

THE EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH

EXPLORING COVENANT AFFIRMATIONS

DVD and Study Guide



DVD
VIDEO

Exploring Covenant Affirmations DVD and Study Guide...

CAST

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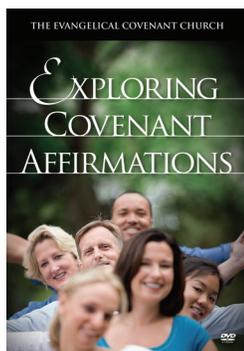
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Exploring Covenant Affirmations Series Overview...

Introduction...

Welcome to a resource designed to help congregations learn more about the core beliefs, or affirmations, that have shaped the Evangelical Covenant Church. North Park Theological Seminary and the Department of Christian Formation have collaborated to design this curriculum series. Our hope is to renew and strengthen our common mission through a clearer understanding of the principles and values that have guided this church. This resource is designed to be used alongside a copy of the 2005 Covenant Affirmations.

Covenant Affirmations are a vital part of our congregational identity and denominational mission. They articulate the theological foundation on which our history and our future are formed. In the introduction to the 2005 Covenant Affirmations, we read:

“The Evangelical Covenant Church seeks to form and nurture communities that are deeply committed to Jesus Christ and passionately engaged in Christ’s mission in the world. The purpose of the Covenant Affirmations is to make clear the values and principles that have guided the Evangelical Covenant Church since its founding in 1885.”

Format of the Curriculum Series...

This curriculum series provides **seven, 60-90 minute study sessions** for use in small groups, Sunday School, confirmation, or new member classes.

Each week’s session includes



well-rounded learning tools that help participants see how Covenant Affirmations relate to their head, heart, and hands. Sessions incorporate Bible study, group discussion, personal reflection, prayer, exposure to content in the affirmations, a video, and extra resources, for participants who want to research topics more deeply. There are also two options for leading a discussion on the 15-minute Affirmation Overview. The **Facilitator Guide** includes tips and a sample bulletin announcement for optional use.

DVD Overview...

Seven video segments, each roughly ten minutes in length, are used as part of this curriculum series. The videos incorporate conversations with seminary faculty and denominational leaders along with visual images to share historic and current aspects of each affirmation.

Two additional video segments are

available for advertising or summary purposes:

- a 2.5-minute video that summarizes the curriculum series and introduces the topics (can be used to promote)
- a fifteen-minute overview of all of the affirmations that can be used as a stand-alone segment

Session Layout and Overview...

Each session provides:

- a one- or two-page Prep Sheet that includes the Affirmation for that session, and discussion questions
- a one-page Facilitator Guide that describes the session contents
- a two-page Discussion Guide to copy and hand out to participants

Both resources can be copied as needed.

Order copies of the printed Covenant Affirmations booklet through www.covenantbookstore.com, or print

and copy the Affirmation Prep Sheets included with each session of this curriculum. This resource includes the following:

- **Introductory Session: Covenant Affirmations and Our Common Christian Affirmations**
- **Affirmation #1: The Centrality of the Word of God**
- **Affirmation #2: The Necessity of the New Birth**
- **Affirmation #3: A Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church**
- **Affirmation #4: The Church as a Fellowship of Believers**
- **Affirmation #5: A Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit**
- **Affirmation #6: The Reality of Freedom in Christ**

Facilitator Guide...

A trained leader or facilitator is not necessary for this study; a participant, or various participants, can take turns fulfilling this role. Facilitators need to be familiar with the Facilitator Guide, the Discussion Guide and the Affirmation Prep Sheet.

This series can be tailored to fit the context in which it is used. Adapt the directions for small and gathered group times to fit your situation. You may elect to spend more time on certain activities or on the entire series. This resource is meant to serve your particular culture and demographic, so feel free to adapt accordingly.

Facilitating Tips...

- Facilitators do not need to be experts. They serve the group by setting the **tone** and keeping the lesson

on track and moving.

- Facilitators serve as **timekeepers** and help participants move from one activity to the next. It helps to tell people when they are half-way through a long activity, or give a one minute warning when an activity is almost over. People may indicate they need more time on certain activities. Remember that the goal of this series is to introduce concepts and to stimulate learning by using a variety of styles. You may elect to spend more time on a specific issue or exercise, but then be prepared to re-plan later how to keep the session and series on track.
- Invite **participation** from various voices. If people are not answering, or a certain subgroup is not responsive, you may want to intentionally invite more participation from that group.
- **Encourage** everyone to take part in each exercise. Partner exercises and personal reflection appeal to reflective persons; small group discussions and large group activities appeal to talkative persons. Having each person participate creates community and a safe learning space.
- A variety of communal **liturgical** practices are incorporated into the sessions. Liturgy may not be used in your 'normal' church style of worship, but consider using these suggestions as a way to expand and enrich the learning experience. The **communal** nature of the liturgies is intentional and based on theological reasoning. Common liturgy reflects the deep value within our affirmations to be communal people connected through fellowship, rather than just individuals engaged in

prayer or worship.

- If your group is six or more, the ideal **configuration** for your meeting space would have tables (with 3-4 chairs) to hold materials and for writing, clustered around an easily visible screen or monitor for viewing the videos. Think ahead how best to arrange the space you have available to match the number of participants you expect.

Sample Announcement To Promote the Series...

Exploring Covenant Affirmations: A Curriculum Series

Join us for an innovative, thought-provoking, conversational experience as we learn more about the historic and theological foundations of our church body. Through video, discussion, biblical study, reflection, and communal prayer, we will learn more about what shapes Covenant identity, how that identity can be expressed to others, and how to be encouraged in our faith walk. This series engages 'head', 'heart' and 'hands,' and was developed by North Park Seminary and the Department of Christian Formation of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

The series begins _____ [date] during _____ [e.g., during the Sunday school hour] at _____ [time] and runs for _____ weeks. It will be held _____ [location]. For more information, contact: _____ .

session one

Covenant Affirmations and Common Christian Affirmations Prep Sheet...

It is the purpose of this booklet to provide a context for the affirmation of our living faith for people both within and outside of our fellowship. Such a statement is not to be construed as a creed or a formal doctrinal statement. Covenanters affirm that sound doctrine, subject to the authority of the word of God alone, is a necessary though not sufficient condition for vital and growing faith. With this as background, we make four basic affirmations concerning our faith in common with the whole Christian Church.

- We are an apostolic church.
- We are a catholic church.
- We are a Reformation church.
- We are an evangelical church.

We are an apostolic church because we confess Jesus Christ and the faith of the apostles as recorded in the Holy Scriptures. Covenanters have always affirmed the Bible to be “the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct.” The Apostle Paul writes that “all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Covenant Church has not chosen to be more precise than this in stating its view of inspiration. **The authority of the Bible is supreme in all matters of faith, doctrine, and conduct, and is to be trusted.** “Where is it written?” was and is the Covenant Church’s touchstone of discussion with regard to faith and practice. In this sense, we are an apostolic church.

We are a catholic church. The word catholic literally means universal. We are part of the universal Church that has existed from the days of the apostles until now. **This includes all who confess faith in Christ.** In the first several centuries of the Christian era, the Church developed a series of affirmations concerning the faith that has been accepted by Christians throughout history. The Covenant Church considers itself a part of that catholic tradition and recognizes its indebtedness to the early creeds and confessions of the Church as concise statements of biblical faith. We refer especially to the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, though the same could be said for the Chalcedonian and Athanasian creeds.

Apostles’ Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hades; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Christian Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

We are a Reformation church in that we see ourselves as standing in the mainstream of the Protestant Reformation, particularly with reference to the doctrine that justification is by faith alone. While affirming with the reformers the sovereignty of the word of God over all creeds, and

the priesthood of all believers, the Covenant Church has placed particular importance on the Reformation emphasis on salvation by grace alone through faith alone—apart from the works of the law. This is well stated in the following excerpt from the Augsburg Confession of 1530, a Lutheran confession with which other Reformation churches would generally have agreed:

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfaction, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.

The Covenant Church continues to be shaped by Pietism, a renewal movement that originated in seventeenth-century Europe and emphasized the need for a personal life in Jesus Christ, sanctification through the Holy Spirit, and call to service in the world. Pietism, in seeking a balance between the head and the heart, affirmed that correct doctrine is a necessary though not sufficient condition for vital and growing faith.

A leading spirit in this movement was Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), who through his widely influential writings challenged the Church to deeper spirituality. Particularly important was his call for widespread reading and study of the Bible; greater participation by lay people in the work of the Church; simple, clear, and direct preaching geared to the needs of the people; and the abandonment of theological hair-splitting in favor of practical concern for living the Christian life. The influence of Pietism extended throughout northern Europe and enriched the lives of many through its emphasis on the new life in Christ.

We are an evangelical church. Five centuries have passed since the Reformation. New issues have arisen upon which Scripture has shed light. The Covenant Church, consistent with its background in Pietism, sees in the emergence of evangelicalism a movement that gives expression to several of its basic emphases.

Many have defined evangelicalism as Protestantism. It is more accurate, however, to view it as a religious awakening that flowered in Europe and America during the nineteenth century. Waves of spiritual revival have swept the Protestant West for more than two centuries. The Covenant Church has grown out of these awakenings, and Covenanters have enjoyed cooperating in mission at home and abroad with all who follow Christ. In this they are true to the spirit of the text expounded at the birth of the Covenant in 1885: "I am a companion of all who fear you" (Psalm 119:63).

Evangelicals historically have been characterized by a number of significant emphases: a strong insistence on biblical authority; the absolute necessity of new birth; Christ's mandate to evangelize the world; the continuing need for education and formation in a Christian context; and responsibility for benevolence and the advancement of social justice.

Consistent with its affirmation of classical Christianity and its own historical experience, the Covenant Church affirms as central to its life and thought a number of evangelical emphases. Foremost among these are the following:

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

session one

Covenant Affirmations and Common Christian Affirmations Facilitator Guide...

Preparation...

- **Review** session outline and familiarize yourself with content.
- **Copy** the Discussion Guide and Common Christian Affirmations Prep Sheet for each person.
- **Copy** the next session's Affirmation Prep Sheet to be read before the session.
- Set up **equipment** in order to show video within lesson.
- Gather **pens** and **Bibles**.

Overview...

- This session, including the video segment, is 60-90 minutes in length.
- Your role is to help keep time for various activities and keep the discussion and learning activities moving forward, although you may always elect to stay on a topic or activity longer if you wish.
- As facilitator, you should also participate in each activity.
- Questions/directions to share with the group are printed in **bold** below.
- Actions for you to take as the facilitator are starred and written in *italics*.

Session Outline ...

Introduction (5 MINUTES)

Ask someone to open in **prayer**.

