

:: COVENANT MEMBERSHIP IN THE CITY CHURCH ::

DEFINING “CHURCH MEMBERSHIP”

From the moment of salvation, and continuing throughout our life, the gospel not only calls us to God; it calls us to each other. This is our gospel identity of Family (1Thess 2:9; 1Tim 5:1-2), and reflects one of the primary attributes of God – that God is Trinity, and thus exists in eternal community with Godself. In The City Church, we believe that God’s people are called to live out our faith together, in local expressions of God’s family. In other words, to be a biblical Christian is to invest your life in a local church. Each early church was described as a body, and each church’s people were described as parts of one body (1Cor 14:12; 1Tim 3:15; 5:1-2), working together for the good of the whole (Acts 20:28). From well before Jesus walked the earth, and continuing in New Testament Churches, God’s people have kept records of members (Acts 2:37-47; Rom 16:1-16), and most of the New Testament epistles are written not to individuals, but “to the church” (1Cor 1:2; 2Cor 1:1; Gal 1:2; Phil 1:1; 1Thess 1:1; 2Thess 1:1; Rev 1:4).

While people covenanting to the church as “members” isn’t explicitly stated in Scripture, it is implicit throughout the Bible, as God sovereignly makes us one covenant people, sealed with one Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; Php 1:27; etc.). Simply put, we cannot be a covenant people and refrain from covenanting with each other. So covenanting as members of a local church is simply formalizing biblical truths that already exist: you are a member of God’s covenant community; you are pursuing God, each other, and mission; and you are agreeing to do that within the biblical context of an individual, local church.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans that “just as each of us has one body with members, and these members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (12:4-5). The image of being “members of one another” means that we care for each other (1 Cor 12:25), speak truth to one another (Eph 4:25), and live out our faith together (1Thess 2:9). Members who covenant with their local church are called to a higher degree of responsibility and service to that church family. At the same time, church leaders covenant with members, to assist members first and foremost, to love and lead members, to provide counsel and aid, and to pray for, teach, and guide members. This is the image of “church membership” as described in the New Testament Church: a local church belongs together, lives out our gospel identities together, and exists together as God’s communities, on God’s mission.

DEFINING “COVENANT”

Found as early as the book of Genesis (6:18; 9:9-17; 17:4-21; etc.), and still used today to speak of commitments such as marriage, a covenant is an oath. It’s a solemn promise by which you commit yourself to one another into a binding relationship. Some covenants, like the ones in Genesis 6, 9, and 15, in Ezekiel 20, Hosea 2, Jeremiah 31, and Matthew 26, are *between people and God*. Other covenants are made between *people as other individuals or between people and groups*: David and Jonathan covenant together in 1Samual 18:1-5; David covenants with the elders of Israel to be their king in 2Samual 5:3; and marriage is a covenant described in Ephesians 5. A covenant generally outlines shared responsibility for both parties, and carries obligations that each party commits to.

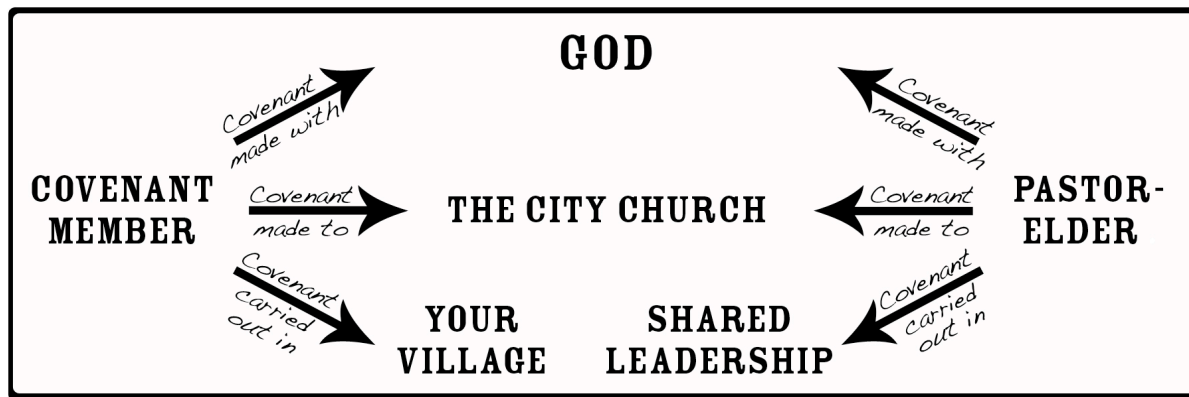
Some covenants, like many between God and people, are *unconditional*, and aren’t broken based on actions by either party. On the other hand, virtually all covenants between people, including covenant membership in The City Church and even the covenant of marriage (Matt 5:32; 19:1; 1Cor 7:15), are *conditional*. This means that the covenant is able to be broken if either side fails in keeping their commitment, and if they remain unrepentant about their failure. However, as is the case even within marriage, the breaking of a covenant should never be a “first response,” but is only done after a discipline process is carried out, and the offender remains unrepentant (Matt 18:15-20; 1Cor 5) – this is explained in the FAQ’s of this document.

