



COMBINED SESSION

# The Meaning of Membership

*Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.*



The Evangelical Covenant Church

MAKE & DEEPEN DISCIPLES

U P D A T E D M E M B E R S H I P C U R R I C U L U M R E S O U R C E F R O M M D D

### Greetings Covenant Friends:

The purpose of *The Meaning of Membership: Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.* is to explore what it means to become a member of an Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC). In the ECC, our very reason for being is to go deeper in Christ and further in mission, together. Membership signifies the commitment to be mission friends together in the context of a local church community.

Ever since Swedish immigrants founded the Covenant more than 125 years ago, we have been known as “mission friends.” Mission is at the core of our identity and is deeply rooted within Pietism. August Hermann Francke, a founding figure of Pietism, said that Christians live for “God’s glory and neighbor’s good.” When it comes to advancing the mission of God, we are truly better together.

Today the ECC is one of the fastest growing and most diverse denominations. As our missional movement continues to diversify and flourish, we are grateful to provide this formational resource to help strengthen our Covenant identity together as mission friends.

***The Meaning of Membership* is the ECC’s refreshed and fully updated membership curriculum resource from Make and Deepen Disciples which covers:**

- The Mission of God
- The Mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church
- The Mission of Our Church
- The Mission of a Member

It is our sincere hope that *The Meaning of Membership* will empower every ECC church to grow deeper in Christ and further in mission together in fresh and exciting ways.

**Thank you for taking the time to explore what it means to be a part of the Evangelical Covenant Church family.**

In Grateful Partnership,



*Michelle Sanchez*

Michelle Sanchez

EXECUTIVE MINISTER OF MAKE AND DEEPEN DISCIPLES  
EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH

All materials can be downloaded for free at [CovChurch.org/Membership](https://CovChurch.org/Membership).



THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP

*session one*

# The Mission of God

*Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.*

## PURPOSE OF THIS SESSION

To help participants understand the work of God in the world,  
with a focus on the mission of God reaching to each individual.

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### OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION

- Provide an overview of the work of God in the world
- Introduce, build, and deepen relationships
- Acquaint participants with the mission of God for each person and for the church
- Begin the process of discovering membership within your congregation

### MATERIALS FOR THIS SESSION

- Leader's guide
- Participant's guides (one per person)
- Pens or pencils
- Dry erase board or chart paper and markers
- PowerPoint presentation and equipment for display

## SESSION OUTLINE

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### Gather

- Beginning Points
- Why Membership?
- One-on-one Introductions

### Instruct & Interact

- God's Story: God's Mission to You

### Integrate

- Reflecting on God's Story: God's Mission to You
- The X-Factor

### Going Deeper

- Going Deeper in Christ and Further in Mission Together

# Gather

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## #1 | BEGINNING POINTS

### Introduction

- Welcome participants to *The Meaning of Membership: Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.*
- Introduce yourself.
- **Pray** for God's blessing as you begin this journey together.
- Pass out participant's guides.

### Purpose of *The Meaning of Membership*

- Take an in-depth look at our congregation
- Underscore our commitment to God's mission in the world
- Introduce our denominational family
- Build and deepen friendships
- Explore what it means to be a member
- Outline the process to become a member

### Format of *The Meaning of Membership*

**EXPLAIN: Our church is all about mission.** We are committed to purposefully pursuing the priorities of God. Together we will examine four intersecting dimensions of that mission: the mission of God; the mission of the denomination to which we belong, the Evangelical Covenant Church; the mission of our local church; and the mission of individual members of our church. We will explore these four topics during four one-hour sessions [or one session].

LEADER TIP: Edit the timeline to fit your context.

#### EXPLAIN:

- In "The Mission of God," we will explore our understanding of God's story and God's mission in the world through you.

**Our church is all about mission.**

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

- In “The Mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church,” we will examine the values, mission, and ministry of our denominational family.
- In “The Mission of Our Church,” we will explore how we are seeking to pursue God’s priorities as a local church body. We will also introduce you to our history and give you a behind-the-scenes look at how we are organized.
- In “The Mission of a Member,” we will look at our church’s commitment to you and the expectations we have for those committed to our church.

### **Objectives for this Session**

**EXPLAIN: The objectives for this session are to:**

- Provide an overview of the work of God in the world
- Introduce, build, and deepen relationships
- Explore the story of God’s mission to you and God’s mission through you
- Begin the process of discovering membership at our church.

## **#2 | WHY MEMBERSHIP?**

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

We know that Christ loves the church. As we commit to our local church body, we join Christ in that commitment, which roots us in transformative ways within the family of God.

We are a people who are “in it together,” counting on God and each other to join together to pursue God’s mission in the world. As we seek to advance the mission of God, we know we are better together. We can accomplish far more by joining together than we could ever do on our own.

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.

### #3 | ONE-ON-ONE INTRODUCTIONS

**Divide the class into groups of two or three.**

- Ask each group to discuss the following questions:
  1. How did you begin attending this church?
  2. What is one question you would like to see answered during our time together?
- Give the groups a few minutes to discuss, then invite them back to share with the larger group the answers that their partner(s) gave.

LEADER TIP: Write down the questions each person would like answered. Keep the list for future reference to help you remember to answer the questions as the subjects come up.

- Assure participants that their questions will be addressed either within your sessions or outside of the meetings.

## *Instruct and Interact*

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### #1 | GOD'S STORY: GOD'S MISSION TO YOU

Lenses help us to see everything better. Perhaps the most important lens we need to understand our own story is the lens of God's story—the story which includes all other stories, including yours and mine. God's story is the overarching storyline that encompasses everything from the beginning of creation to its culmination, from Genesis to Revelation.

**The four chapters of God's story reveal God's mission to us:**

**1. CREATION (GENESIS 1-2).** God, who is love itself, created humanity in order to grow his family of love. God's desire was to enjoy the goodness and beauty of life and all creation together with us.

- “God is love” (1 JOHN 4:16).
- “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (GENESIS 1:31).