Share with a Partner (10 MINUTES)

Invite participants to pair up and discuss these questions:

- **How would you describe “the Christian church” to someone who had never attended one?**

- **What part of your own life story, if any, includes experiences with the Christian church?**

**Make sure video equipment is ready.*

Video Reflection (20 MINUTES)

**Hand out the Discussion Guide for session one, the Common Christian Affirmations Prep Sheet and pens.*

Introduce the video by reading the **Video Reflection questions** aloud and encouraging participants **to take notes**. If needed, answers are: (1) Apostolic; (2) Catholic; (3) Reformation; (4) Evangelical.

**Show the video.*

Invite participants to **share their answers to the video questions**. (There will only be time for a few responses to each question. This time is meant to promote discussion and to establish the key themes within this topic.)

Bible Study Discussion (15 MINUTES)

Participants may or may not have read through the Common Christian Affirmation Prep Sheet so time for reading parts of the Prep Sheet during the Bible study are included in this session. Underlined sections identify key ideas for discussion purposes. (Remind participants that they will need to read the Affirmation prior to each session.)

- Invite participants to **form small groups** of 3-4 people.
- Encourage small groups to read the scripture passages and the affirmation section and then discuss the questions.

Application (5 MINUTES)

Gather the small groups together. Read aloud the application questions and guide the group in a discussion. (Time given for this discussion can be somewhat flexible.)

Personal Reflection (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants **to spend some time in prayer and reflection**, using the **Personal Reflection questions** on the Discussion Guide.

Closing & Communal Prayer

(UNDER 5 MINUTES)

Point out the **additional resources** listed on the Discussion Guide.

**Hand out the Prep Sheet for session two.*

Remind participants to **read Affirmation #1, The Centrality of the Word of God**, before the next session.

Invite participants to briefly **share a personal reflection or specific prayer request**.

Read the following explanation aloud before reading the Communal Prayer together: “Each session will conclude with a common liturgical practice. This activity is grounded in the common history and practices that we’ve read about today. Each session’s communal liturgical practice provides opportunity to share in the tradition and history of believers across time.”

session one

Covenant Affirmations and Common Christian Affirmations Discussion Guide...

Video Reflection...

① As you hear them on the video, write down the **four Common Christian Affirmations** upon which the Covenant Church is grounded. Make notes to help you **define** each affirmation.

a. First Common Christian Affirmation:

b. Second Common Christian Affirmation:

c. Third Common Christian Affirmation:

Three aspects of the third affirmation relate to Lutheran history:

- *Salvation by grace through faith*
- *Scripture as final authority*
- *Priesthood of all believers*

d. Fourth Common Christian Affirmation:

② What do I want to **remember** from this presentation?

③ What **action** do I want to take as a result of what I've learned?

Bible Study Discussion...

① Read 2 Timothy 3:16, and the **first** Common Christian Affirmation (apostolic). What does this say about our connection to the witness of the apostles and the **historic** church?

② Read the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, found within the **second** Common Christian Affirmation (catholic). Which of these creeds, if any, are part of our congregational worship and history? How are or could these creeds be helpful to our church?

③ Read Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5, and the **third** Common Christian Affirmation (reformation). What do these verses teach us about salvation? What influence did **pietism** have on the Covenant?

④ Read Psalm 119:63, and the fourth Common Christian Affirmation (evangelical). How does this affirmation relate to our church's focus on **new birth**, discipleship, and mission?

5 **How** and **why** are these terms at times misunderstood?

Application...

1 What evidence have we seen that our church is **already aware** of our history as a congregation, and how it relates to these four affirmations – apostolic, catholic, reformation, and evangelical?

2 Name additional ways our church could **teach and celebrate** this history (e.g., perhaps through worship, education, service).

Personal Reflection...

1 How do I relate to the church as:

a. apostolic?

b. catholic?

c. reformed?

d. evangelical?

2 For what in this inherited story am I most grateful (e.g., not being “alone” in my faith journey, learning from wisdom of others)?

Communal Prayer...

Leader: Lord, call us into the church. Call us in often,

People: and teach us the old words and old songs with their new meanings.

Leader: Lord, give us new words for the words we wear out.

People: Give us new songs for those that have lost their spirit. Give us new reasons for coming in and for going out, into our streets and to our homes.

Leader: As the house of the Lord once moved like a tent in the wilderness,

People: so keep our churches from becoming rigid. Make our congregation alive and free.

Leader: Give us ideas we never had before,

People: so that alleluia and gloria and amen are like the experiences we know in daily living.

ALL: Alleluia! O Lord, be praised! In worship and in work, be praised! Amen.

From The Covenant Hymnal: A Worshipbook, 1996, #921

More Resources...

Covenant Affirmations: This We Believe, Don Frisk (Covenant Publications, 1981) ISBN 0006591043. Presents the basic theological affirmations of the Evangelical Covenant Church. It does not seek to cover the entire range of Covenant convictions, but rather considers those doctrines which have been of most vital significance in our life as a Christian fellowship. While references to our common Christian history are found throughout, see especially Chapter 4 (pages 49-62). Purchase from www.covenant-bookstore.com.

Church History in Plain Language, Bruce L. Shelley (Thomas Nelson, 2nd edition 1996) ISBN 0849938619. Taps the roots of our Christian family tree, combining authoritative research with a captivating style to bring our heritage home to us.

Philipp Jakob Spener: Pietist Patriarch, K. James Stein (Covenant Publications, 1986) ISBN 0910452652. A theological biography details his contributions as the guiding spirit of Pietism. Purchase from www.covenantbookstore.com.

session two

Affirmation #1: The Centrality of the Word of God Prep Sheet...

The Covenant Church states its view of Scripture as follows: “the Holy Scripture, the Old and the New Testament, is the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct.” (See question 1) When Philipp Jakob Spener presented his proposals for the renewal of the Church in 1675, his first concern was with the centrality of the word of God in the life of the congregation and of individual believers. He wrote:

Thought should be given to a more extensive use of the word of God among us. We know that by nature we have no good in us. If there is to be any good in us, it must be brought about by God. To this end the word of God is the powerful means, since faith must be enkindled through the gospel.... The more at home the word of God is among us, the more we shall bring about faith and its fruits.

What was new in Spener’s proposal was not another doctrine of inspiration (there was general agreement on the divine inspiration of Scripture in his day), or a new recognition of the authority of Scripture. What was new was his recovery of the living nature of the word of God. The word is the “powerful means” to the creation of new life through the Holy Spirit. For many in Spener’s day the word of God was simply information, or law, or rules; for Spener the word was power—power to effect change in the life of the hearer through the Holy Spirit. (See question 2)

The dynamic life-shaping power of the word of God has been at the heart of the Covenant Church since its founding. That life-changing word gave birth to the conventicles—the small groups that met for Bible study in confidence that the word would shape the life of the believer and the believing community. (See question 3) It provided the motive for private devotional reading of the Bible, a practice for which our forebears received the nickname “readers.” It prompted the concern for faithful preaching, not of human opinion, but of the word of God, which has power to convict of sin and unrighteousness and kindle the desire for new life. This dynamic life-shaping power of the word leads us to affirm that both women and men are called to serve as ordained ministers. It is the reason we intentionally pursue ethnic diversity. It is the motivation behind every act of compassion and justice through the life of our

shared ministry.

The Evangelical Covenant Church believes that the effective power of the scriptural word is inseparably associated with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit never works independently of the word, and the word is made effective through the Holy Spirit. (See question 4)

The union of word and Spirit is a central theme in evangelical faith. It was by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the written word came into being (2 Timothy 3:16). Through the Spirit the word of God does not return empty but accomplishes that for which it was sent (Isaiah 55:11). It is through the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit that the sinner who responds to the word is assured of being a child of God (Romans 8:16-17).

It is essential, then, to the life of the Church that it be a company of people who desire their lives to be shaped by the powerful and living word of God. The alternative is clear. Not to be shaped by the word is to be shaped by the world. (See question 5)

On every side attractive and persuasive voices urge us toward conformity to the spirit of this age. There is no escaping from these pervasive influences. Only the church that hears and responds to the word will be able to be a prophetic voice in this wilderness and bring healing to a confused and troubled world.

Discussion Questions...

These questions correspond to the underlined statements in this Affirmation.

1. What insight does this statement provide concerning how we are to live the Christian life?
2. How does this description of the Bible fit with our understanding of the Bible’s significance in our church?
3. How do you think the conventicles compare to the small groups that we have in our church today? Within the Covenant the phrase “Where is it written?” is commonly used. How do we explore scripture as a community of faith rather than as individuals?
4. How significant is the role of the Spirit when we read the Bible?
5. If this statement were a measuring stick, how would our church measure up to this standard?

session two

Affirmation #1: The Centrality of the Word of God Facilitator Guide...

Preparation...

- **Review** session outline and familiarize yourself with content.
- **Copy** Discussion Guide for each person.
- **Copy** the next session's Affirmation Prep Sheet to be read before the session.
- Set up **equipment** in order to show video within lesson.
- Gather **pens** and **Bibles**.

Overview...

- This session, including the video segment, is 60-90 minutes in length.
- Your role is to help keep time for various activities and keep the discussion and learning activities moving forward, although you may always elect to stay on a topic or activity longer if you wish.
- As facilitator, you should also participate in each activity.
- Questions/directions to share with the group are printed in **bold** below.
- Actions for you to take as the facilitator are starred and written in *italics*.

Session Outline...

Introduction (5 MINUTES)

Ask someone to open in **prayer**.

Share with a Partner (10 MINUTES)

Invite participants to pair up and discuss this topic:

- **Talk about a time you experienced the power of the Word of God. The example can be from your own life**

or someone else's. The key is to think of a surprising or memorable experience.

**Make sure video equipment is ready.*

Reflecting on the Affirmation

(5 MINUTES)

Assume participants have read through Affirmation #1. To do a brief review, ask for a few short response to the discussion questions listed on the Affirmation Prep Sheet. Refer to the underlined segments.

Video Reflection (20 MINUTES)

**Hand out the Discussion Guide for session two and pens.*

Introduce the video by reading the **Video Reflection questions** aloud and encouraging participants **to take notes**.

**Show the video.*

Invite participants to **share their answers to the video questions**. (There will only be time for a few responses to each question. This time is meant to promote discussion and to establish the key themes within this topic.)

Bible Study Discussion (10 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **form small groups** of 3-4 people and complete the **Bible Study Discussion**. After discussion in small groups, ask each group to report briefly.

**Hand out Bibles.*

Application (5 MINUTES)

Gather the small groups together. **Read aloud the Application questions** and guide the group in a discussion. (Time given for this discussion can be somewhat flexible.)

Personal Reflection (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **spend some time in prayer and reflection**, using the **Personal Reflection questions** on the Discussion Guide.