“COVENANT MEMBERSHIP” IN THE CITY CHURCH

Whether you make a covenant commitment to God or to other people, a covenant is still, always a promise made *with* God. That’s what separates a covenant from a promise, oath, or any other type of commitment: it is always a promise you make *with* God. So if you’re making a covenant *to* another person, or in this case *to* The City Church, your covenant *with* God is carried out in your commitment *to* the church. David’s friendship with Jonathan was a covenant *with* God, made *to* Jonathan. Likewise, marriage is a covenant *with* God, enacted as a lifelong commitment *to* your spouse. Your church membership covenant is a solemn oath *with* God, carried out as we commit ourselves *to* The City Church family [see the diagram below].

Practically, this covenant *with* God, made *to* The City Church, is *carried out* in our church’s Villages. Based on Paul’s descriptions of “membership of one another” in Romans 12, and the picture of a local church family throughout the New Testament, covenant membership in The City Church involves more than walking to the front one Sunday, joining an institution, attending occasional meetings, and checking a box on the roll. Just as a healthy physical body requires each member do its part well, a healthy church requires each member to sacrificially commit to carrying out the works and ministry God’s entrusted to you (Rom 12:4-5; 1Cor 12:12-25; Eph 2:10; 4:12). We hold your membership covenant to The Church in high regard, as we strive to live out our gospel-centered identities together, as disciples, family, and missionaries together, for the glory of God and the good of Fort Worth.

On the other side of the covenant is the church’s pastor-elders and leadership, who make a covenant *with* God, and *to* you, the church family. And just like you practically *carry out* your covenant in community (your Village), The City Church’s pastor-elders *carry out* their covenant in the community of leaders, sharing leadership as we co-pastor the church and submit to each other in a biblical model of church leadership (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5; etc.). Membership helps our pastor-elders shepherd better, knowing who is fully invested to our church family and who they will give an account for in heaven (Heb 13:17). Our pastor-elders thus commit to care and counsel, pray for and with, teach, and guide our covenant members first and foremost.



The next pages answer questions and provide a copy of our Membership Covenant and Village Commitment.

COVENANT MEMBERSHIP F.A.Q.'S

- **ARE THERE ANY PREREQUISITES TO BECOMING A COVENANT MEMBER?**

Other than being a practicing, confessing Christian, having been baptized, and being willing and able to live out our covenant, there are no specific requirements for covenant membership. We recommend that you refrain from covenant membership until you're fully ready to commit yourself in The City Church family, so it might be wise to be involved with our church family for at least six months before you covenant with us. Additionally, you will want to be familiar with our theology and philosophy, and you might benefit from a "Foundations" class, offered several times throughout the year as "an intro to life in The City Church."

- **WHY DO I HAVE TO BE A CHRISTIAN TO BECOME A COVENANT MEMBER IN THE CITY CHURCH?**

Simply put, the basis of a covenant is a common understanding and unity before God, based in Jesus' work in the gospel. All of our identities, and all our work in the church family, are based on the Bible and the cross of Christ. The church is the family of God; the body of Christ. Without this shared understanding and basis, you won't be able to fulfill the very basis of this covenant... If you're not a believer in Christ, we still welcome your fellowship and involvement with us; however, you will not be able to be a covenant member.

