

SESSION TWO

The Mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church

Gather

OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION

- Acquaint the group with the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC)
 - History
 - Distinctives and theology
 - Structure and resources
- Explore how the ECC's character finds expression in our church

Family Name Discussion

What do you know about your family name?

Interact

Mission of the ECC: Introduction

A DENOMINATION

THE ETHOS OF THE ECC—WHY MISSION FRIENDS?

The term “mission friends” was an early nickname given to Covenant people. Covenanters have from the beginning sought to build a culture of friendship in Christ, pursuing the mission of God together. We hope to embody that same spirit today in this congregation. We are in it together, pulling for each other, as we seek to live faithfully in response to the love and grace God extends to us through Christ.

THE COVENANT DESCRIBES ITSELF

“The Covenant is not a church organization in the ordinary sense, but a mission society having churches as its members. These churches have consolidated together because of the missionary spirit which led them to missionary enterprises too large for any single church to undertake”—1893 World’s Fair

THE MISSION OF THE ECC

From our inception the Evangelical Covenant Church has been in it together to see
...more disciples,
...among more populations,
...in a more caring and just world.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION—QUICK FACTS

- 1885:
- Approximately 800:
- 11:
- 17:
- Greater than 24%:
- 30/5/500,000:
- Chicago:

Mission of the ECC: Our Roots

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION—THE IDENTITY QUESTION

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

THE ENDURING COMMITMENTS OF THE COVENANT

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

THE HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

- *The Protestant Reformation:* A movement in Europe in the early 16th century that began with Martin Luther, who attempted to reform the Roman Catholic Church. The influence of the Reformation can be seen in the Covenant's belief in the Scriptures, the Old and New Testament, as the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct.
- *Pietism:* A movement within Lutheranism in the late 17th and mid-18th century that focused on individual piety (devotion) and dynamic and personal Christian life. The movement sought to restore the life of the Church through the study of the Bible, the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, kind treatment for all people, including non-believers, and prominent devotional life in schools for theological training. To reflect this, the question often asked in Mission Friend circles at that time was, "Are you yet walking with Christ?"
- *Moravian mission:* A movement that spanned the 9th century through the 1700s, which emphasized the joy of life in Christ and mission to those who did not yet know such joy. They also emphasized the unity of Christians.
- *Founding rationale:* After unsuccessfully trying to reform the Swedish Lutheran churches in the U.S. and based on several factors—including a differing view of Christ's atonement—the Covenant was founded to be a church where "we will be in mission for Jesus together as friends."
- *Continuing influences of the Evangelical Covenant Church today:* The Evangelical Covenant Church has always been an immigrant church. Although it began with Swedish immigrants, today people from many cultures and nationalities make up the Covenant Church, expanding our spiritual heritage. Whereas 100 years ago one would have heard Swedish spoken in Covenant

congregations in the United States and Canada, today one might hear Spanish, Korean, or Nuer in addition to English. Covenanters now trace their roots to Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America. We are united in one body by our faith in Christ, and throughout our history we have continued to hold fast to the four commitments that shape our character.

Mission of the ECC: Our Character

Each of these four enduring commitments—Biblical, missional, devotional, and connectional—is dependant upon the other three and is evidenced in our Covenant Affirmations. All excerpts regarding the Covenant Affirmations are taken from the brochure “What does the Covenant Believe: A Brief Look at Covenant Affirmations.” As you discuss the four commitments, fill in the missing information in the diagram below.



BIBLICAL

We are a biblical people who desire to grow in our knowledge of God, to:

We affirm the centrality of the word of God. We believe the Bible is the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct. The dynamic, transforming power of the word of God directs the church

in the life of each Christian. This reliance on the Bible leads us to affirm both men and women as ordained ministers and at every level of leadership. It is the reason we pursue ethnic diversity in our church and is the inspiration for every act of compassion, mercy, and justice.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”
—2 Timothy 3:16 (See also: Psalm 19:7-11; Hebrews 4:12; Isaiah 55:11)

Reflection:

1) How have you seen this lived out in our church?

2) How does God’s word influence your life?

DEVOTIONAL

We are a devotional people desiring to:

We affirm a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit. The Covenant Church affirms the Trinitarian understanding of one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The New Testament tells us that the Holy Spirit works both within individuals and among them. We believe it is the Holy Spirit who instills in our hearts a desire to turn to Christ, and who assures us that Christ dwells within us. It is the Holy Spirit who enables our obedience to Christ and conforms us to his image, and it is this Spirit in us that enables us to continue Christ's mission in the world. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to us as individuals and binds us together as Christ's body.