Closing & Communal Prayer

(UNDER 5 MINUTES)

Point out the **additional resources** listed on the Discussion Guide.

**Hand out the Prep Sheet for session three.*

Remind participants to **read Affirmation #2, The Necessity of the New Birth**, before the next session.

Briefly **share personal reflections or specific prayer requests**.

Close with the communal prayer.

(The quotation at the end of the communal prayer is from "The Covenant Affirmations," 2005.)

session two

Affirmation #1: The Centrality of the Word of God

Discussion Guide...

Video Reflection...

① The Covenant uses the phrase “**Where is it written?**”.

What are the ways that we in our congregation try to understand the scripture together?

② How does God’s Word function as an “**identity shaping**” document? How does the world try to shape our identity?

③ Do you agree that “**being biblical is not easy**”? Why or why not?

Bible Study Discussion...

① Read **Romans 8:16-17** together. What truth about our **identity** is found here? How might that affect how we see our own individual value?

② Take turns looking up and reading the following verses to each other: **Isaiah 55:11**; **2 Timothy 3:16**; **Hebrews 4:12**; then, answer the following questions together.

a. How do the **Holy Spirit** and the Word relate to each other?

b. Reflecting on the verses read and the video, in what way is the Word of God **alive**? How have you experienced the Word as especially powerful, alive, or active in any areas of your life?

c. What **alternative “stories”** or “**sermons**” do we hear in the world that are in conflict with the message of the Word? How would you summarize the **true story** of the Bible to someone unfamiliar with that story?

d. Have you had experiences of reading Scripture in **community** where brothers and sisters interpret or apply biblical truth **differently**? How has that stretched you or affected your understanding of the Bible?

Application...

1 In what ways are we **demonstrating** that the Word of God is central to our life as a church?

2 How might the **centrality** of the Word of God become more evident in our life together?

Personal Reflection...

1 Do I live as if I **love** God's Word? What does that look like?

2 What aspects of my true **identity** in Christ do I need to be reminded of by God (e.g., I am God's child, I am forgiven, I need others, I am called to serve God, etc.)?

3 What do I want to remember from this session?

4 What action do I want to take as a result of this session?

Communal Prayer...

Leader: Wise and giving God, we thank you for revealing yourself through the story of your Word,

People: and in the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Leader: We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit who leads and guides us,

People: to faithful understanding, passionate conviction, and needed encouragement.

Leader: We thank you for the gift of the body of Christ, the community of the church,

People: that helps us access truth in the Word, read truth into our own lives, and be the truth in the world.

Leader: Teach us to love your Word, oh God, and to trust it,

People: even as we struggle to understand it, are surprised by its living power, and are still learning how to share it with the world.

Leader: Teach us to listen for and return to Your Word, again and again,

People: so that we find our identity in your truth, hope, and love.

Leader: Help us to turn away from the loud voices in this world,

People: to reject voices of selfishness, short-term gain, and despair.

ALL: Remind us that, "only the church that hears and responds to the Word will be able to be a prophetic voice in this wilderness, and bring healing to a confused and troubled world." Amen.

More Resources...

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart (Zondervan, 2003) ISBN 0310246040. This informative book explains how various genres/books in the Bible are to be read and understood differently. It also discusses hermeneutics—applying the Word to context.

Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes, Justo L. Gonzalez (Abingdon, 1996) ISBN 0687014522. Gonzalez explores how a Hispanic perspective illuminates the biblical text in ways that will be valuable not only for Latino readers but also for the church at large. He introduces five "paradigms" for Latino biblical interpretation and provides concrete examples of biblical texts that gain new meaning when read from a different perspective.

Shaped by the Word, M. Robert Mulholland (The Upper Room, 2001) ISBN 0835809366. Being introduced to the concept of reading formationally as opposed to reading informationally can profoundly change the way you read the Bible.

Affirmation #2: The Necessity of the New Birth Prep Sheet...

When the Covenant Church affirms that it is evangelical, it proclaims that the new birth in Jesus Christ is essential. We teach that “by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God conquered sin, death, and the devil, offering forgiveness for sin and assuring eternal life for those who follow Christ.” New birth is more than the experience of forgiveness and acceptance. It is regeneration and the gift of eternal life. This life has the qualities of love and righteousness as well as joy and peace. (See question 1)

Jesus said to Nicodemus, “No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above” (John 3:3). To enter the kingdom is not only to have a right relationship with God but to be enlisted in Christ’s service. God’s purposes entail the transformation of persons, as well as the transformation of God’s world into a place of truth, justice, and peace. (See question 2)

As an evangelical church we believe that conversion results in eternal life. Conversion can be defined as the act by which a person turns with repentance and faith from sin to God. (See question 3) Conversion involves a conscious rejection of the life of sin and involves a commitment of faith. Eternal life is not given through assent to creeds alone, but through a personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

Such a high doctrine of conversion does not mean that all believers have dramatic conversion experiences. While no one remembers the moment of physical birth, one’s present life is evidence of its occurrence. So a person may be truly converted even though he or she has no memory of the moment of new birth. The vitality of life is the proof of birth, not its memory or recollection.

It is the will of God that all should be redeemed: “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Yet it is only through the grace of Christ that we can be saved. Our Savior declared, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). The apostles concurred: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The Covenant Church shares God’s concern for the salvation of all,

but accepts God’s word that only those converted to Jesus Christ shall be saved.

The new birth, however, is only the beginning of life. Growing to maturity in Christ is a lifelong process called sanctification. (See question 4) Being formed in Christ is the goal, for both individuals and communities of believers. The Apostle Paul agonized as a woman in labor, that believers might express Christ’s character and goodness in their whole being (Galatians 4:19).

On this journey of being transformed by the Holy Spirit into Christ’s likeness, God’s people experience and express love for God and others. Healthy and effective spiritual growth takes place in the context of relationships, both within and beyond peer groups. The desired outcome of this formational process is described by the Apostle Paul: “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

Being a disciple of Jesus implies costly obedience to all of his teachings. Such obedience, together with the Spirit’s work in us, equips us to do the work of the kingdom, giving witness to the good news and serving others in Jesus’ name.

Though there is no state of final perfection in this life, there is a process of growth from beginning to end. (See question 5) This growth is as much a gift of God as the gift of life itself (Galatians 3:3). Together with the gifts of life and growth, the child of God receives the gifts of assurance of salvation and confidence in the faith. The Apostle Paul declares: “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

As there is no new birth without repentance and faith, so there is no healthy spiritual growth without a life of discipline. Discipline is the cultivation and nurture of the spiritual life in both its personal and corporate dimensions. Public worship, participation in the sacraments, prayer, Bible study, service to others, stewardship, fellowship, and other spiritual disciplines all enhance the Christian’s growth. (See question 6) A life of discipline prepares us individually and communally for passionate engagement in the work of Christ in our world. It is through transformed

people that God transforms our world. It is for this reason we are called into new life. A life of discipline seeks to avoid moral and spiritual indifference on the one hand and oppressive legalism on the other.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul declares: “You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

While the pursuit of holy living does not earn God’s favor, it pleases God. It allows the Spirit to fill the Christian with joy and makes the Christian an effective agent of reconciliation.

Discussion Questions...

These questions correspond to the underlined statements in this Affirmation.

1. According to the article what is the “new birth”?
2. What do you think this “transformation” looks like?
3. How did you experience conversion?
4. How do you understand sanctification?
5. How do we encourage “growth from beginning to end”?
What makes this kind of growth difficult?
6. How effective is our church at encouraging discipline in our spiritual lives? How could we improve in this area?

session three

Affirmation #2: The Necessity of the New Birth Facilitator Guide...

Preparation...

- **Review** session outline and familiarize yourself with content.
- **Copy** Discussion Guide for each person.
- **Copy** the next session's Affirmation Prep Sheet to read before the session.
- Set up **equipment** in order to show video within lesson.
- Gather **pens** and **Bibles**.

Overview...

- This session, including the video segment, is one hour in length.
- Your role is to help keep time for various activities and keep the discussion and learning activities moving forward, although you may always elect to stay on a topic or activity longer if you wish.
- As facilitator, you should also participate in each activity.
- Questions/directions to share with the group are in printed in **bold** below.
- Actions for you to take as the facilitator are starred and written in *italics*.

Session Outline...

Introduction (5 MINUTES)

Ask someone to open in **prayer**.

Share with a Partner (10 MINUTES)

**Hand out the Discussion Guide for session three and pens.*

Invite participants to pair up and discuss the questions on their sheet. If they complete this exercise early, direct partner pairs to share with each other brief stories of when they, or someone they know, became a Christian and what that experience meant.

**Make sure video equipment is ready*

Reflecting on the Affirmation

(5 MINUTES)

Assume participants have read through Affirmation #2. To do a brief review, ask for a few short responses to the discussion questions listed on the Affirmation Prep Sheet. Refer to the underlined segments.

Video Reflection (20 MINUTES)

Introduce the video by reading the **Video Reflection questions** aloud and encouraging participants **to take notes**. If needed, the answer to the question is: new birth, when God reaches in with grace to take us out of spiritual death into new life.

**Show the video.*

Invite participants to **share their answers to the video questions**. (There will only be time for a few responses to each question. This time is meant to promote discussion and to establish the key themes within this topic.)

Bible Study Discussion (10 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **form small groups** of 3-4 people and complete the **Bible Study Discussion**. After discussion in small groups, ask each group to report briefly.

**Hand out Bibles.*

Personal Reflection (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **spend some time in prayer and reflection**, using the **Personal Reflection questions** on the Discussion Guide.

Application (5 MINUTES)

Gather the small groups together. **Read aloud the Application questions** and guide the group in a discussion. (Time given for this discussion can be somewhat flexible.)

Closing & Communal Prayer

(UNDER 5 MINUTES)

Point out the **additional resources** listed on the Discussion Guide.

**Hand out the Prep Sheet for session four.*

Remind participants to **read Affirmation #3, A Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church**, before the next session.

Close with the communal prayer.

Affirmation #2: The Necessity of the New Birth Discussion Guide...

Partner Activity...

1 Circle the words (below) that you associate with the act of becoming a Christian. Then briefly explain why you chose each word. (Feel free to add words to this list if needed.)

- | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Private | Dramatic | Born-again |
| Gift | Sanctification | Baptism |
| Logical | Creeds | Everyday |
| Accepting Jesus | Rebirth | Personal |
| Surprising | Sacrifice | Insurance |
| Sin | Eternal life | Public |
| Familiar | Inherited | Confirmation |
| Choice | Absorbed | Prayer |
| One-time Event | Guarantee | Saved |
| Confession | Guilt | Non-specific |
| Holy Spirit | Guided | Change |
| Insecure | Conversion | Kingdom of God |
| Discipline | Daily | Growth |
| Gradual | Process | Family |
| New life | Communal | Emotional |
| Journey | Repentance | Decision |
| Persecuted | Mystery | Costly |
| Celebration | Testimony | Dependent |
| Home | Unknown | |

Video Reflection...

