

Exploring Covenant Affirmations: Core Values for Christian Living



- Affirmations Held in Common
- The Centrality of the Word of God
- The Necessity of New Birth
- Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church
- A Fellowship of Believers & Conscious Dependence on the Spirit
- The Reality of Freedom in Christ

Drawing, Developing, & Deploying Disciples of Christ
through Salem Covenant Church

A Movement on the Way to Wholeness

- The Covenant, all its people, and all its churches represent together a movement:
 - * living in the Word of God;
 - * sharing in the whole church (body of Christ)
 - * knowing that “mutual filial condition of being born from above” (C. J. Nyvall)
- Wholeness, which is what salvation means, requires us constantly to embrace:
 - * the whole Word of God;
 - * the whole church of Christ;
 - * the whole mission of furthering God’s kingdom work into which we have been born again by grace

What We Are and Why

- ” 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. Once you were no people, but now you are God’s people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church

“God’s nature is love, and salvation means being restored to life in the love of God and in love with his children.

“But love only exists in actual concrete human relationships. Love in general is nothing at all; true love means care for real people—my brother, my fellow-worker, my neighbor. We have to give and receive love in dealing with actual men and women—not just those whom we choose, but those whom God gives to us.

“ So it is that the center of God’s plan of salvation is an actual community of men and women called by God for this purpose.”

New Birth Seeks New Life

- *“Mission is sharing one’s experience with others. As long as truth is not appropriated, but remains objective, there is no demand to share it with others; when it becomes personal, then it grows, develops, and demands expansion. Missionary activity and true Christian life are two aspects of the same thing. To be a Christian and lack missionary interest is a contradiction.”*

Nils Heiner (1868-1958) wrote in *Covenant Characteristics*: (quoted in *Covenant Roots*, p. 188).

Covenanters Commit to Christ and His Word

- When new members join a Covenant church, they are asked to consent to four questions:
 - 1) ‘Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and promise to follow him as Lord?’
 - 2) ‘Do you accept the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, as the word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct?’

Covenanters Also Commit to the Church and Its Mission

New members are further required to give their consent if they:

3) “intend to live among God’s people, hear his word and share in the Lord’s Supper, proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, and strive for justice and peace in all the earth, &

4) “promise to support the ministries of this church, including the local conference and denomination to which we belong.”

Twin Biblical Mandates

Two things underlie these questions biblically:

- Jesus' great commandment (Mt 22:37-40)
To love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus demands personal commitment.
- Jesus' great commission (Matthew 28:19,20)
To make disciples that "all might be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." Jesus commands us to reach out to others everywhere.

The Covenant Experience

- When the early Covenanters came to experience new birth and new life in Christ, their hearts were not only captivated by Christ but motivated by his Great Commission to share their faith with others.
- Charged at the organizational meeting in 1885 to be “companions of all who fear God” (Psalm 119:63), their horizons on both faith and faithfulness were broadened.

The Early Covenant as a Movement

- Saw itself as part of the universal body of Christ--not a splinter movement of individuals or separate churches, sect-like, but a covenant (*Förbund*), something transcending individuals and churches.
- *“That which unified the Covenant churches—and the Covenant was an aggregate of churches and not an assembly of people—was ... a common primal experience of saving grace in Christ.*
- *“Theoretically, the Covenant would have welcomed into its fellowship churches of a variety of denominational types as long as these churches insisted upon the primal experience.”*

Made Friends in Faith and Mission

- Thus the name Mission Friends: “not just friends in mission, but members of the mission who were, as members of the mission, friends. And friends because [they] were of the mission.
- “And the mission—not simply separated congregations—but the mission wherever there were Mission Friends who had God’s glory and neighbor’s good to see to.”

Zenos E. Hawkinson, *Glad Hearts*, p. 165

'Friends and Lovers of Mission'

Pastor-journalist G.D. Hall (1870-1927), reporting on early Mission Meetings from 1896-1911 wrote:

“We all ought to be specialists in one matter: to be friends and lovers of Christ’s mission.... And what is mission but the fulfillment of prophecy: ‘He shall reign from shore to shore.’ ...It is only a matter of time until the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of Christ. We can speed up the coming of that glorious time. Just think if the powers that be spent half of the monies now spent in defense to support missions. What waves of blessing would pour over the peoples of the world.”

Who and How Many Were They Then?

- 62 delegates to the organizational meeting February 18-20, 1885, voting unanimously that “A union of Christians should take place on the basis of God’s Word and among people who believe in Christ, and who trust and love one another and want to live in peace and harmony.”
Axel Mellander, Report in *Missionären* (1900)
- By the turn of the century, 45 congregations with a total membership of 11,145, with about 25,000 in attendance.
- Consider their early passion for mission.

Early Mission Incentives

- Benevolence among the old and young
 - * Ellis Island Mission among Immigrants (1880s)
 - * Covenant Home in Chicago (1885-86),
 - * Swedish Covenant Hospital (c. 1890s)
 - * Seaman's Missions – Boston and San Francisco,
 - * Children's Homes in Cromwell and CT
- World Mission – in Alaska (1889) & China (1890)
- Education
 - * Ansgar College (1873-1884)
 - * North Park College & Seminary – Minneapolis (1884), given to Covenant (1891) and moved to Chicago (1894)

Who and How Many Are We Now?

- 790 churches, 125,852 members; 168,924 attending;
- Local and Conference totals: \$310,595,808 income; \$245,485,375 expense (c. 80% total)
- \$8,561,522 to ECC; \$5,925,562 to conferences; \$43,465,874 for miscellaneous causes including building expenses and other Covenant and non-Covenant causes; (c. 20% total).
- 278,813 members on 30 mission fields
- 95 long-term project missionaries
- 30 short-term missionaries

Developing Mission Incentives

- Benevolence

- * Two hospitals, one health & fitness center;
- * Five Enabling Residences;
- * Two Children's Homes and a ministry for victims of domestic violence;
- * Fourteen Covenant Retirement Centers

- Education

- * North Park University & Theological Seminary;
- * Alaska Christian College;
- * Minnehaha Academy (Northwest Conference)

Developing Mission Incentives (con't)

- Covenant World Relief;
- The Paul Carlson Foundation
- Commissions also working on compassion, mercy, and justice issues:
 - * Biblical Gender Equality;
 - * Christian Action
 - * Ethnic Ministries
 - * Response to Domestic and Sexual Abuse
 - * Urban Ministries

Mission Incentives Today (con't)

- **Ministries of Compassion, Mercy, and Justice**

- * Formed by the Annual Meeting in 2006 “to energize, empower, and equip churches and regional conferences to obey God’s call to be involved in ministries of CMJ in the world.”

- * Absorbing other similar ministries like Covenant World Relief & CMJ aspects of local and conference-wide church planting initiatives;

- * Collaborating with other departments in ministries with CMJ implications;

- * Development of ministry networks

Identity and Biblical Mission

“We are united by Christ in a holy covenant of churches empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey the great commandments and the great commission: to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to go into all the world and make disciples.”

Vision for Mission

- “We covenant:

- * to cultivate communities of worship committed to: prayer, preaching, and study of the word, the celebration of the sacraments, and fellowship across gender, race, age, culture, and class;

- * to equip loving, giving, growing Christians to reach out with the good news of Jesus Christ—evangelizing the lost, ministering to those in need, and seeking justice for the oppressed.”

(Covenant Year Book, 2008-2009, p. v)

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Next Week's Assignment

Read Prep Sheet
for

**The Church as a Fellowship of Believers
and
Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit**

and
frame a written response
to the
Discussion Questions

Closing Prayer

“Come, O Holy Spirit.
Come as Holy Fire and burn in us,
come as Holy Wind and cleanse within,
come as Holy Light and dispel our ignorance,
come as Holy Power and enable our weakness,
come as Holy Life and dwell in us.
Convict us, convert us, consecrate us
until we are set free
from the service of ourselves,
to be your servants in the world. Amen!”

(Whitston)