**2. FALL (GENESIS 3).** Unfortunately, all creation was soon damaged by evil. We now live in a broken world and we ache for a better world. A better world did exist before humanity turned from God and God's ways to follow their own ways. This turning away from God is called



**We now live in  
a broken world  
and we ache for  
a better world.**

“sin,” and the ultimate outcome of sin is disconnection, decay, and death.

- “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (ROMANS 3:23).
- “For the wages of sin is death” (ROMANS 6:23).

**3. REDEMPTION (GENESIS 3 - REVELATION 20).** Although all is broken, all is not lost! The good news is that Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection make our redemption possible. To “redeem” means to save or to restore. Jesus, who is the Son of God, sacrificed his life in order to save us and permanently restore our relationship with God, with one another, and with all creation. God’s purposes are big and you have a part to play. God is sending us near and far to be disciples who make disciples. Together we are sent on God’s mission to bring healing and flourishing to the world in Jesus’s power and authority.

- “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (JOHN 3:16).
- “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 JOHN 4:10).
- “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (MATTHEW 28:19).

**4. NEW CREATION (REVELATION 21-22).** Ultimately God will restore all things through a renewal of heaven and earth. Those who have been restored through Jesus Christ will finally flourish in perfect love with God, community, and creation, just as God always intended.

- “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death” or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (REVELATION 21:3-4).



## #2 | REFLECTING ON GOD'S STORY: GOD'S MISSION TO YOU

- Give participants a few minutes to reflect on the questions below. Then ask them to share their thoughts in groups of two or three. Remind participants that it's okay to not to answer every question.
  1. How have you experienced the goodness of creation and the brokenness of creation?
  2. How have you already experienced God's redeeming love through the church?
  3. How does God's mission of restoration give you hope for people and our planet?
  4. How might God be calling you to respond to his story?

### **As you hear God's story perhaps you are aware you have not yet embraced God's mission of love to you through Jesus Christ.**

You can become a follower of Jesus and engage in his mission to restore the world with his community and with the help of the Holy Spirit. You can begin to follow Jesus today through a simple prayer, using your own words or prayer like this:

Jesus, I believe that your death and resurrection broke the cycle of brokenness in the world and in me. I acknowledge my responsibility in contributing to the damage in the world. I receive your forgiveness. I choose to follow you and to let you be my leader. I receive your Spirit.

—PRAYER ADAPTED FROM INTERVARSITY'S THE BIG STORY APP

If anyone here would like to pray this together with me, please join me in silent prayer while I say the prayer again.

LEADER TIP: Suggest that everyone bow their heads together as you pray this prayer.

**If you have received Jesus Christ today for the first time, please let me know so that we can support you in this new journey!**

**God is sending us near and far to be disciples who make disciples.**

**Ask someone to read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 and Matthew 28:16-20.**

**EXPLAIN:** God's mission extends to you, but it extends beyond you as well. God's mission has a ripple effect! We are first reconciled to God, then reconciled to one another in community. The church is a community of believers that has been mobilized to extend God's reconciling mission in word and action in the world. We are now called to heal the world with God and to become disciples who make disciples.

### The X-Factor: Keep this Image in Mind

**EXPLAIN:** Here is an image that can help us remember both God's mission to you and God's mission through you. Koine Greek is the language of the New Testament. The Greek letter *chi* looks like the English letter "X". *Chi* is the first letter for the Greek spelling of Christ, so it became the one-letter abbreviation for Christ. It is also a visual image for the mission of God.

#### Draw the top half of the letter *chi*, "X"

**EXPLAIN:** The top part of the "X" reminds us that the God of the universe, in all his power, majesty, and vastness (the vast open portion at the very top) nevertheless pinpoints his love and attention on us.

#### Draw the bottom half of the letter *chi*, "X" to complete the letter.

**EXPLAIN:** From this point on, we are reminded by the bottom half of the *chi*, that we join God (the center point) in his expansive mission to the world (the lower opening).

The two halves of the X combine to remind us of the rhythm of faith: God has a mission both to us and through us.

## #3 | THE X-FACTOR



# Going Deeper

## CLOSING

**EXPLAIN:** God has a mission in this world, and that mission includes you. God loves you and longs to be in relationship with you. Throughout the rest of our time together, keep that in mind, wherever you are on your spiritual journey.

- If you sense that you are at a place where you desire to embrace God's love for you for the first time, I encourage you to talk with me, to help you begin following Jesus.

## GOING DEEPER IN CHRIST AND FURTHER IN MISSION TOGETHER

In the Evangelical Covenant Church, we are characterized by four commitments by which we go deeper in Christ and further in mission together. As a denominational family, we are **biblical, devotional, connectional, and missional**. These four commitments outline how we participate in God's mission to us and through us.

**Take five minutes to consider how you will deepen your commitments in the following areas, so that we might grow deeper in Christ and further in mission together.**

- **Biblical**—Growing in our knowledge of God through Bible engagement. *How is God's word influencing your life?*
- **Devotional**—When we open God's word it isn't just to know about God, but rather to be in relationship with God through the work of the Spirit. *What spiritual practices help you go deeper in Christ in this season of your life?*
- **Connectional**—We are created for relationship with God and one another. We are connectional people. We are all the church together—children, youth, adults, women and men, persons of all ethnicities, nationalities, social standing and ability. All are invited and called by God to be the church. *How will you embrace being better together within the local church? How will you go deeper in Christ and further in mission together?*
- **Missional**—The church exists for God's mission. As missional people we are called to be about God's priorities in the world in both word and deed, reaching the lost and helping the hurting. We are called to share the love of God and to grow the family of God by becoming disciples who make disciples. *What is your next step in going further in mission with God?*

You may want to set apart additional time this week to reflect on these questions.



THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP

*session two*

# The Mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church

*Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.*

## PURPOSE OF THIS SESSION

Acquaint the group with the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC).