1 In the video, "new birth" is defined as:

2 Soong-Chan Rah spoke of a particular moment when he accepted Christ, and Ed Delgado stated that he does not remember a dramatic conversion experience. Both characterize the Covenant. Which is most similar to your experience?

3 What does the statement "new birth in Christ is not about what we give up, but what we accept" mean to you?

Bible Study Discussion...

1 Take turns looking up and reading the following verses: **John 3:3; 2 Peter 3:9; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 4:13, 22-24; Galatians 3:3.** As each verse is read, record your thoughts in the areas below.

How we receive new life	Results of receiving new life

② Read Philippians 2:12, 13. How would you describe the balance between the **Spirit's** role and **our** own action on the journey of spiritual growth? What metaphor or image might be helpful in describing this balance?

③ In your own experience, how does new life in Christ relate to the process of **discipleship**?

Personal Reflection...

① Where is God **guiding** me on the journey of discipleship right now? Am I in a posture of listening, in order to hear God's call?

② What does it feel like/look like when I have a balanced/biblical understanding of **my** role and **God's** role in my faith walk?

Application...

① How does our church teach that new life in Christ **changes our relationship to others**; our family, our community, our nation, our world?

② How might our church **better reflect this reality** of new life in Christ at various levels of worship, education, service, etc.?

Communal Prayer...

Leader: When we gather to worship God, we remember that we are people who have preferred our own wills to God's will. Let us confess our sins to God in the presence of each other.

ALL: Eternal God, we confess that we have failed to be your obedient servants: We have not done your will; we have broken your law; we have rebelled against your love; we have not loved our neighbors; we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Bow for a moment of silent confession and reflection.)

Leader: Hear the Good News: "Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that is God's own proof of his love toward us." In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

People: In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!
Thanks be to God!

From *The Covenant Book of Worship*, 1981, p. 68

More Resources...

"Bringing My World to Christ," is an evangelism program developed by the Department of Church Growth and Evangelism. More information at www.covchurch.org.

The "School of Evangelism" developed by the Department of Church Growth & Evangelism is a weekend experience which brings speakers and resources to local churches for training in ways to reach out and share good news. More information at www.covchurch.org.

The Department of Christian Formation's GROW curriculum provides congregations with tools and reflection to strengthen the lifelong journey of discipleship. More information at www.covchurch.org.

Turning To Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels, Scot McKnight (Westminster John Knox, 2002) ISBN #0664225144. This book by North Park University professor Scot McKnight includes the diverse ways people have come to faith in Christ and theological reflection on evangelism and discipleship.

session four

Affirmation #3: Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church Prep Sheet...

The Covenant Church has always been characterized by its involvement in mission. The earliest name attributed to Covenanters was “Mission Friends,” people who covenanted together for the purpose of common mission both far and near. (See question 1) They understood the work of mission to be evangelism and Christian formation, as well as the benevolent ministries of compassion and justice in the face of suffering and oppression. This is the legacy of Pietism, which was instrumental in pioneering the Protestant missionary movement. An early Pietist, August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), described this when he said that the Christian lives for God’s glory and the good of one’s neighbor. (See question 2) At Halle in Germany, Francke was instrumental in developing a Pietist university that educated pastors, teachers, and missionaries. Pietists there founded orphanages, a hospital, a pharmacy, a printing press, and a great library devoted to a global vision of Christian service. We remain a community of friends committed to this whole mission of the Church.

Jesus made it clear that if his followers were to love him, they must keep his commandments. He said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40). This is the great commandment.

The Covenant Church is also committed to the great commission of Jesus Christ: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). (See question 3)

Established by the gospel and grace of Jesus Christ, the Church exists by doing mission—the great commission and the great commandment—as fire exists by burning. The church’s mission is faith active in love, and the two cannot be separated without diminishing the gospel. As Christ’s representative in the world, the Church is to be an agent of grace, entrusted with the message of reconciliation, hope, justice, and peace. At the end of his life, Jesus declared his disciples his friends, meaning they shared with him a common passion for his mission in the world (John 15:13-15).

Covenanters, as Mission Friends, have broadly understood mission to be the befriending of others, and all that God has created, in the name of the One who first befriended us.

Covenanters, like all Christians, are called to proclaim this good news with their lives and words, and by the love and integrity of their communities. In faithful witness, the lost are found in Christ. In acts of generosity and compassion, people are ministered to and justice is proclaimed. In the work of evangelism and mission, we seek to embody the presence of Jesus Christ with head, hands, voice, and heart. (See question 4) Jesus called on his disciples to carry their own crosses, and in this joyful way of suffering and service we embody his ministry of reconciliation and proclaim the reality of the kingdom, which extends to every person in every land and to the whole of creation. The Covenant Church, therefore, is “committed to reaching across boundaries of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, age, and status in the cultivation of communities of life and service.” This mission belongs to the whole Church, the spiritual priesthood of all believers—women and men, young and old, laity and clergy.

The Covenant Church seeks to hold together proclamation and compassion, personal witness and social justice, service and stewardship in all areas of life. (See question 5) God makes all things new and calls God’s followers to share this mission. Those who neither know nor love the Lord Jesus as well as those enduring poverty, suffering, inequality, and injustice cannot be ignored. In the incarnation of Jesus Christ, “God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:19-20). This bears witness to God’s boundless passion for both the souls and earthly lives of all people, and for all that God has made. When we address not only the consequences but also the causes of suffering, we live out what it means to be the body of Christ in the world.

Discussion Questions on following page.

Discussion Questions...

These questions correspond to the underlined statements in this Affirmation.

1. How would the title “Mission Friends” describe our church?
2. What specific things does our church do to live out this statement?
3. What are the great commandment and the great commission and why are they significant?
4. What do you think of this strategy for evangelism and mission? How have you seen it work?
5. This statement says that balance is needed. Where in our church is this balance evident? What is the particular calling of this congregation?

session four

Affirmation #3: Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church Facilitator Guide...

Preparation...

- **Review** session outline and familiarize yourself with content.
- **Copy** the Discussion Guide for each person.
- **Copy** the next session's Affirmation Prep Sheet to be read before the session.
- Set up **equipment** in order to show video within lesson.
- Gather **pens** and **Bibles**.

Overview...

- This session, including the video segment, is 60-90 minutes in length.
- Your role is to help keep time for various activities and keep the discussion and learning activities moving forward, although you may always elect to stay on a topic or activity longer if you wish.
- As facilitator, you should also participate in each activity.
- Questions/directions to share with the group are printed in **bold** below.
- Actions for you to take as the facilitator are starred and written in *italics*.

Session Outline...

Introduction (5 MINUTES)

Ask someone to open in **prayer**.

Share With a Partner (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants to pair up and discuss these questions:

- **How would you describe the "mission of the church" to someone who does not attend church?**

- **What does the mission look like?**
- **What actions does it include?**

**Make sure video equipment is ready.*

Reflecting on the Affirmation

(5 MINUTES)

Assume participants have read through Affirmation #3. To do a brief review, ask for a few short responses to the discussion questions listed on the Affirmation Prep Sheet. Refer to the underlined segments.

Video Reflection (20 MINUTES)

**Hand out the Discussion Guide for session four and pens.*

Introduce the video by reading the **Video Reflection questions** aloud and encouraging participants to **take notes**. If needed answers are: (1) We need to be involved in compassion, mercy and justice; hospital, orphanage, senior care facility; (2) Alaska, build schools as well as churches.

**Show the video.*

Invite participants to **share their answers to the video questions**. (There will only be time for a few responses to each question. This time is meant to promote discussion and to establish the key themes within this topic.)

Bible Study Discussion (10 MINUTES)

Invite participants to form **small groups** of 3-4 people and complete the **Bible Study Discussion**. After discussion in small groups, ask each group to report briefly.

**Hand out Bibles.*

Application (5 MINUTES)

Gather the small groups together. **Read aloud the Application questions** and guide the group in a discussion. (Time given for this discussion can be somewhat flexible.)

Personal Reflection (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **spend some time in prayer and reflection**, using the **Personal Reflection questions** on the Discussion Guide.

Closing & Communal Prayer

(UNDER 5 MINUTES)

Point out the **additional resources** listed on the Discussion Guide

**Hand out the Prep Sheet for session five.*

Remind participants to **read Affirmation #4, The Church as a Fellowship of Believers**, before the next session.

Briefly **share personal reflections or specific prayer requests**.

Divide the group into two smaller groups, A and B, and **close with the communal prayer**.

session four

Affirmation #3: Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church

Discussion Guide...

Video Reflection...

1 What mission did the first **Home of Mercy** carry out? Who did the Home serve?

2 Where were the Covenant Church's **first missionaries** sent and what ministries were part of their tasks?

3 What does the statement "If I want the **best** for me, I've got to want the **best** for my brothers and sisters" look like in your life? How would you define "the best"?

Bible Study Discussion...

1 Read aloud Luke's version of the Great Commandment, **Luke 10:25-37**. Summarize the text in your own words. Who are neighbors for our congregation?

2 Read the following verses together: **Matthew 28:19, 20; John 15:13-15; Luke 4:16-21**.

a. What do these verses say about **preaching** and **living** the Good News? Where is this to take place?

b. The Luke passage is Jesus' first "sermon". How does this passage describe **good news**?

c. What other **teachings of Christ** in the New Testament can you think of that link having a personal relationship with Christ (loving God) with outward mission (loving others)?

d. How is the **good news** the church is told to proclaim/ embody to be seen?

Application...

1 If we agree, along with our historic forbearers, that personal transformation means getting involved in **local and international mission**, what **roadblocks** keep our church from doing this?

2 Who are the “discarded” in our current ministry context?

3 How does our **church budget** reflect a commitment to the whole mission of the church?

Personal Reflection...

1 How am I loving **God** with all of who I am? How am I loving my **neighbor** as myself?

2 How would my spiritual life be strengthened by more involvement in **mission** and **service** work? What might that look like? What keeps me from doing it?

3 What do I want to remember from this session? What do I feel called to act on or embody in my life in some way?

Communal Prayer...

ALL: Gracious God, we come to you today in prayer for your church and for your world.

A: We praise you, Christ Jesus, for establishing the church as your body here on earth, to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind.

B: We ask that you keep the church faithful to your commands, oh Lord.

A: We praise you, Christ Jesus, for calling us your friends so that we too can share in your mission of befriending and redeeming the whole world.