- **WHY DO I HAVE TO BE BAPTIZED TO BECOME A COVENANT MEMBER IN THE CITY CHURCH?**

Baptism is an outward, public expression of the change Jesus has made in your life. It's one of the two ordinances we believe in (along with communion), in which Jesus participated, and which Jesus commanded of his disciples (Matt 28:19; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 1Pet 3:21). Believers throughout the Bible and history model baptism: you've died to sin and risen anew to Christ. While we don't require your baptism to take place in The City Church, we do require that every covenant member have been baptized after his or her conversion to Christ. If you haven't been baptized, please tell your Village leader, or a pastor-elder, and we'll celebrate with you and baptize you. If you do not agree with our beliefs on baptism, we still welcome your fellowship and involvement with us; however, you will not be able to become a covenant member.

- **IS THERE AN AGE LIMIT FOR COVENANT MEMBERSHIP?**

There is no minimum (or maximum!) age for becoming a covenant member in The City Church. The only requirements are that you are a professing, practicing Christian who has been baptized; that you are able to understand our theology and philosophy; and that you are willing and able to live out our covenant. We ask parents to be discerning as to what age their child covenants with The City Church.

- **WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO BECOME A COVENANT MEMBER?**

If you're not a covenant member in The City Church, then you're technically our "guest." We rejoice in this if you're not yet a believer in Christ or if you're a visitor: you're welcome to participate with, be involved with, and fellowship with The City Church and your Village. But if you're a Christian who refrains from becoming a member over an extended time (generally more than a year of involvement), you do a disservice to Jesus' body and bride, and to yourself: you consume from God's church, but don't commit to it or sacrifice for it, and you hinder the work of the church family (1Cor 12). Practically, if you're not a covenant member, you're disallowed from serving in KidCity, from leading a Village, class, and from some of the other City Church ministries reserved specifically for the church family, the covenant members. Finally, our pastor-elders cannot commit to provide the same level of personal shepherding and support to you, because the Bible requires that we take care of our family first (Eph 2:19; Gal 6:10).

- **WHY CAN'T I BE INVOLVED IN LEADERSHIP IF I'M NOT A COVENANT MEMBER?**

The church family is just that: a family, a committed body, a covenanted people. Anyone in leadership in the family, therefore, must be committed and covenanted to the family. As a matter of protecting our family, the Bible forbids our pastor-elders from putting you in a position of leadership, or some ministry positions, if you're not willing to fully commit and invest in our church family (1Tim 5:22; Acts 20:28).

- **AM I COVENANTING WITH MY VILLAGE, INSTEAD OF "THE CHURCH"?**

No. Biblically, the church isn't an institution or organization, which you join like a country club or a gym. The church is the people of God; the family of God, living on the mission of God (Eph 1:4-5; 2:19). Practically, "becoming members one of another" – investing our lives together, caring for each other, speaking truth to one another, and living out our faith and mission together (Rom 12:5, 1Cor 12:25; Eph

4:25; 1Thes 2:8) – happens in smaller expressions of the Church, with whom you truly share life. So you covenant once with God and to The City Church as a whole. But every year, you fill out a new Village Annual Identities Plan, planning and committing to specific ways you’ll live out elements of the covenant together in your Village during the following year.

Several times in the Bible, covenants were sealed – or “ratified” – through secondary actions: building an altar, sacrificing animals, sharing a sacrificial meal, shaking hands, and even placing one’s hand under the other person’s thigh are among the ways that covenants were ratified (see Gen 15:9-18; 24:2-9; 31:45-47, 54; Ezra 10:19, etc.). In marriage, the exchange of rings symbolizes a ratification of the covenant. Your membership covenant to The City Church is ratified by the annual commitment to live out your identities together with your Village.

- **WHAT HAPPENS IF I WANT TO BECOME A COVENANT MEMBER MID-YEAR?**

Membership conversations and annual Village Identities Plans generally happen every September. If you aren’t comfortable becoming “members of one another” in September, or aren’t involved with The City Church in September, but choose to covenant with us later in the year, you’re welcome to do so. Generally, you’ll just talk with your Village leader or a pastor-elder, and they’ll walk you through the covenant and your Village’s Annual Identity Plan for that year. You’ll sign yourself into covenant membership, and then commit to the Annual Identity Plan until the following annual renewal, the coming September.