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### OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION

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

- History
- Distinctives and theology
- Structure and resources

### MATERIALS FOR THIS SESSION

- Leader's guide
- Participant's guides (one per person)
- Pens or pencils
- Dry erase board or chart paper and markers
- PowerPoint presentation and equipment for display

## SESSION OUTLINE

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### Gather

1. Beginning Points
2. Family Name Discussion

### Instruct & Interact

1. Mission of the ECC: Introduction
2. Mission of the ECC: Our Roots
3. Covenant Affirmations
4. Covenant Mission Priorities
5. Covenant Distinctives

### Integrate

1. Questions and Comments
2. Closing

### Going Deeper

# Gather

## #1 | BEGINNING POINTS

### Introduction

- **Welcome participants back** to *The Meaning of Membership: Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.*
- **EXPLAIN: The objectives for this session are to:**  
Examine the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC), including:
  - History
  - Distinctives and theology
  - Structure and resources
 Explore how the ethos of the ECC finds expression in your local church.
- **Pray**

### Family Name Discussion

**EXPLAIN:** Pair off and tell your partner what you know about your family name. *[After several minutes, call the group back together.]*

**EXPLAIN:** Just as each of us comes from a larger family, so our congregation is part of a larger family which has a family name, the Evangelical Covenant Church, or the Covenant. We want to introduce you to our extended family and help you see how we relate to our larger church as responsible family members.

*[You can find more material about the Covenant at [covchurch.org](http://covchurch.org).]*

Our church  
is part of a  
larger family,  
the Covenant.

# *Instruct and Interact*

## MISSION OF THE ECC: INTRODUCTION

### A Denomination

**EXPLAIN:** The word “denomination” has become difficult for some people in our culture. It is true that denominations are not specifically taught in Scripture. However, we do see in Scripture that God placed people into tribes, so it’s possible for us to study denominations in those terms. In essence, denominations are groups of local churches who collectively work together to fulfill God’s mission in the world.

**Let’s take a look at the mission of the ECC.**

### The Ethos of the ECC—“Mission Friends”

**EXPLAIN:** 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*

**EXPLAIN:** 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.

From the beginning Covenanters have sought to build a culture of friendship in Christ.



When we describe a person, we may describe them physically so that you would recognize him or her when they walked into the room. Or, we might describe their character so you would know their heart as you interact with them. We will describe the ECC in both ways.

### Physical Description: Quick Facts

#### EXPLAIN:

- The ECC was founded in 1885 by Scandinavian immigrants.
- The ECC consists of more than 850 congregations in many locations of the U.S. and Canada.
- The ECC is comprised of 11 regions called conferences.
- The ECC is one of the fastest-growing denominations.
- The ECC is diverse—33% of our congregations are predominantly non-white or multiethnic in their makeup.
- The ECC has mission partnerships around the globe in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East North Africa, extending the whole gospel around the world and impacting hundreds of thousands of people.
- The denominational offices of the ECC are located in Chicago.

### Reflection

**EXPLAIN:** Before we examine the character of the ECC, let's take a few moments to think about the benefits of a denomination.

*[Allow a few moments for thought, then facilitate and record answers. You may wish to start in pairs before recording responses from the whole group.]*

### MISSION OF THE ECC: OUR ROOTS

**EXPLAIN:** Now that we have reflected on some of the benefits of being a denomination, let's look at how our roots have shaped our identity.

### Character Description: The Identity Question

**EXPLAIN:** What is at the heart of the ECC? What makes the Covenant the Covenant?

The ECC has held four enduring commitments from the beginning. To understand the ECC, it is important to understand these commitments. If you remove any of them, you misunderstand the character of 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

The question often asked in Mission Friend circles was, “Are you yet walking with Christ?”

**Historical Influences**

**EXPLAIN:**

- **The Protestant Reformation:** A movement in Europe in the early 16th century that began with Martin Luther, who attempted to reform the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation’s influence on the Covenant can be seen our belief in the Scriptures, the Old and New Testament, as the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct. Especially important is the belief that we are saved by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, not by anything we can do.
- **Pietism:** A renewal movement within Lutheranism in the late 17th and mid-18th centuries that focused on individual piety (devotion) and dynamic and personal Christian life. The movement sought to restore the life of the Church through small group study of the Bible and devotional literature (called conventicles), emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, kind treatment for all people, including non-believers, and prominent devotional life in schools for theological training. To reflect these priorities, the question often asked in Mission Friend circles was, “Are you yet walking with Christ?”

- **Moravian Mission:** A movement that spanned the ninth century through the 1700s, which emphasized the joy of life in Christ and mission to those who did not yet know such joy. Moravians also emphasized the unity of all Christians.
- **Founding Rationale:** Among several different Swedish American churches in the late 19th century, the Covenant emerged as a movement of like-minded congregations who wanted to join together in common mission without rigid structures that might stifle the free movement of the Holy Spirit. One of the early markers was a distinct view of the atonement.

LEADER TIP: *One Body, Many Members*, by Covenant historian Philip J. Anderson, includes further information on historical influences and is available online at [covchurch.org/resources/one-body-many-members](http://covchurch.org/resources/one-body-many-members). An illustration from the book, which depicts our denominational roots, is included on Session Two's participant's guide and PowerPoint.

### Continuing Influences on the Evangelical Covenant Church Today

- **The Evangelical Movement.** A series of religious awakenings flowered in Europe and America during the 19th century and provided rich soil for the early growth of the Covenant Church with our passion for mission. Historically evangelicals have been characterized by their insistence on biblical authority, the 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.
- **The Global and Multiethnic Kingdom of God.** The Evangelical Covenant Church has always been an immigrant church. Although it began with Swedish immigrants, today people from many cultures and nationalities make up the Covenant Church, expanding our spiritual heritage. Whereas 100 years ago one would have heard Swedish spoken in Covenant congregations in the United States and Canada, today you might hear Spanish, Korean, or Nuer in addition to English. Covenanters now trace their roots to Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America. We are united in one body by our faith in Christ, and throughout our history we have continued to hold fast to the commitments that shape our character.