B: We ask that you continue to befriend us in our lonely times, oh Lord, as we seek to befriend the stranger, orphan, and widow.

A: We praise you, Christ Jesus, for promising to reconcile the church and all of creation to Your goodness, as we go out into the world to baptize and make disciples of all nations.

B: We ask that you strengthen those active in outreach ministry and missionary service today, oh Lord.

A: We praise you, Christ Jesus, for being the good news and for showing us how to love God and our neighbors with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength.

B: We ask that you keep the church faithful to your commands, oh Lord.

ALL: Gracious God, we come to you today in thanksgiving for your church and for your world. Walk with us as we learn to be faithful to your commands, oh Lord. Amen.

More Resources...

Several Covenant ministries are committed to helping churches become involved in the whole mission: visit www.covchurch.org for information on the Covenant Ministries of Benevolence, Covenant World Relief, the Department of Christian Formation’s “Sankofa” and Pacific Southwest Conference’s “Journey to Mosaic”, the Department of Compassion, Mercy and Justice, and the Department of World Mission.

The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today, Charles Marsh (Perseus Books, 2006) ISBN 0465044166. This book traces the church’s involvement with civil rights historically and today.

Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Charity Development, John M. Perkins (Baker, 1993) ISBN 0801071224. John Perkins calls churches to leave behind old political assumptions and apply serious biblical ministry to urban problems. This new vision rejects easy answers, stressing Christian community.

The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World, Robert E. Webber (Baker, 2002) ISBN 0801091527. The author highlights the focus of this demographic on mission, servanthood, and action.

session five

Affirmation #4: The Church as a Fellowship of Believers Prep Sheet...

Martin Luther, in the midst of the Reformation era, made a daring suggestion for the organization of the Church: “[Christians] should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and do other Christian works. According to this order, those who do not lead Christian lives could be known, reprovved, corrected, cast out, or excommunicated, according to the rule of Christ (Matthew 18:15-17). Here one could also solicit benevolent gifts to be willingly given and distributed to the poor, according to St. Paul’s example (2 Corinthians 9). Here would be no need of much and elaborate singing. Here one could set out a brief and neat order for baptism and the sacrament and center everything on the Word, prayer, and love.”

Luther saw the ideal church as a gathering of those who confess faith in Jesus Christ, commit themselves to each other, and submit to no authority other than Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church. The Covenant Church seeks to realize the value of this ideal.

The roots of this view of the Church are found in two basic New Testament emphases:

- The Church is a communion or fellowship of believers, characterized by mutual participation in and sharing of the new life in Christ. Paul calls the Christian community the body of Christ, a community composed of many members, each different and mutually interdependent (1 Corinthians 12:12-30). It is when we are in community with one another, when all of God’s people are interacting with one another in worship and service, that God’s will is most clearly revealed and discerned. (See question 1)
- The New Testament also 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). These three areas—race, class, and gender—are to be of no advantage or disadvantage within the body of Christ. This is a multiethnic, classless, gender-equal vision. We recognize our need for ethnic diversity, for fellowship and mutual ministry across artificially constructed socio-economic boundaries, and for the gifts and leadership of women and men. It is the

desire of the Covenant Church to pursue this biblical vision. (See question 2)

The Church is a gathered community set apart for involvement in Christ’s mission to the world. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). The “priesthood of all believers” means that every believer is called to be part of a fellowship of believers and to participate in evangelism, formation, worship, and service. (See question 3)

The believers’ Church is not simply a human institution or organization, but a people whom God has called. Emphasis does not fall on buildings or hierarchical structures, but upon a grace-filled fellowship and active participation, through the Holy Spirit, in the life and mission of Christ.

Membership in the Covenant Church is by confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ. It is open to all believers. We do not expect that all believers will agree on every detail of Christian belief. What is required is that one be born anew “into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). But if membership is open to all believers, it is also open only to believers. “The doors of the church are wide enough to admit all who believe and narrow enough to exclude those who do not,” said our forebears. (See question 4)

This is not to claim that members of the believers’ Church are perfect. The Church knows itself to be always a company of sinners, but sinners who have experienced forgiveness and are seeking wholeness in a new relationship to God. At the same time we affirm that all people at all stages of belief and unbelief are welcome to participate in the life of the church.

The Covenant Church believes the Holy Scriptures to be the source of the Church’s life, its preaching and teaching, and the means for its renewal. Jesus said, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31b-32). Included in the ministry of the word is the observance of baptism and Holy Communion as sacraments of the church expressly commanded by our Lord. They

are visible signs of the invisible grace of Jesus Christ. The Covenant Church is open to all believers and recognizes infant and believer baptism as biblical forms of that sacrament and includes the practice of both in its ministry.

The local congregation is of crucial importance in God's redemptive work in the world. While God is at work elsewhere, it is particularly in the close personal relationships of the fellowship that people are opened to the healing, convicting, and life-giving ministry of the Holy Spirit. Here, biblical nurture and discipline occur in the context of love and concern. (See question 5)

The Covenant Church is a communion of interdependent member congregations. Each local congregation seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit in matters of common life and mission. In accordance with congregational polity, every congregation is free to govern its own affairs. At the same time, every Covenant congregation has committed itself to participate responsibly in the fellowship, decisions, and shared ministries of the regional conferences and denomination.

The Covenant Church holds that there is only one indispensable ministry—that of Jesus Christ. All members of the body are called to this ministry. It is a ministry of proclamation and evangelism, Christian formation and nurture, stewardship and servanthood. Both concern for personal

salvation and for social justice are involved in the ministry. At the same time, we recognize that God calls certain men and women to be set apart as servants of the word, sacraments, and service. This does not give credentialed ministers superior status. It does recognize their call from God and gives them a special function in the Church, enabling the Church to fulfill its mission. (See question 6)

Discussion Questions...

These questions correspond to the underlined statements in this Affirmation.

1. Which words or phrases in this definition do you affirm as a good description of the church?
2. How is this realized and not realized in the church today?
3. Where is this true in our church and where do we fall short?
4. How do you respond to the phrases “open to all” and “open only to believers”?
5. What examples can you share to illustrate this statement? Where does this happen in our church?
6. What do you think about this final sentence?

session five

Affirmation #4: The Church as a Fellowship of Believers Facilitator Guide...

Preparation...

- **Review** session outline and familiarize yourself with content.
- **Copy** Discussion Guide for each person.
- **Copy** the next session's Affirmation Prep Sheet to be read before the session.
- Set up **equipment** in order to show video within lesson.
- Gather **pens** and **Bibles**.
- Gather **hymnals** to sing final hymn, familiarize yourself with the tune, have someone play piano, or read it instead of singing.

Overview...

- This session, including the video segment, is 60-90 minutes in length.
- Your role is to help keep time for various activities and keep the discussion and learning activities moving forward, although you may always elect to stay on a topic or activity longer if you wish.
- As facilitator, you should also participate in each activity.
- Questions/directions to share with the group are printed in **bold** below.
- Actions for you to take as the facilitator are starred and written in *italics*.

Session Outline...

Introduction (5 MINUTES)

Ask someone to open in **prayer**.

Share With a Partner (10 MINUTES)

**Hand out the Discussion Guide for session five and pens.*

Invite the group to pair up and answer the Partner Activity questions. As they complete this exercise, if time allows, direct partner pairs to share stories with each other about their first time attending church.

**Make sure video equipment is ready.*

Reflecting on the Affirmation

(5 MINUTES)

Assume participants have read through Affirmation #5. To do a brief review, ask for a few short responses to the discussion questions listed on the Affirmation Prep Sheet. Refer to the underlined segments.

Video Reflection (20 MINUTES)

Introduce the video by reading the **Video Reflection questions** aloud and encouraging participants **to take notes**. If needed, answers are: (1) conventicles; (2) Genesis 1, Genesis 2, and Jesus having disciples in the New Testament; (3) Baptism and Lord's Supper, both are performed in community and involve vows/actions taken by the group, not just individuals.

**Show the video.*

Invite participants to **share their answers to the video questions**. (There will only be time for a few responses to each question. This time is meant to promote discussion and to establish the key themes within this topic.)

Bible Study Discussion (10 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **form small groups** of 3-4 people and complete the **Bible Study Discussion**. After

discussion in small groups, ask each group to report briefly.

**Hand out Bibles.*

Application (5 MINUTES)

Gather the small groups together again. **Read aloud the Application questions** and guide the group in a discussion. (Time given for this discussion can be somewhat flexible.)

Personal Reflection (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **spend some time in prayer and reflection**, using the **Personal Reflection questions** on the Discussion Guide.

**Hand out hymnals if singing last hymn, otherwise read it out loud.*

Closing & Communal Hymn

(5 MINUTES)

Point out the **additional resources** listed on the Discussion Guide.

**Hand out the Prep Sheet for session six.*

Remind participants to **read Affirmation #5, A Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit**, before the next session.

Ask a participant to **read aloud the quote by Zenos Hawkinson** in the box on the participant sheet.

Close by singing hymn #578, Thank You, God, for Sisters, Brothers. (Words are set to a fairly well-known tune, so don't be afraid to try singing it, even a cappella!)

Affirmation #4: The Church as a Fellowship of Believers

Discussion Guide...

Partner Activity...

1 Begin by briefly sharing with your partner the words or phrases you most often use to describe “**the church**” and why. Spend a few minutes listing all of the names or descriptions of “the church” you can recall from the Bible or from Affirmation #4.

My words and phrases	Descriptions from the Bible

Video Reflection...

- 1 What were early **small groups** called?
- 2 What **biblical tenets** does Tim Johnson site as reasons for community “not being an option, it is mandated for us?” (They are the first biblical references Johnson gives early on in the video.)
- 3 What two **sacraments** does the Covenant celebrate? How are they communal?

4 Describe how “not always having to be right” can be **liberating**.

Bible Study Discussion...

1 Take turns reading the following passages aloud. As you listen to each passage, try to write one sentence that summarizes its main point. Share your summaries with each other.

a. **Galatians 3:23-29**

b. **Ephesians 4:11-16**

c. **1 Peter 2:1, 2, 9, 10**

2 In what ways is **diversity** necessary for the body of Christ?

3 How are we shaped to be similar or **united**?

4 How is the fellowship of believers **interdependent** within the body of Christ at a variety of levels: local, regional, and denominational?

Application...

Covenant members early on were called “**Mission Friends**.” As Tim Johnson explained, “*It’s possible to be right about the mission but be so unfriendly that we undermine it. At the same time, it’s also possible to be very friendly, civil, but be fuzzy and mission-less. When we live out both halves of that name, there is a corrective and a balance... We focus on mission but do it in a strongly relational way.*”

1 How does **our church** incorporate these two halves? Are we stronger on one or the other?

2 How might we **strengthen** both our mission and our friendliness?

Personal Reflection...