- **HOW DO I KNOW IF CHURCH LEADERSHIP IS UPHOLDING THEIR END OF THE COVENANT?**

We do our best to keep you informed of leadership decisions, direction, etc, but if you have a question, you’re always free to simply ask a pastor-elder, or another leader in the area you have a question about. We use venues such as All-Church Gatherings, our online network, eNews, and covenant member meetings to keep you informed of issues, decisions, and information The City Church family needs to know. But again, if you have a question, please ask us: we have an open-books policy for covenant members regarding finances, and if there’s something you don’t feel like you know, we’re happy to talk with you about it.

- **WHAT IF I FEEL LIKE CHURCH LEADERSHIP ISN’T UPHOLDING THEIR END OF THE COVENANT?**

If you feel like a pastor-elder or another leader isn’t fulfilling their covenant with you, it is your right and responsibility to first lovingly and humbly express your concerns to that leader, as well as to the pastor-elders, who will handle it according to the biblical mandate for charging an elder (Matt 18:15-20; 1Tim 5:19-20). If the pastor-elders are unwilling to change and pursue a solution, or to pursue faithfulness to the covenant, then you are freed from your covenant membership obligations and are free to seek membership elsewhere, based on the church’s disobedience. The other pastor-elders handle the issue and decide the steps of reconciliation, discipline, or removal of that pastor-elder or leader.

- **HOW DO I KNOW IF I’M FULFILLING MY END OF THE COVENANT?**

Within your Village, you’ll periodically participate in “family nights,” during which you’ll review your membership covenant and Annual Identity Plan together, celebrate together, and discuss areas where you’re struggling, need discipleship and/or discipline, and need to shepherd each other. Additionally, we encourage you to be in regular discipleship relationships with other same-sex folks, who you trust and who can push and exhort you in areas of the Christian life where you need discipleship and growth. Regarding the financial giving aspect of the covenant, The City Church’s leadership sends annual giving statements to each covenant member. Finally, if you ever have a question about your end of the member covenant, feel free to ask a pastor-elder.

- **WHAT HAPPENS IF SOMEONE THINKS I’M NOT UPHOLDING MY END OF THE COVENANT?**

Failure to uphold your covenant – the breaking of a vow, oath, or covenant – is a sin before the LORD, just as any other sin is a sin against the LORD, even if it is carried out between two people (Num 30:2; Psalm 51: Matt 5:33-37). Thus, if someone in your Village or in your life thinks you’re being unfaithful to your member covenant, in an ongoing or regular basis, and in an unrepentant manner, they should approach you, humbly and lovingly walking through each step of the church discipline procedure outlined in Matthew 5:33-37. If they fail to approach you in this manner, or if you disagree, you’re welcome to approach a pastor-elder to act as an arbitrator between the two parties (1Cor 6:1-8).

:: THE CITY CHURCH'S MEMBERSHIP COVENANT ::

THE CITY CHURCH'S LEADERSHIP COVENANT WITH COVENANT MEMBERS

The City Church's Pastor-Elders are entrusted with teaching, overseeing, and protecting the church body and our covenant members. As such, all Pastor-Elders covenant with God and to our covenant members, the following:

- To ordain elders and appoint deacons and leaders (whether "staff" or not) according to the Bible's criteria for such offices (1Tim 3:1-12; Titus 1:5-9; 1Pet 5:1-4)
- To prayerfully seek God's will for our church family and to steward resources to the best of our ability, based on the Bible and prayerful leading of God the Spirit (Acts 20:28; 1Pet 5:1-4)
- To shepherd our church family and individuals within it, as gospel-centered disciples, family, missionaries, in truth and love and seeing all things as worship (Rom 12:1; Matt 28:16-20; Eph 4:15-16; Col 1:28; James 5:14; 1Pet 5:1-4)
- To faithfully preach and teach the Bible, and to give advice and counsel based in Scripture (Acts 20:27-28; 1Tim 4:16; 2Tim 4:1-5; Titus 2:1)
- To faithfully equip the members of our church family to carry out the work of ministry well (Eph 4:11-16)
- To protect against false teachers and false teaching (Matt 7:15; Acts 20:28-31; 1Tim 1:3-7; 1John 4:1)
- To exercise discipline – in love – when necessary, pursuing first the glory of God, then the good of the disciplined one and the health of the church as a whole (Matt 18:15-20; 1Cor 5; Gal 6:1; James 5:19-20)
- To set an example for you to follow, and to join with our covenant members in fulfilling the obligations of covenant members, stated below (Phil 3:17; 1Tim 4:12; Titus 2:7-8; 1Pet 5:3)

MEMBER COVENANT WITH THE CITY CHURCH

As God's redeemed children, saved by grace through the gospel of Christ, we strive to reflect the character of Christ through obedience and "living by the Spirit." This covenant in no way serves as "legalism" or "extra rules" for you. Instead, it is intended to help shape your life as you become a more faithful disciple, family member, and missionary in our church family, growing in obedience that faith produces. As covenant members, we covenant with God and to The City Church, the following:

As I strive to center my life in the gospel of Jesus Christ...