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 Christ and receiving forgiveness, acceptance, and eternal life. It means being alive in Christ, and this life has the qualities of love and righteousness joy and peace. New birth is only the beginning. Growing to maturity in Christ is a lifelong process for both individual and community believers. God forms and transforms us and it is through people transformed by Christ that God transforms

the world.

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”—Ephesians 3:16-19 (See also: John 15:5; Matthew 21:13)

Reflection:

1) How have you seen us being a devotional people at our church?

2) How goes your walk with Christ?

MISSIONAL

We are a missional people who intend to:

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.

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

“He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”—Micah 6:8 (See also: Colossians 1:28; Matthew 10:39)

Reflection:

1) How have you seen us being missional at our church?

2) How do you see the church helping you to reach the lost and help the hurting?

CONNECTIONAL

We recognize and affirm that we are:

We affirm the church as a fellowship of believers. Membership in the Covenant Church is by confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ and is open to all believers. We observe baptism and Holy Communion as sacraments commanded by Jesus. We practice both infant and believer baptism. We believe in the priesthood of all believers, that is, we all share in the ministry of the church. We also affirm that God calls some men and women into professional, full time Ministry. The church is not an institution, organization, or building. It is a grace filled fellowship of believers who participate in the life and mission of Jesus Christ. It is a family of equals: as the New Testament teaches that within Christian community there is to be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

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.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”—Acts 2:42-47 (See also: Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 10:24-25)

Reflection:

1) How have you seen us being connectional at our church?

2) What does it mean to you to become part of a community of faith?

Mission of the ECC and the Ministry of Our Church

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

- Global ministries of the ECC
- The regional ministries of our conference
- The local ministries of our congregation

DENOMINATIONAL OFFICES

The denominational offices have been formed to serve, support, partner and help coordinate our ministry together both near and far. Here are eleven ways the ECC serves the local congregations, at both a denominational and conference level:

- Instant connection to global mission
- Training, care, and accountability for pastors

- Assistance with pastoral search process
- Consulting, seminars, and training events
- Curricular, media, and print resources
- Camping and retreats
- Insurance and pension system
- Resource center for materials
- Conflict mediation upon invitation by congregation
- Loan source
- Denominational events for youth, women, families, and clergy

OUR CONFERENCE

Integrate

The Distinctives of the ECC

The four commitments we have looked at today are founded within the word of God, and are fleshed out within our six affirmations:

- 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
- The reality of freedom in Christ.

These six affirmations have shaped a set of key distinctives which set us apart from many other church movements:

- The ECC is known for emphasizing what unites Christians, rather than what sets them apart from each other. We affirm theological freedom, which means that we believe there are some periphery issues in Scripture that are open to interpretation. Christians everywhere differ in interpretations of Scripture, so we work to stand in the center, rather than becoming focused only on the periphery. A theologian once said, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.” The ECC embodies this sentiment.
- The ECC is known for its stance on baptism. We affirm both infant and believer baptism. We see the Scriptures as unclear on modes of baptism and we have decided not to be divided over this.
- The ECC is known for its affirmation of women in ministry at all levels of leadership, including the role of lead or solo pastor.
- The ECC is known for its authentic and growing ethnic diversity.
- The ECC is known for its congregational polity, meaning the local congregation holds the highest authority over its mission and ministry, while churches work together in mission.
- The ECC is known for understanding that discipleship fully embraces evangelism together with compassion, mercy, and justice.

Essentially, you could simply say this of the Covenant:

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

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

Going Deeper

The Character of the Covenant in You

The enduring commitments of the Covenant are intended to be lived out in our individual lives as well

as in the life of each church. Take some time to consider what practices you will commit to in order to lean more fully into the transforming work of the Spirit so that your character reflects these four enduring commitments of the ECC character.

In other words...

- We grow in God’s Word because we are a *Biblical* people.
- We grow in relationships because we are a *connectional* people.
- We grow in obedient living because we are a *missional* people.
- We grow in worship because we are a *devotional* people.

What spiritual practices might foster your growth in each of these areas?

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

Additional Resources

Additional resources can be found in the appendix for the participant’s guide.