1 How might God be **guiding me** to practice deep and trusted fellowship with other believers, not to “go it alone”?

2 Am I in community with Christians who are **different** from me? How might I be more open to this kind of community?

4 What does it feel like in my life when I **balance** being missional and being a friend?

Communal Hymn...

“Trust the Word, then, which you are for each other, and for us all. A fellowship is a structure built out of a Word, requiring that same ceaseless cybernetic flow of messages, of information, for its health... Imperfect as we are, we are yet, in ourselves, messages from God to each other, in that incarnated form we creatures most readily understand.”—Zenos Hawkinson (*Anatomy of the Pilgrim Experience*, pp. 86, 90)

“*Thank You, God, for Sisters, Brothers*”

Verse 1: Thank you God for sisters, brothers, keeping faith with us and you. Joining heart to heart with others, as your call to us comes true. With the cross our only standard let us sing with one great voice. “Glory, glory, yours the kingdom, churches in your Church rejoice.”

Verse 2: God be praised for congregations by the love of Christ set free! Many tongues of many nations sing the greater unity. Sweet the psalm and sweet the carol when our song is raised as one: “Glory, glory, yours the power, as in heav’n your will be done.”

Verse 3: May your name be honored ever, heal our differences of old. Bless your churches new endeavor for your kingdom, make us bold. One our Christ and one our Gospel – make us one we now implore: “Glory, glory, yours the glory, through the ages evermore.”

From *The Covenant Hymnal: A Worshipbook*, 1996, #578

More Resources...

Anatomy of the Pilgrim Experience: Reflections on Being a Covenanter, Zenos E. Hawkinson (Covenant Publications, 2000) ISBN 0910452865. A poetic, historic account of early stories and values that made the Covenant people who they were and includes discussions of many of the Covenant affirmations. Available for purchase from www.covenantbookstore.com.

Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 5, Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Geoffrey B. Kelly, ed. (Augsburg Fortress, 2004) ISBN 0800683250. *Life Together* includes Bonhoeffer’s thoughts about the nature of Christian community. *Prayerbook of the Bible* describes the moods of an individual’s relationship with God and also the turns of love and heartbreak.

session six

Affirmation #5: Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit Prep Sheet...

The Covenant Church, rooted in historic Christianity, affirms one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit continues the creative work of the Father and the redeeming work of the Son within the life of the church. It is for this reason the Covenant Church has emphasized the continuing work of the Spirit.

According to the Gospel of John, the earthly Jesus promised that the same Spirit of God that “remained on him” (1:32) would one day live in his disciples as a result of his crucifixion and resurrection. The Spirit “abides with you,” he said, “and will be in you” (14:17). It was this Holy Spirit that came to abide in Paul, filling him with the presence of God and directing him, just as it had Jesus. For this reason Paul could claim, “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). It is the spirit in us that enables us to continue Christ’s mission in the world (Acts 1:8).

The New Testament affirms that the Holy Spirit works both within and among individuals. It is the Holy Spirit that draws together those who are far off and estranged, causing them to be made one in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22). It is the Holy Spirit that stirs within each of us a deep sense of familial affection for one another, so that we are beloved to one another (1 Corinthians 15:58). It is because Christ has become our brother (Romans 8:29) that we are together members of the family of God (Ephesians 3:14-16). It is the Spirit of God within us that cries “Abba,” as we have been adopted into the family of God, sisters and brothers one with another (Galatians 4:4-7). It is the Holy Spirit, Paul asserted, that affords a sense of unity and common purpose among Christians (Philippians 1:27; 2:1-2). (See question 1)

The Covenant understanding of the Holy Spirit, rooted in the New Testament, is further informed by the Reformation idea that word and Spirit are inseparable. (See question 2) It is the Spirit of God that enlivens the preaching of the gospel within the community of faith and grants efficacy to the sacraments participated in by the community of faith. The Covenant also draws upon its Pietist heritage for understanding the Holy Spirit. We believe it is the work of the Holy Spirit to instill in the human heart a desire to turn to Christ. We believe it is the work of the Holy Spirit to assure

believers that Christ dwells within them. We believe that the Holy Spirit, in concert with our obedience, conforms us to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-29).

The early Covenanters in Sweden were linked by a common awareness of the grace of God in their lives. They spoke of the Holy Spirit communicating this warm sense of God’s grace to each one individually and directing them to a common devotion to God in Christ through the reading of the Bible and frequent meetings for the purpose of mutual encouragement and edification. They perceived the Holy Spirit leading them corporately to common mission and purpose. (See question 3)

The early Covenanters in North America were conscious of the presence and purpose of God through the activity of the Holy Spirit among them. They were certain the Holy Spirit was at work in their churches and particularly in leading them to form the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant denomination. At the organizational meeting of the Covenant, C.A. Björk spoke to the effect that an organizational meeting can never produce unity; God’s people become one, he said, through the leading of the Holy Spirit. The early Covenanters believed that each Christian needs to await the voice of God as revealed not only to the individual, but also through the witness of other believers. They believed the Holy Spirit is alive and active, working through preaching, the sacraments, the Scriptures, and in the witness of one another. (See question 4)

The Covenant Church believes that the Spirit of God is active and “blows where it chooses” (John 3:8). The Spirit is the prevenient actor in the drama of salvation, the creator of hunger for Christ’s life, and the fulfiller of that hunger. We are often surprised at the unfolding of God’s purpose, suggesting that our ways and thoughts are not always the ways and thoughts of God. For this reason Covenanters desire to cultivate a healthy humility before God open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. When God is about doing a new thing (Isaiah 43:9), we wish to perceive God at work rather than be found dull to the divine purpose. We wish to see with the eyes of the Spirit, and not merely with our own. The Covenant Church believes with Paul that the Holy Spirit endows believers with spiritual gifts, the purpose of which is to serve the Christian community that is the very body of Christ. As a believer’s church the Covenant has

valued the Reformation concept of the priesthood of all believers, and sees it rooted in the idea of mutual interdependence expressed in Paul's notion of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). The Spirit bestows gifts on individual Christians for the benefit of others, not the benefit of the one who has received the gift. It is the plan of God through the work of the Spirit that within the body of Christ we need one another. (See question 5) Accordingly, while recognizing the legitimacy of all the spiritual gifts, the Covenant Church has historically been unmarked by an emphasis on any one or one type of spiritual gift. This deep trust in the gentle leading of the Spirit has remained true of the Covenant Church through the years.

Discussion Questions...

These questions correspond to the underlined statements in this Affirmation.

1. Review the opening paragraphs and make a list of all of the characteristics of the Holy Spirit.
2. What does it mean that word and Spirit are inseparable?
3. When have you personally or have we together in our church experienced the Spirit in the way described in this paragraph?
4. How does our church consciously put this idea into practice?
5. Why are the gifts of the Spirit so important and how are they evident in our church?

session six

Affirmation #5: Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit Facilitator Guide...

Preparation...

- **Review** session outline and familiarize yourself with content.
- **Copy** Discussion Guide for each person.
- **Copy** the next session's Affirmation Prep Sheet to be read before the session.
- Set up **equipment** in order to show video within lesson.
- Gather **pens** and **Bibles**.

Overview...

- This session, including the video segment, is 60-90 minutes in length.
- Your role is to help keep time for various activities and keep the discussion and learning activities moving forward, although you may always elect to stay on a topic or activity longer if you wish.
- As facilitator, you should also participate in each activity.
- Questions/directions to share with the group are printed in **bold** below.
- Actions for you to take as the facilitator are starred and written in *italics*.

Session Outline...

Introduction (5 MINUTES)

Ask someone to open in **prayer**.

Share with a Partner (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants to pair up and discuss these questions:

- **How would you describe your understanding of the Holy Spirit?**

- **How about your involvement with the Holy Spirit?**

**Make sure video equipment is ready.*

Reflecting on the Affirmation

(5 MINUTES)

Assume participants have read through Affirmation #5. To do a brief review, ask for a few short responses to the discussion questions listed on the Affirmation Prep Sheet. Refer to the underlined segments.

Video Reflection (20 MINUTES)

**Hand out the Discussion Guide for session six and pens.*

Introduce the video by reading the **Video Reflection questions** aloud and encouraging participants **to take notes**.

**Show the video.*

Invite participants to **share their answers to the video questions**. (There will only be time for a few responses to each question. This time is meant to promote discussion and to establish the key themes within this topic.)

Bible Study Discussion (10 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **form small groups** of 3-4 people and complete the **Bible Study Discussion**. After discussion in small groups, ask each group to report briefly.

**Hand out Bibles.*

Personal Reflection (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **spend some time in prayer and reflection**, using the **Personal Reflection questions** on the Discussion Guide.

Application (5 MINUTES)

Gather the small groups together. **Read aloud the Application questions** and guide the group in a discussion. (Time given for this discussion can be somewhat flexible.)

Closing & Communal Prayer

(UNDER 5 MINUTES)

Point out the **additional resources** listed on the Discussion Guide.

**Hand out the Prep Sheet for session seven.*

Remind participants to **read Affirmation #6, The Reality of Freedom in Christ**, before the next session.

Briefly **share personal reflections or specific prayer requests**.

Divide the group into two smaller groups, A and B, for the reading.

Close with the communal prayer.

session six

Affirmation #5: Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit

Discussion Guide...

Video Reflection...

- 1 How can we be **conscious** of the Holy Spirit's work?
- 2 What encourages our being **dependent** on the Holy Spirit's work?
- 3 Both presenters spoke of the Holy Spirit's **leading** in their lives. What is an example of the Spirit's leading in your life?

Bible Study Discussion...

Take turns reading the following verses aloud. As each passage is read, make notes to the questions below: **John 14:15-21, 25-27; Acts 1:8; Philippians 1:27.**

- 1 **Where** does the Spirit come from?
- 2 **Who** does the Spirit impact?
- 3 **How** does the Spirit make a difference and work toward transforming the world?
- 4 If the Holy Spirit is a **gift**, not something to be grasped, what does our **response** need to be?
- 5 When have you seen the Spirit remind people of **who** they are, or **whose** they are?
- 6 Would you describe the power of the Spirit as a "**secret**" that many Christians aren't aware of (as was said in the video)? Why or why not?

Personal Reflection...

① Do I rely on God's Spirit for **everything** that I do? Do I need to ask God to help convict or **remind me of who I am** in any area of my life?

② How can I live out the freeing truth that **God dwells within me**?

③ What do I want to **remember** from this session? What do I feel **called to act on or embody** in my life in some way?

Application...

① When we gather as a church body, how do we **demonstrate a conscious dependence** on the Holy Spirit?

② How might a dependence on the Holy Spirit be **strengthened** within our church (e.g., through sacraments, practices, etc.)?

③ How do we believe and act out the truth that **only God's Spirit can bring about unity**? Where in our communal life do we need to **depend more** on the Spirit for healing, reconciliation, and unity?

Communal Prayer...

ALL: Come, O Holy Spirit,

A: Come as Holy Fire and burn in us,

B: Come as Holy Wind and cleanse us within,

A: Come as Holy Light and lead us in the darkness,

B: Come as Holy Truth and dispel our ignorance,

A: Come as Holy Power and enable our weakness,

B: Come as Holy Life and dwell in us,

ALL: Convict us, convert us, consecrate us, Until we are set free from the service of ourselves, to be your servants to the world. Amen.

From The Covenant Hymnal: A Worshipbook, 1996, #918

More Resources...

Covenant Affirmations: This We Believe, Don Frisk (Covenant Publications, 1981) ISBN 0006591043. This book presents the basic theological affirmations of the Evangelical Covenant Church. It does not seek to cover the entire range of Covenant convictions, but rather considers those doctrines which have been of most vital significance in our life as a Christian fellowship. While references to the Holy Spirit are found throughout, see especially pages 107-121 and pages 163-166. Purchase from www.covenantbookstore.com.

Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God, Gordon D. Fee (Hendrickson, 1996) ISBN 1565631706. The author presents a strong reminder of what God, through his Holy Spirit, intends the church to be. He points us back to the Bible and strengthens our own vision of how the Spirit mobilizes the community of believers in the local church.

session seven

Affirmation #6: The Reality of Freedom in Christ Prep Sheet...

The Covenant Church seeks to focus on what unites followers of Jesus Christ rather than what separates them. (See question 1) The center of our commitment is a clear faith in Jesus Christ. The centrality of the word of God, the necessity of the new birth, a commitment to the whole mission of the church, the church as a fellowship of believers, and a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit form the parameters in which freedom is experienced. Here followers of Christ find the security to offer freedom to one another on issues that might otherwise divide.

Freedom is a frequently misunderstood concept. In western culture freedom is often understood as autonomy and independence. No one, however, can truly be autonomous and independent. Authentic freedom manifests itself in a right relationship with God and others. (See question 2) It is for this reason that freedom in Christ is so highly valued in the Covenant Church. Freedom is a gift of God in Christ to all who are willing to receive it. “If you continue in my word,” said Jesus, “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31b-32).

Liberation is one of the Bible’s major themes. Early in their story, God’s people were liberated as slaves from Egypt and began their long journey to the promised land. The story continues with the liberating work of the judges, who delivered Israel from its enemies. Israel’s greatest king, David, liberated them from the Philistines and established a kingdom committed to Israel’s God. But this kingdom did not stand. The Hebrew Scriptures end with Israel once again in bondage to their enemies, but living with the promise of God’s deliverance. Throughout this story the freedom of God’s people is not just freedom from, but freedom to. They are set free from Egypt to worship and serve their God. In their law they are called not only to serve one another, but the stranger, the alien, the widow, and the orphan—all who suffer and are marginalized by the bitter circumstances of life.

Jesus came as God’s anointed one to continue God’s program of liberation. He sets us free, according to Paul, from the power of sin to condemn, control, and destroy. God’s people are not without sin, but find in Jesus’s death and resurrection the glorious liberty of the children of God. But, as in the Hebrew Scriptures, this freedom is never

simply personal and individualistic. (See question 3) By the power of his life-giving Spirit, Christ moves us into a new realm—a new kingdom where light and life and joy prevail. “For freedom Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1a). Thus empowered, the believer not only seeks to obey and follow God, but to effect the liberation of others from the sins and oppressions of their lives. This freedom is “in Christ.” By grace God makes a person, with Luther, “a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none” and at the same time “a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” (See question 4) For Paul such freedom means believers are set free from the binding restrictions of culture and creed to live into a new reality: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

True freedom is found in this creative tension between the “lordly” and servantlike spirit. God wants individuals to be who and what they were created to be in perfect freedom. This freedom is not for self-indulgence but to serve the community and the world out of love for God (Galatians 5:13).

The Covenant Church has sought to honor the tensions inherent in this freedom. The Covenant Church has understood that God’s word is sovereign over every human interpretation of it—including its own. Covenant freedom operates within the context set by other principles the Covenant Church regards as primary, particularly the authority of Scripture. Within these parameters the principle of freedom applies to doctrinal issues that might tend to divide. With a modesty born of confidence in God, Covenanters have offered to one another theological and personal freedom where the biblical and historical record seems to allow for a variety of interpretations of the will and purposes of God. This has at times led to controversy over such matters as baptism, the second coming of Christ, the precise nature of inspiration or how the atonement may be understood, and various matters of life and practice. Nevertheless, commitments to the Bible as the word of God and the historical interpretative consensus of the Christian Church have remained a constant. This commitment to freedom has kept the Covenant Church together when it would have been easier to break fellowship and further divide Christ’s body. (See question 5)

To some such freedom is no freedom at all. They would rather have the marching orders clear and an unimpeachable source of authority to bear the whole burden of responsibility. It is not easy to be free. But such limitations of freedom show not wisdom, but immaturity. They show a people who have not come into their majority as heirs of God's good gifts (see Galatians 3:23-29). Nevertheless, to seek freedom for its own sake is to lose it. Freedom is not for self-indulgence or self-aggrandizement but to serve and love God, in whom alone is found true freedom.

The Covenant Church cherishes this freedom in Christ and recognizes, as one of our forebears put it, that freedom is a gift and the last of all gifts to mature. In the meantime there will be questions and conflicts. Full maturity and full understanding await the day when "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ, when he shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). In the meantime we offer freedom to one another since for

Covenant people freedom is not something we claim for ourselves, but offer to the other. (See question 6) In this we are simply sharing the gift of freedom God has given us in Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions...

These questions correspond to the underlined statements in this Affirmation.

1. How do we live this statement out in our life together?
2. Can we list some examples of how freedom is a misunderstood concept?
3. How do you feel about this statement?
4. How can you rephrase this into your own words?
5. How does your church understand these issues and the Covenant's commitment to freedom?
6. What makes this statement so challenging and difficult to practice?

session seven

Affirmation #6: The Reality of Freedom in Christ Facilitator Guide...

Preparation...

- **Review** session outline and familiarize yourself with content.
- **Copy** Discussion Guide for each person.
- Set up **equipment** in order to show video within lesson.
- Gather **pens** and **Bibles**.
- Gather **hymnals**.
- Choose a hymn and arrange for music if needed.

Overview...

- This session, including the video segment, is 60-90 minutes in length.
- Your role is to help keep time for various activities and keep the discussion and learning activities moving forward, although you may always elect to stay on a topic or activity longer if you wish.
- As facilitator, you should also participate in each activity.
- Questions/directions to share with the group are printed in **bold** below.
- Actions for you to take as the facilitator are starred and written in *italics*.

Session Outline...

Introduction (5 MINUTES)

Ask someone to open in **prayer**.

Share with a Partner (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants to pair up and complete the following statements:

- **I felt freedom when I experienced** _____ .
- **In my life, I have been freed from** _____ **in order to** _____ .

** Make sure video equipment is ready.*

Reflecting on the Affirmation

(5 MINUTES)

Assume participants have read through Affirmation #6. To do a brief review, ask for a few short responses to the discussion questions listed on the Affirmation Prep Sheet. Refer to the underlined segments.

Video Reflection (20 MINUTES)

**Hand out the Discussion Guide for session seven and pens.*

Introduce the video by reading the **Video Reflection questions** aloud and encouraging participants **to take notes**. If needed, answers are: (1) scripture; (2) constraints; (3) none, all; (4) freedom, love; (5) neighbor; (6) Christian living.

**Show the video.*

Invite participants to **share their answers to the video questions**. Spend a little longer than usual discussing this video and the Group Reflection questions. Use copies of Affirmation #6 and identify how this affirmation connects with or impacts the other five.

Bible Study Discussion (10 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **form small groups** of 3-4 people and complete the **Bible Study Discussion**. After discussion in small groups, ask each group to report briefly.

**Hand out Bibles.*

Application (5 MINUTES)

Gather the small groups together. **Read aloud the Application questions** and guide the group in a discussion. (Time given for this discussion can be somewhat flexible.)

Personal Reflection (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **spend some time in prayer and reflection**, using the **Personal Reflection questions** on the Discussion Guide.

Closing & Communal Hymn

(UNDER 5 MINUTES)

Point out the **additional resources** listed on the Discussion Guide.

Close with a selected hymn.

session seven

Affirmation #6: The Reality of Freedom in Christ

Discussion Guide...

Video Quotes...

During this video clip, pay attention to certain sentences and phrases from the speakers (listed below), and write key words in the blanks.

1 Michelle: “David Nyvall talked about freedom in Christ and theological diversity as a communal responsibility, and so it’s our duty as Christians to talk about the ways in which we differ theologically. We are to do it in love, we are to do it in courage, and we are to do it in devotion to _____.”

2 Phil: “Freedom is something that is experienced together, and discerned together, and puts _____ at times on one’s personal freedom, for the higher freedom of the gospel, or the freedom for the church to be the church in our common life.”

3 Michelle: Referring to Martin Luther, “Using I Corinthians 9 and Romans 13 he puts forth two propositions. One is that the Christian is the perfectly free lord of all and subject to _____. The other is that the Christian is the perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to _____.”

4 Phil: “In essential matters, unity, in non-essential matters, _____, in all things, _____. Well, someone’s non-essential is someone else’s essential, and that’s why we need to be speaking to each other and doing our biblical reading together for that freedom to be preserved.”

5 Michelle: “Authentic freedom manifests itself in right relationship to God and _____. This is why it is so important to understand the reality of freedom in Christ in the context of the other affirmations.”

6 Phil: “Freedom that liberates one in forgiveness and new life in Christ is carried over into daily _____ and what it means for faith to be active in love and in community and in concern for our neighbor.”

Video Reflection...

1 What stood out to you in these quotations?

2 Using the quotes listed above and the text of Affirmation #6, identify how freedom in Christ connects to or impacts the earlier **five affirmations**.

a. The centrality of the Word of God:

b. The necessity of the new birth:

c. A commitment to the whole mission of the Church:

d. The Church as fellowship of believers:

e. A conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit:

3 How would you describe the reality of freedom in Christ to someone not familiar with the church or the Covenant church? Share several ideas.

Bible Study Discussion...

1 Take turns reading the following verses: **John 8:31-36; Galatians 3:23-29, 5:1, 13; Ephesians 1:7**. As each verse is read, write down answers in the columns below.

We have freedom from...	We are freed for...

2 In the text of the Affirmation, read paragraphs 3 and 4 (paragraph 3 begins with “Liberation”). As you read, note more examples of what we are freed **from** and freed **for** below.

We have freedom from...	We are freed for...

3 In our present context, from what fears, lies, sins, or constraints might God be **liberating** our church? To what end?

Application...

1 How does our **church** embody the reality, “In essential matters, unity, in non-essentials, freedom, in all things, love”?

2 Where can people read Scripture and discuss theology and daily Christian living in a way that allows them to share **divergent** ideas and opinions with each other?

Personal Reflection...

1 Am I living like I believe I am **really free** through Christ’s absolute love? Do I need to be reminded of particular things that I am freed from?

2 What items from the “We Have Freedom From” list are hard for me to accept?

3 Do I need to be reminded of the things that I have been freed for—purpose and calling in my life? Could I **offer freedom** to others in my life? In my church?

2 What items from the “We are Freed For” list are hard for me to practice?

5 Who in my life needs to hear the message of freedom?

Closing Hymn...

Select one of the following hymns from the *The Covenant Hymnal: A Worshipbook*: 494, 205, 587, 751.

More Resources...

Between Two Truths: Living with Biblical Tensions, Klyne Snodgrass (Wipf and Stock, 2004) ISBN 159244914X. This book does not give simplistic answers to difficult questions; rather, it invites the reader to celebrate the rich and vibrant tensions of God’s eternal truth.

Glad Hearts, James R. Hawkinson, ed. (Covenant Publications, 2003) ISBN 0910562911. Hawkinson has compiled from Covenant writings a collection of the comments and reflections on theology, church life, and the personal walk of faith. Available for purchase from www.covenantbookstore.com.

supplementary session, version A

Affirmations Overview : 15-Minute Video Facilitator Guide...

Preparation...

- **Review** session outline and familiarize yourself with content.
- **Copy** the Discussion Guide for each person.
- Set up **equipment** in order to show video within lesson.
- Gather **pens** and **Bibles**.

Overview...

- This session, including the video segment, is 60-90 minutes in length.
- Your role is to help keep time for various activities and keep the discussion and learning activities moving forward, although you may always elect to stay on a topic or activity longer if you wish.
- As facilitator, you should also participate in each activity.
- Questions/directions to share with the group are printed in **bold** below.
- Actions for you to take as the facilitator are starred and written in *italics*.

Session Outline...

Introduction (5 MINUTES)

Ask someone to open in **prayer**.

Briefly introduce the Covenant affirmations, using the information on the DVD case. Describe the format of this session.

Share with a Partner (10 MINUTES)

Invite participants to pair up and make a list of responses to this question:

- **What does it mean to be Covenant?**

After 5 minutes bring the partner groups back together and discuss some of the answers.

**Make sure video equipment is ready.*

Video Discussion (30-60 MINUTES)

**Hand out the Discussion Guide for the supplementary session (version A), Bibles and pens.*

Use the following outline to discuss each of the Covenant affirmations. Allow 5-10 minutes for each Affirmation.

- Show video segment of each Affirmation (approximately 2 minutes in length) stopping when the Title Page for the next segment appears.
- Use the first question to invite observations and insights related to this Affirmation.
- Read the scripture passage for the Affirmation under discussion.
- Lead discussion around the provided question.
- Continue with the video segment for the next Affirmation.

Application (5 MINUTES)

Read aloud the application questions and guide the group in a discussion. (Time given for this discussion can be somewhat flexible.)

Personal Reflection (5 MINUTES)

Invite participants to **spend some time in prayer and reflection**, using the **Personal Reflection questions** on the Discussion Guide.

Closing/Communal Prayer

(5 MINUTES)

Point out the **additional resources** listed on the participant sheet.

Invite participants to **read the closing scripture passage** in unison.

supplementary session, version A

Affirmations Overview : 15-Minute Video Discussion Guide...

Video Reflection...

1 View the video, “**Affirmation #1: The Centrality of the Word of God**”. What information in the video is most interesting to you?

Read **Hebrews 4:12**. How is the Word of God “living and active”?

2 View the video, “**Affirmation #2: The Necessity of New Birth**”. What information in the video is most important to you?

Read **Acts 4:11-12**. What comes to mind when you hear the phrases “new birth” and “new life in Christ”?

3 View the video, “**Affirmation #3: The Whole Mission of the Church**”. What information in the video is most applicable to you?

Read **Micah 6:8**. Discuss this question: As Christians, how does this verse help us “walk the talk”?

4 View the video, “**Affirmation #4: The Church as the Fellowship of Believers**”. What is the most important idea you heard?

Read **Galatians 3:28**. Discuss this question: In what ways is the church interdependent?

5 View the video, “**Affirmation #5: A Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit**”. What are the intentional ways you depend on the Spirit?

Read **Hebrews 14:17**. Discuss this question: How is the work of the Holy Spirit revealed in our church?

6 View the video, “**Affirmation #6: The Reality of Freedom in Christ**”. How easy is it to misunderstand the meaning of “freedom in Christ”?

Read **Galatians 5:13-14**. Discuss this quote: “In essential matters, unity, in non-essentials, freedom, in all things, love.”

Application...

1 How have you seen these six Covenant Affirmations **evident** and alive in the life of this congregation?

2 Where do you think our congregation needs to **improve** in relation to the Covenant Affirmations?

Personal Reflection...

How does my life **reflect** the Covenant Affirmations?

a. The centrality of the word of God

b. The necessity of the new birth

c. A commitment to the whole mission of the church

d. The Church as a fellowship of believers

e. A conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit

f. The reality of freedom in Christ

Closing/Communal Prayer...

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, So that you may be filled with the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

(Ephesians 3: 14-21, From *The Covenant Hymnal: A Worshipbook*, 1996, #916)

More Resources...

Copies of the *Covenant Affirmations* can be downloaded from the Covenant website (www.covchurch.org) or printed versions can be ordered from covenantbookstore.com

Covenant Affirmations: This We Believe, Don Frisk (Covenant Publications, 1981) ISBN 0006591043. Presents the basic theological affirmations of the Evangelical Covenant Church that have been of most vital significance in our life as a Christian fellowship. Purchase from www.covenantbookstore.com.

supplementary session, version B

Affirmations Overview : 15-Minute Video Facilitator Guide...

Preparation...

- **Review** session outline and familiarize yourself with content.
- **Copy the** Discussion Guide for each person.
- Set up **equipment** in order to show video within lesson.
- Gather **pens** and **Bibles**.

Overview...

- This session, including the video segment, is 60-90 minutes in length.
- Your role is to help keep time for various activities and keep the discussion and learning activities moving forward, although you may always elect to stay on a topic or activity longer if you wish.
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Session Outline...

Introduction (5 MINUTES)

Ask someone to open in **prayer**.

Briefly introduce the Covenant affirmations, using the information on the DVD case. Describe the format of this session.

Share with a Partner (10 MINUTES)

Invite participants to pair up and make a list of responses to this question:

- **What does it mean to be Covenant?**

After 5 minutes bring the partner groups back together and discuss some of the answers.

*Make sure video equipment is ready.

Bible Reading and Discussion (5 MINUTES)

(5 MINUTES)

**Hand out Bibles.*

Read **Ephesians 4:11-16** aloud together and then discuss the following questions.

- **How have you seen this scripture passage evident in the life of our congregation?**
- **What role do the Covenant Affirmations play in helping Covenant churches live into this scripture passage?**

Video (15 MINUTES)

**Hand out the Discussion Guide for the supplementary session (version B), Bibles and pens.*

Show the entire 15 minute overview of the Covenant affirmations.

Video Reflection (15-30 MINUTES)

Select questions from the Discussion Guide to discuss together as a group.

Application (5 MINUTES)

Read aloud the application questions and guide the group in a discussion. (Time given for this discussion can be somewhat flexible.)

Closing/Communal Prayer (5 MINUTES)

(5 MINUTES)

Point out the **additional resources** listed on the participant sheet.

Invite participants to **read the closing scripture passage** in unison.

supplementary session, version B

Affirmations Overview : 15-Minute Video Discussion Guide...

Video Reflection...

1 What insights about the Covenant Church did you gain as a result of this video presentation?

What are the four common Christian affirmations?

2 **Affirmation #1: The centrality of the Word of God.**

The Covenant uses the phrase, “Where is it written?”. What are ways we in our congregation try to understand the scripture together?

“The reading of scripture is not an individual affair, it is a communal affair.” How do you respond to this statement?

In what ways are we demonstrating that the Word of God is central to our life as a church?

3 **Affirmation #2: The Necessity of New Birth.** How would you define “new birth”?

Soong-Chan Rah spoke of a particular moment when he accepted Christ, and Ed Delgado stated that he does not remember a dramatic conversion experience. Both characterize the Covenant. What was your conversion experience like?

How might our church better reflect this reality of new life in Christ at various levels of worship, education, service, etc.?

4 **Affirmation #3: The whole mission of the Church.** Why does the Covenant Church stress keeping the great commandment and the great commission together?

What does the statement, “If I want the best for me, I’ve got to want the best for my brothers and sisters.” look like in your life? How would you define “the best”?

How does our church budget reflect a commitment to the whole mission of the church?

5 **Affirmation #4: The Church as the fellowship of believers.** What biblical tenets do Tim Johnson cite as reasons for community “not being an option; it is mandated for us.” (They are the first biblical references Johnson gives early in the video.)

What two sacraments does the Covenant celebrate? How are they communal?

Covenant members early on were called “Mission Friends.” As Tim Johnson explained, “It’s possible to be right about the mission but be so unfriendly that we

undermine it. At the same time, it's also possible to be very friendly, civil, but be fuzzy and mission-less. When we live out both halves of that name, there is a corrective and a balance...We focus on mission but do it in a strongly relational way." How does our church incorporate these two halves? Are we stronger on one or the other?

6 Affirmation #5: A conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit. How can we be conscious of the Holy Spirit's work?

What encourages our being dependent on the Holy Spirit's work?

When we gather as a church body, how do we demonstrate a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit?

7 Affirmation #6: The reality of freedom in Christ. How does freedom in Christ impact or connect with the earlier five affirmations?

a. The centrality of the word of God:

b. The necessity of the new birth:

c. A Commitment to the whole mission of the church:

d. The Church as a fellowship of believers:

e. A Conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit:

How would you describe the reality of freedom in Christ to someone not familiar with the church or the Covenant church? Share several ideas.

How does our church embody the reality, "In essential matters unity, in non-essential, freedom, in all things, love"?

Application...

How have you seen these six Covenant Affirmations evident and alive in the life of this congregation?

Where do you think our congregation needs to improve in relation to the Covenant Affirmations?

Closing/Communal Prayer...

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, So that you may be filled with the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

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