## COVENANT AFFIRMATIONS

**EXPLAIN:** 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.

### Affirmation #1: The Centrality of the Word of God

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

**Ask participants to read this paragraph from the participant’s guide:**

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?

### Affirmation #2: The Necessity of New Birth

**EXPLAIN:** 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 new birth, which means committing ourselves to Christ and receiving forgiveness, acceptance, and eternal life.

**Ask participants to read this paragraph from the participant's guide:**

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 individuals 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?*

**Affirmation #3: A Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit**

**The Holy Spirit animates us to go deeper in Christ.**

**Ask participants to read this paragraph from the participant's guide:**

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?*

**EXPLAIN: The apostle Paul writes:**

"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?

#### **Affirmation #4: A Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church**

**EXPLAIN:** 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.

**Ask participants to read this paragraph from the participant's guide:**

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?*

**EXPLAIN:** God's word speaks to this call on our lives as believers.

"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?

#### **Affirmation #5: The Church as a Fellowship of Believers**

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

**Ask participants to read this paragraph from the participant's guide:**

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

This freedom means  
we are set free  
from the power  
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tend to divide.

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?*

**EXPLAIN:** The Bible tells us how the early members of the Church behaved:

“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.

### **Affirmation #6: The Reality of Freedom in Christ**

**EXPLAIN:** The final affirmation speaks to the grace we extend to others in order to live in unity as a church.

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 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?*



**Reflection:**

- 1) How have you seen us being connectional at our church?
- 2) In what ways does our faith flourish when we embrace and extend freedom in Christ?

**COVENANT MISSION PRIORITIES**

**EXPLAIN:** ECC churches partner together through five mission priorities. Each of these mission priorities is strengthened by ministry leadership from Covenant Offices (Chicago, IL).

- **Start and Strengthen Churches:** The Covenant is committed to start and strengthen healthy, missional churches, much as the Apostle Paul started and continued to strengthen churches in the New Testament. We believe the local church is God’s foundational strategy to carry out mission in the world. Through planting new churches and providing resources to strengthen existing congregations, these ministries seek to reach more people, in more places, among more populations, with the hope of Christ.
- **Make and Deepen Disciples:** The denomination partners with regional conferences to resource local churches to provide intentional pathways for persons of all ages to follow Jesus, grow toward Christ-likeness, and join in God’s mission. Our dream is to have an exponential impact by equipping the Covenant to become a multiethnic community of disciples who make disciples among all ages.
- **Love Mercy Do Justice:** From our inception the Covenant has been concerned with helping hurting people (love mercy) and addressing the causes of that hurt (do justice). The mission of Love Mercy Do Justice (LMDJ) is to “Join God in making things right in our broken world.” The goal of LMDJ is to resource and equip the local church in its call to love, serve, and work together with people at the margins toward holistic individual, family, and community transformation.
- **Develop Leaders:** The Covenant is committed to developing leaders. It is our privilege to strengthen our Covenant community of vocational ministers through advocacy, endorsement, care, and formation. Additionally, we strive to lift up lay leaders in our local churches to join with local pastors in furthering God’s mission.
- **Serve Globally:** The Covenant is committed to God’s global mission. Through global partnerships and Covenant missionary personnel, we make and deepen disciples, start and strengthen churches, develop

leaders, love mercy and do justice, and serve globally—that is, we join the rest of the global church in engaging in God's mission.

We encourage you to go to [CovChurch.org](http://CovChurch.org) to explore more of who the Covenant is and what the Covenant does. The appendix notes several resources available to you for amplifying the information in this session.

### Our Conference

Briefly describe the conference of which your local church is a part. Consider including the number of churches in the conference, superintendent's name, state range of conference, any Covenant camps.

[LEADER NOTE: Conference facts and links to each conference website can be found at [CovChurch.org](http://CovChurch.org), at the bottom of the home page.]

## COVENANT DISTINCTIVES

**EXPLAIN:** Our Covenant affirmations make clear the values and principles that have guided us from generation to generation, shaping over time a set of key distinctives that set us apart from other church movements.

- 1) We are evangelical but not exclusive.
- 2) We are biblical but not doctrinaire.
- 3) We are congregational but not independent.
- 4) We are traditional but not rigid.

Learn more about the Covenant distinctives in the resource *What Does It Mean to Be a Covenant Church? A Look at Covenant Distinctives*.

[CovChurch.org/Distinctives](http://CovChurch.org/Distinctives)

## COVENANT PRACTICES

Some additional practices that shape our life together in the Evangelical Covenant Church are:

- **The Sacrament of Baptism.** The ECC celebrates the sacrament of baptism as commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20, and we affirm both infant and believer baptism. While the denomination has traditionally practiced the baptism of infants, in conformity with our affirmation of freedom in Christ, we also recognize the practice of believer baptism and do not consider mode of baptism a cause for division.

[LEADER NOTE: For further reference, see *The Covenant Book of Worship* at [CovBooks.com](http://CovBooks.com), *The Covenant Quarterly* baptism issue at [CovBooks.com](http://CovBooks.com), *What Does It Mean to Receive a Child into the Church?* at [CovChurch/InfantBaptism](http://CovChurch/InfantBaptism).

- **Multiethnic Commitment.** The ECC strives to be an intentionally multiethnic church, taking seriously both the mission of Christ and the unity of Christ's Church. These two convictions converge at the point of pressing forward in ethnic ministry and diversity. Currently, the ECC is one of the most multiethnic denominations in North America. A six-fold multi-dimensional test has therefore been adopted to intentionally foster the advancement of our multiethnic mosaic throughout our movement. Together, the ECC strives to make multiethnic progress in the six dimensions of: 1) Population, 2) Participation, 3) Power, 4) Pacesetting, 5) Purposeful Narrative, and 6) Practicing Solidarity. Learn more at [CovChurch.org/SixFoldTest](http://CovChurch.org/SixFoldTest).
- **Women in Ministry Leadership.** The ECC has long affirmed the full participation of women in all ministries of the church, and in 1976 delegates to the Annual Meeting voted to begin ordaining women in the Covenant Church. Since that time, women have served in all levels of ministry and leadership positions within the church. The ECC upholds that the biblical basis for service in the body of Christ is giftedness, a call from God, and godly character—not gender. Our position on women in ministry flows from our high view of Scripture and is not derived from cultural or societal trends. We believe women ought to minister not because culture or society says so, but because the Bible leads the Church to such a conclusion. Learn more at [CovChurch.org/CalledandGifted](http://CovChurch.org/CalledandGifted).
- **Marriage Practice and Human Sexuality.** We recognize that God's love meets us without preconditions, God's grace leads us into newness of life, and God's ongoing work in our lives empowers us for costly discipleship toward holiness and service. We affirm that God's boundaries, whatever the dimension of life, are meant for our flourishing. With regard to marital practice and human sexuality, the biblically derived core of the Covenant position is: "Faithfulness in heterosexual marriage, celibacy in singleness—these constitute the Christian standard."\* Therefore, in ECC churches, marriages are performed between one man and one woman. The ECC offers pastoral care to anyone regardless of race, gender, creed, ethnic origin, socioeconomic

status, or sexual orientation. The ECC is also committed to equipping people to flourish in love for LGBTQ+/SSA/sexual minority individuals and communities.

LEARN MORE:

\*“ECC Guidelines for Covenant Pastors and Congregations Regarding Human Sexuality” (<https://covchurch.org/resources/human-sexuality-guidelines/>)

Embrace: human sexuality discipleship resources and learning experiences ([CovChurch.org/Embrace](https://CovChurch.org/Embrace))

[LEADER NOTE: Much of the above description is taken from “Guidelines for Covenant Pastors and Congregations Regarding Human Sexuality” (<https://covchurch.org/resources/human-sexuality-guidelines/>).

Additional ECC resources include: “Human Sexuality and the Marriage Ethic: Towards a Biblical and Theological Discernment of God in Human Sexuality” (<https://covchurch.org/resources/human-sexuality-paper/>) and “Resolution on Human Sexuality” (<https://covchurch.org/who-we-are/beliefs/resolutions/1996-human-sexuality/>).]

## *Integrate*

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### Questions and Comments

**EXPLAIN:** We have covered a lot of material today in an effort to provide a better understanding of who we are as a church. Perhaps you have questions or comments.

[LEADER TIP: You may choose to field some questions and comments now. Ask participants to write their questions and comments on post-it notes or 3” x 5” cards, collect them, and then answer them.

Alternatively, if time is short, ask participants to write their questions

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

and comments down to discuss during your next session. You might also consider soliciting the reflections of some members of the group about a particular question prior to answering it in order to see how people are perceiving our identity as a church.]

## CLOSING

Remind your group of the additional questions available in the “Going Deeper” section at the end of this session for those who want to reflect further on their role in the working out of the mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

# *Going Deeper*

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**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 aside 15 minutes this week to learn more at [covchurch.org](http://covchurch.org) about that area of the Covenant’s mission 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](http://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](http://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](http://covchurch.org/bless).

**Love Mercy Do Justice.** Read a resource from this list:

[covchurch.org/justice/resources/](https://covchurch.org/justice/resources/). Learn more about racial righteousness and sign up for Sankofa or Journey to Mosaic at [covchurch.org/justice/racial-righteousness](https://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/](https://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](https://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](https://covchurch.org/sg/get-involved/#give).

LEADER TIP: You may wish to take five minutes from the beginning of the next session to explore these questions; alternately, you may suggest that participants pair up and share their reflections on the questions with each other before the next session.

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## APPENDIX: THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP SESSION TWO RESOURCES

**Denominational tree diagram from *One Body, Many Members***

[covchurch.org/One-Body-Many-Members-Diagram.pdf](https://covchurch.org/One-Body-Many-Members-Diagram.pdf)

**Historical Influences of the Covenant**

[covchurch.org/Historical-Influences.pdf](https://covchurch.org/Historical-Influences.pdf)

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

[covchurch.org/Covenant-Affirmations-Brief-Form.pdf](https://covchurch.org/Covenant-Affirmations-Brief-Form.pdf)

***Covenant Affirmations* booklet**

[covbooks.com/products/covenant-affirmations-booklet](https://covbooks.com/products/covenant-affirmations-booklet)

***Called and Gifted (Women in Ministry)***

[covchurch.org/resources/called-and-gifted-material/](https://covchurch.org/resources/called-and-gifted-material/)

**Policy on Baptism**

[covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2011/02/2-Policy-on-Baptism.pdf](https://covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2011/02/2-Policy-on-Baptism.pdf)

**What Does It Mean to Receive a Child into the Church?**

[covchurch.org/Infant-Baptism.pdf](https://covchurch.org/Infant-Baptism.pdf)

**Six-Fold Test**

[covchurch.org/resources/six-fold-test](https://covchurch.org/resources/six-fold-test)

**Embrace (human sexuality)**

[covchurch.org/embrace](https://covchurch.org/embrace)





THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP

*session three*

# The Mission of Our Church

*Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.*



## PURPOSE OF THIS SESSION

This session is designed to be highly customized by you in order to introduce your congregation to the participants in this membership process. The PowerPoint presentation serves as a guide that suggests topics you may wish to cover, and you can edit each slide to adapt to your context.

### OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION

Acquaint the group with your church:

- History
- Vision and mission
- Structure and resources

Consider deeper involvement in the mission and ministry of your church.

### MATERIALS FOR THIS SESSION

- Leader's guide
- Participant's guides (one per person)
- Pens or pencils
- Dry erase board or chart paper and markers
- PowerPoint presentation and equipment for display

## SESSION OUTLINE

### Gather

1. Beginning Points
2. Discussion starter

### Instruct & Interact

1. Biblical images for the local church
2. Who we are—history and structure of our congregation
  - Our history
  - Our mission and values
  - Our mission and ministry

### Integrate

1. Distinctives of the ECC
2. Questions and Comments
3. Closing

**Going Deeper**

# Gather

## #1 | BEGINNING POINTS

### Introduction

- **Welcome participants back** to *The Meaning of Membership: Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.*
- **Explain:** The objectives for this session are to:
  - Acquaint the group with the mission of *[insert your church name]*:
    - History
    - Vision and mission
    - Structure and resources
- **Pray**

Consider a deeper involvement in the mission and ministry of *[insert your church name]*.

### DISCUSSION STARTER

**Choose from one of the following options:**

- **Option 1 — Have you ever taken a behind-the-scenes tour** of a place that has always fascinated you? Perhaps it was a stadium tour, a tour of a movie set, a factory tour, or a tour of a mammoth structure like a dam or skyscraper. What was it like to go behind the scenes? *(Allow time for discussion.)*
- **Option 2 — Have you ever learned the inside scoop** about a business or organization? Perhaps it was in training for a new job, beginning as a volunteer, or perhaps through a conversation with a friend or family member. Describe what it was like to learn more about that business or organization. *(Allow time for discussion.)*

**EXPLAIN:** Taking a tour or learning the inside scoop can provide a whole new appreciation for what that enterprise is all about and what it takes to make it run effectively. Today we are going on a behind-the-scenes tour of our congregation. Our goal is to help you understand something of our history, our values, how ministry is organized, and where we are going

Have you ever taken a behind-the-scenes tour of a place?

# *Instruct and Interact*

## BIBLICAL IMAGES FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

### Ask the following discussion question:

What images or metaphors come to mind when you think about the local church? *(Allow time for discussion.)*

### Looking at Scripture

**EXPLAIN:** The Bible uses many images to depict the local church. Here's a partial list:

- **Family** (GALATIANS 3:26, 4:6-7; ROMANS 8:29; HEBREWS 2:10-18)
- **Bride of Christ** (MARK 2: 18-20; JOHN 3:29; ROMANS 7:1-4; 2 CORINTHIANS 11:2; EPHESIANS 5:22-33; REVELATION 19:7)
- **Temple** (2 CORINTHIANS 5:1; 1 PETER 2:4-8)
- **Priesthood of All Believers** (1 PETER 2:4-9)
- **The Flock** (LUKE 12:32; JOHN 10:1-16, 27-28; ACTS 20:28-29; 1 PETER 5:2-4)
- **The Body** (EPHESIANS 4:4-13; ROMANS 12:1-31)

**EXPLAIN:** These images indicate that a local church is to be:

- A place of loving devotion to God
- A relational place of protection and encouragement
- A place for developing our gifts for service with God
- A place that pursues God's priorities in the world

**Reflection:** Allow participants time to think about the following question and share their answers with the group:

**How do you see these elements being lived out in this church?**

**EXPLAIN:** Even though our church is far from perfect, these four elements help guide who we are and what we are trying to accomplish.

### Discussion Question

Ask the following discussion question:

**What attracted you initially to [insert your church name] and what has encouraged you to stay here?**

Stories have  
the power to  
connect hearts.

## WHO WE ARE—HISTORY AND STRUCTURE OF OUR CONGREGATION

### Our History

**You may wish to sketch out a brief history of your church,** using no more than four key stories or events including how you were originally founded. Stories have the power to connect hearts and help people visualize who the church is and what the church believes. Especially note the stories of faith, commitment, and sacrifice that were present in the founding and at other key points along the way. If possible, show pictures from your church archives in the PowerPoint presentation, or consider a brief handout or timeline of significant events.

### Our Mission and Values

**If you have a mission and values statement, state it and explain it here.**

LEADER NOTE: You may have additional Scripture that shapes the identity and direction of your church. We encourage to speak to that in this section.

[LEADER TIP: *Consider emphasizing how each of the following will help fulfill the mission and values of your church.*]

### Our Mission and Ministry

**Highlight the key ministries that you offer in your context.** A handout may be useful here to allow people to gain an overview and ask questions. Be sure to highlight areas of mission that are specifically important to your church, and clarify how your ministries are connected to the mission of the church.

Ask this discussion question:

**What ministries have you been involved with or have impacted you or your family?**

[LEADER TIP: *if the group is larger than 8-12 people, ask the group break into smaller groups to respond to this question, so everyone has an opportunity to share.*]

### Our Staff and Leaders

**Offer a brief introduction to your staff members and/or church leaders.**

If the staff is large, consider pulling up your church website to show who is on staff and highlight who serves at the senior leadership level.

LEADER TIP: *Getting to know the key leaders is a significant benefit of this class. If possible, invite key staff to attend this session to introduce themselves and their ministry to the group.*

### Our Structure

**Review the role of the congregation in decision-making.** Explain key governing structures of your polity and how members fit into this structure. You may choose to create a diagram as part of the PowerPoint material in this section. Have copies of your constitution and bylaws available for anyone interested.

### Our Facility

If you have your own facility, many newcomers may be familiar with the seating area of the sanctuary and perhaps the children and youth areas but have not had a thorough tour of the facilities. **Such a tour could make them feel more like “insiders.”** If the class is meeting at the church, consider taking a few minutes to lead them on a “behind the scenes” tour of the entire facility, especially those parts that do not get much traffic, such as offices, set-up areas, kitchens, etc.. If your class is off-site, you may choose to consider a virtual tour.

### WHERE WE’RE GOING—PREVIEW OF THE FUTURE

Review any future initiatives and directions, as well as any hopes and prayers of the congregation moving forward.

## *Integrate*

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### GET CONNECTED—PATHWAYS TO DEEPER INVOLVEMENT

**Identify how people can become more connected to the church in addition to becoming members.** Examples include small groups, serving in and outside the walls of the church, and more.

LEADER TIP: *This is a good time to identify any helpful pathways your church has created to make involvement more accessible so that new people aren’t left to figure out how to do that on their own.*

## CLOSING

**ASK:** What is something new you learned today? Do you have a question about our church that hasn't yet been addressed?