- I believe that God himself has come to rescue and renew all of creation, including me, in and through the work of Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Rom 8:18-25; 2Cor 5:18-19; Eph 2:8-10).
- I believe that I have a new identity in of the Gospel, and that I am called to live out these identities in day-to-day life: I am a disciple, a member of God's family, and a missionary, all for the purpose of worship (Eph 4:11-13; 2Tim 2:2; 2Thes 2:8; 1Tim 5:1-2; 2Cor 5:17-18; Matt 28:18-20; Rom 12:1-2; 1Cor 10:31).

As I live out our gospel-centered Disciple identity, I covenant with God and to The City Church...

- To pursue Jesus through regular Bible reading, prayer, and disciplines (Luke 18:1; Acts 17:11; 1Cor 9:2-27; Eph 5:1-21; 1Thes 5:12-22)
- To submit to the Bible as the final authority on all issues, and by God's grace, to avoid activities that the Bible deems sinful or foolish (Psa 119; 2Tim 3:14-17; 2Pet 1:19-21; Rom 14:14-23)
- To steward the resources God has given me well, including time, talents, spiritual gifts, and finances. This includes regular, sacrificial and joyful financial giving, and serving my church family as acts of worship (Matt 25:14-30; Rom 12:1-2; 2Cor 8-9; 1Pet 4:10-11)
- To thoughtfully abide by the biblical doctrine of The City Church, and joyfully submit to the pastor-elders and appointed leadership in The City Church as they prayerfully pursue God's will for the church (1Tim 1:10; 6:3; Heb 13:17)

As I live out our gospel-centered Family identity, I covenant with God and to The City Church...

- To be committed to The City Church as my local church family for my time in Fort Worth, regularly involving myself in “City Life” by engaging in my Village and our Annual Identities Plan, regularly attending All-Church Gatherings, participating in Scattered/SERVE opportunities, and giving of my time and gifts for the good of the church (Acts 2:42-47; Heb 10:23-25; Titus 3:14; 1Cor 12)
- To submit to the discipline of God the Spirit by (a) following the procedures for church discipline when sin is evident in another, to pursue restoration, and by (b) receiving righteous and loving discipline when approached biblically by a fellow believer (Matt 18:15-20; Psa 141:5; 1Cor 5:9-13; Heb 12:5-11)
- To confess my sin to God and fellow believers, repenting and seeking help to put sin to death (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5; Jas 5:16; 1Jhn 1:6-10)

As I live out our gospel-centered Missionary identity, I covenant with God and to The City Church...

- To, by God’s grace, intentionally pursue a daily lifestyle of “Gospel Intentionality” and inviting not-yet-believers into my life, as I live as a missionary in word and deed, in my neighborhood, apartment, classes, job, gym, and wherever else God puts me (Jer 29:7; John 20:21; 1Pet 2:9)
- To participate as often and sacrificially as possible, in person, prayer, and finances, in God’s mandate for local and global missions, and to make disciples in domains of society both here and abroad (Acts 1:8; Matt 28:18-20)

Knowing my inherent sinful tendency toward legalism and selfishness...

- ...I will strive to see everything above not as a checklist, or as ways to ‘earn God’s love’ in any way, or in any other misperception. Instead, I will strive to see my pursuit of this covenant as an act of worship, in loving obedience to God’s ongoing, abundant grace in my life (1Cor 10:31; Rom 12:1-2).

I understand that by signing below, I am sealing an agreement *with* God and *to* The City Church family, to walk together as members of one another for as long as God has me here. I understand that there will be good times and bad; frustrating times and joyous ones; but that our covenant runs deeper than those. I also understand that it is the responsibility of each member to carry the weight and burden of fulfilling our covenant, that the covenant will practically be carried out in and with my Village, and that none of this is a responsibility not to be considered lightly.

“When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay” (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5).

Signed:

Date: