

SESSION TWO

Covenant Affirmations

Our place in the worldwide Christian Church

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

Our identity and call to serve Christ in the world

For Covenant people, our essential beliefs are summed up in what we call Covenant Affirmations:

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

- **We affirm the necessity of the new birth.** The Apostle Paul wrote, “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17, TNIV). New birth in Christ means committing ourselves to him and receiving forgiveness, acceptance, and eternal life. It means being alive in Christ, and this life has the qualities of love and righteousness, joy and peace. New birth is only the beginning. Growing to maturity in Christ is a lifelong process for both individuals and communities of believers. God forms and transforms us—and it is through people transformed by Christ that God transforms the world.
- **We affirm a commitment to the whole mission of the Church.** The early Covenanters were known as “Mission Friends”—people of shared faith who came together to carry out God’s mission both far and near. Mission for them and for us includes evangelism, Christian formation, and ministries of compassion, mercy, and justice. We follow Christ’s two central calls. The Great Commission sends us out into all the world to make disciples. The Great Commandment calls us to love the Lord our God and our neighbors as ourselves.
- **We affirm the Church as a fellowship of believers.** Membership in the Covenant Church is by confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ and is open to all believers. We observe baptism and Holy Communion as sacraments commanded by Jesus. We practice both infant and believer baptism. We believe in the priesthood of all believers—that is, we all share in the ministry of the church. We also affirm that God calls some men and women into professional, full-time ministry. The church is not an institution, organization, or building. It is a grace-filled fellowship of believers who participate in the life and mission of Jesus Christ. It is a family of equals: as the New Testament teaches that within Christian community there is to be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, but all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28)
- **We affirm a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.** The Covenant Church affirms the Trinitarian understanding of one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The New Testament tells us that the Holy Spirit works both within individuals and among them. We believe it is the Holy Spirit who instills in our hearts a desire to turn to Christ, and who assures us that Christ dwells within us. It is the Holy Spirit who enables our obedience to Christ and conforms us to his image, and it is the Spirit in us that enables us to continue Christ’s mission in the world. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to us as individuals and binds us together as Christ’s body.
- **We affirm the reality of freedom in Christ.** The Apostle Paul wrote, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1, TNIV). This freedom is a gift of God in Christ, and it manifests itself in a right relationship with God and others. It is not a private gift to be used selfishly, but is given to serve the community and the world. For Paul, this freedom means that we are set free from the power of those things that on their own tend to divide. United in Christ, we offer freedom to one another to differ on issues of belief or practice where the biblical and historical record seems to allow for a variety of interpretations of the will and purposes of God. We in the Covenant Church seek to focus on what unites us as followers of Christ, rather than on what divides us.

Conclusion

The Evangelical Covenant Church is a pilgrim church. Until Christ comes, we worship, serve, and witness so that the whole earth may hear God's voice, learn of God's love, and experience God's joy. If you want to learn more about the Evangelical Covenant Church, ask your pastor for the longer version of Covenant Affirmations or visit the Covenant Website at www.covchurch.org for more information.

What Does the Covenant Church Believe? A Brief Look at Covenant Affirmations, *copyright Covenant Publications. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*