**EXPLAIN:** Now that we have learned more about the mission of our church, let's take a moment to reflect and dream. Complete this sentence: **"At our best, our church is a community that..."**

Remind your group of the additional questions available in the "Going Deeper" section at the end of this session for those who want to reflect further on their role in the working out of the mission of the church.

# Going Deeper

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## PATHWAYS TO DEEPER INVOLVEMENT IN THE CHURCH'S LIFE

In Session Two, we learned about the Covenant's five mission priorities, and in the Going Deeper section you asked God to show you a practical way to engage in one of those areas. That exercise may have led you to engage in the mission of the Covenant. Now take time to reflect on the mission and ministries of this church. Where might God be calling you to serve?

**As you consider the five mission priorities, what ministries of this church do you see associated with each priority?**

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

Which ministry or ministries are you most passionate about? Are you already serving in that area? How would you like to be serving in that area?

Talk further with a leader in your church about these reflections.



THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP

*session four*

# The Mission of a Member

*Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.*



## PURPOSE OF THIS SESSION

Acquaint the group with their role as potential members of your church.

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## MATERIALS FOR THIS SESSION

- Leader's guide
- Participant's guides (one per person)
- Pens or pencils
- Post-it notes
- Dry erase board or chart paper and markers
- PowerPoint presentation and equipment for display
- Members from the church to give brief testimonies of ministry experiences (optional)
- Handout on next steps to become a member (optional)

## SESSION OUTLINE

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### Gather

1. Beginning Points
2. Discussion starter
3. Why join a church?

### Instruct & Interact

1. Reasons for joining the church
2. What does it mean to be a member?

### Integrate

1. Group reflection and discussion
2. Decision to become a member
3. Closing

**Going Deeper**

# Gather

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## BEGINNING POINTS

- **Welcome participants back** to *The Meaning of Membership: Deeper in Christ. Further in Mission. Together.*
- **EXPLAIN: The objective for this session** is to acquaint the group with their role as potential members of our church.
- **Pray**

## DISCUSSION STARTER

**Choose from one of the following options:**

**OPTION 1:** Hand out Post-it notes, and ask participants to write down the name of a person or organization they are committed to on each note. Ask them to share the reasons behind their commitments either in pairs or as a group.

**OPTION 2:** Ask participants to pull out every card from their wallets or identify every app on their phone that represents membership in something. Examples may be a library card, a gym card, an Amazon Prime membership, a frequent flier program, and so on. Note where there are commonalities within the group, or do some fun “contests” such as who has the oldest “member since” recognition, who has the longest expired card still in their possession, and so on.

## WHY JOIN A CHURCH?

**EXPLAIN:** Sometimes we hear that people no longer like to commit to joining groups or organizations. Yet this exercise just showed us that isn't true. When people understand why commitment is important, they are willing to invest. Today we will explore what it means to commit to becoming a church member.

If you are a follower of Christ, one spiritual reality the Bible teaches is that you are already a member of God's universal Church. You are joined right now to every other believer around the world by the common relationship we share with Christ. When we join God's family, we are organically joined to all other brothers and sisters who have also

**As a follower  
of Christ, you  
are already a  
member of God's  
universal Church**

experienced the grace of Christ. We become brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of location, culture, class, or gender.

So why bother joining a specific local church? What are some reasons to become a member? (*Allow time for answers.*)

## *Instruct and Interact*

### REASONS FOR JOINING THE CHURCH

**EXPLAIN:** You have already identified many reasons for joining a local church. Commitment and rootedness to a local church can radically transform us as we go deeper in Christ and further in mission together. In Scripture we see several reasons to join the church:

- **Joining the church honors Christ.** Taking this step is a tangible expression of a spiritual reality. It helps us make public declaration of a spiritual truth about our identification with Christ and other believers. Christ loved the Church and gave his life for it. As we commit to the Church, we join Christ in that commitment. (MARK 10:45; LUKE 24:46-47; HEBREWS 10:25; COLOSSIANS 2:19)
- **Joining the church is missional.** Quite simply, we are better together. We can accomplish more by joining with others than we would ever be able to accomplish on our own. (MATTHEW 28:18-20; ROMANS 12:5-8; ACTS 11:19-26; EPHESIANS 2:10)
- **Joining the church fosters spiritual growth.** Making this commitment is part of the progression of faith. First, we commit to Christ, and as part of that commitment we further commit to Christ's family. The New Testament contains 39 "one another" commands about how to live life as brothers and sisters. We cannot reasonably fulfill those commands without making a commitment to a specific group of people. (JOHN 13:34-35; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-22; EPHESIANS 4:15-16)
- **Joining the church is ethical.** Membership is inferred from the New Testament. For example, the Apostle Paul was so broken-hearted about the persistent, flaunting, egregious, and immoral behavior of one member of the Corinthian church that he instructed the members to expel him. (*You can't be expelled from something of which you are not an initiated member.*) Membership is also inferred in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy where some leaders could choose others to minister, or restrict the ministry of others. (ACTS 2:44-47; EPHESIANS 4:11-13; EPHESIANS 5:19-20)

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

- **Joining the church is counter-cultural.** When we make this choice, we swim against the current of consumer religion in which people feel the freedom to move from church to church, with no commitment to a specific congregation. Yet hopping from church to church curtails our growth and prevents the cultivation of deep roots. A different kind of growth occurs through perseverance. Public commitments cause us to review the depth of bonds even in tough times.

(1 CORINTHIANS 12:22-26; GALATIANS 6:2; PHILIPPIANS 1:29-30)

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MEMBER?

**EXPLAIN:** Membership in the church is sometimes described as the desire to grow as Christ's disciple, be a part of God's kingdom, and fulfill the will of God. Let's look at each of these descriptors individually.

### Growing as Christ's disciples

**EXPLAIN:** In the Evangelical Covenant Church we are characterized by four distinctives by which we go deeper in Christ and further in mission together: biblical, devotional, connectional, and missional. These commitments remind us how we can grow.

**LEADER TIP:** Elaborate on these and any other distinctives that you may wish to emphasize, explaining how they are lived out in your church.

**EXPLAIN:** Our commitment is to help you go deeper in Christ and further in mission together as a member of our church family.

- **As a biblical family,** we seek to help you understand the Bible so you can apply it as the frame of reference for all of life.
- **As a devotional family,** we seek to help you go deeper in Christ—not just when we are physically together, but also by empowering you to become attentive and responsive to God's presence in all areas of life.
- **As a connectional family,** we seek to help you find your way into meaningful relationships that will both encourage you and challenge you.
- **As a missional family,** we seek to help you discover God's purposes for your life and equip you to utilize your unique gifts for significant service with God for the world.

**Ask the following reflection questions:**

- How have you already experienced growth in these four areas during your time in this church community?
- How can we best empower you to grow further in each of these areas?

**Being a Part of God's Kingdom**

**EXPLAIN:** As we mentioned earlier, if you are a follower of Christ, one spiritual reality the Bible teaches is that you are already a member of God's universal Church, or God's kingdom. Jesus often speaks of the kingdom; in fact, he included it in the Lord's Prayer when he was teaching the disciples how to pray: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (MATTHEW 6:10).

**God's kingdom is not like any earthly kingdom. It is not established by force. It does not have physical boundaries. It will not fall and crumble, but will last forever. As Jesus first ministered with his disciples in Galilee, he demonstrated what God's kingdom is all about. He revealed a kingdom centered in a loving relationship with God and each other.**

Those who follow Jesus live in two worlds—the kingdom of God and this world. We are commanded to be "in the world" to bring the good news of Jesus to others, but not to be "of the world," caving into the evil that exists in the world. Believers are disciples and ambassadors of God's kingdom. We are called to be like Jesus, to spend time with God in prayer, and to participate in God's kingdom in the world by battling hate with love, apathy with care and concern, injustice with justice, and despair with the hope in Jesus. We are called to pray for our enemies, care for the sick, reach out to those in need, and be a friend to the outcast.

**Ask the following reflection question:**

- How can being a member of the church help us live into the kingdom together and help us to be the kind of disciples Christ calls us to be?

**It takes a lifetime  
of growing. As  
Christ's disciples, we  
are committed to  
help one another  
in this journey.**

### Seeking to fulfill the will of God

**EXPLAIN:** As citizens of God's kingdom, we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. As growing disciples of Christ, we seek to fulfill the will of God in the world. By God's grace we come to faith, and by the Holy Spirit we receive the ability to fulfill God's will. As a church member, you join with all other members in seeking to fulfill the will of God.

**LEADER TIP:** Elaborate on these and any others that you may wish to emphasize or invite other members of your congregation to share.

#### Together we:

1. **Strive for spiritual health as a congregation by:**
  - a. being committed to grow deeper in Christ personally
  - b. reflecting the character and holiness of Christ  
(COLOSSIANS 3:1-17)
  - c. praying for the church regularly
  - d. faithfully participating in the life of the church
  - e. promoting unity
  - f. supporting the spiritual growth and personal care of others
  - g. worshiping together
2. **Serve together in ministry as a congregation by:**
  - a. discovering and using our spiritual gifts
  - b. engaging in discipleship opportunities that help us  
be more faithful and fruitful in our service to God
  - c. caring for one another
3. **Support the mission of our congregation by:**
  - a. giving regularly of our finances, time, and talent
  - b. actively participating in congregational decision-making
  - c. inviting non-churched friends to church
  - d. being externally focused in seeking opportunities for  
evangelism and compassion, mercy, and justice to the  
lost and hurting in our community and beyond

**EXPLAIN:** Growing as Christ's disciples, and helping to fulfill God's will in the world is something we are all growing into, from the youngest to the oldest person in the church. It takes a lifetime of growing and we are committed to help one another in this journey.

# Integrate

## GROUP REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

### Ask the following discussion questions:

1. There are many ways that we seek to fulfill God's will. Which are you most drawn to?
2. What are your thoughts about this lifelong journey and the ways in which we minister together to fulfill God's will?
3. Does today's session raise any particular questions, concerns, or other feelings for you?

## DECISION TO BECOME A MEMBER

### Next steps toward becoming a member

Outline the membership process from this point on, including

- Membership application
- Application review process
- Transfer of membership from another congregation
- Congregational recognition, etc.

### If you decide not to become a member

**EXPLAIN:** After praying about this decision, you may decide that now is not the time for you to formally join as a member. That is perfectly okay. We want you to know about this church, we want you to make the best decision as God leads you. Although you may not be able to formally vote in the church, you will have opportunity to belong and be involved in our common life together. Your presence matters as we move into the future, and we look forward to having you join us with each of your unique gifts and talents.

## CLOSING

**OPTIONAL:** Ask a current member of the church speak briefly to the group (*under five minutes*) on what the church has meant to him or her. Pray for that member.



**Ask the following discussion questions:**

- What are your closing thoughts as we end this discussion?
- Would any of you be willing to share about what this church has meant to you so far and what you hope to experience in the future?

**OPTIONAL:** Create a video using the stories and experiences of the class to introduce new members to the congregation when they are brought to membership. Include the reflections on the class from those who are choosing not to become members at this time, and include the faith testimonies of those who are becoming members.

**Close the class** by thanking everyone for their participation, and express your hope for a long and fruitful relationship together. Pray for God's direction in their lives.

**Remind your group** of the additional questions which are available in the "Going Deeper" section at the end of this session for those who want to reflect further on their role in the working out of their mission as a member.

## *Going Deeper*

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### **NEXT STEPS**

**During this session, we discussed the mission of a member. Set aside time this week to review your church's membership process, and ask God to help you discern your next steps.**

**FOR EXAMPLE:**

- Pursue membership by taking the next step in the membership process.
- Talk with a church leader about questions or concerns you have.
- Research the Evangelical Covenant Church further.
- Discern new ways to go deeper in Christ and further in mission with our community.
- Join a small group.
- Serve in a ministry.



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](https://CovChurch.org/Membership)