reflected in this passage?
- In what ways are we standing with and advocating for the multiethnic mosaic? How are we sharing in the suffering of others, both individually and communally?
- How will you evaluate and measure progress toward this goal?

Invite participants to share their prayer requests in response to the Spirit’s leading. End your time in prayer.



The Evangelical Covenant Church