

FAITH CHURCH MEMBERSHIP COVENANT (DRAFT)

*Not Yet Congregationally-Approved
Please submit your feedback to the pastors & elders*

Having been brought by God's grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and having committed to live together under the supreme authority of the Bible and the gospel of Jesus Christ, we joyfully confirm our covenant together as members of this congregation:

By God's grace, we will live in communion with God, as those who are united to Christ by faith.

We will pursue fellowship with God, learn to abide in Christ, and seek to walk in the Spirit, through bible reading, prayer, and the practice of other spiritual disciplines (1 Jn 1:3; Jn 15:1-5; Gal 5:16).

We will meet together on the Lord's Day to worship him and hear his Word, as well as at other times for prayer, study, and mutual encouragement (1 Cor 11:23-26; Col 3:16; Heb 10:24-25; James 5:16).

We will press on toward maturity in holiness, resisting sin and worldly lusts and growing in Christ-like character through the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God (Rom 6:1-11; 8:29; Col 3:1-17).

With God's help, we will live in meaningful community, as those who are united to each other through Christ.

We will walk in love – bearing one another's burdens, praying for one another, admonishing one another when correction is needed, and engaging in the relief of the poor among us (Jn 13:34-35; 1 Cor 5:1-2; Gal 6:2; Heb 3:12-14).

We will keep the unity of the Spirit by pursuing reconciliation & forgiveness, resisting opportunities for gossip & division, and welcoming one another's loving correction (Rom 12:10-21; Eph 4:3-6; Tit 3:2).

We will honor marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman, and bring up children under our care in the nurture and training of the Lord (Ps 78:1-10; Deut 6:1-9; Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-5).

By the power of the Spirit, we will live on mission for God's glory, as those who have been called to make disciples of Jesus.

We will work together to produce spiritual descendants, by evangelizing those who don't know Jesus, establishing new Christians in the faith, and equipping growing Christians for ministry work (Matt 28:16-20; Eph 4:11-13; 1 Thess 2:1-12).

We will invest in the ministries and mission of Faith Church, by serving and cheerfully giving of our time, spiritual gifts, and finances (Matt 6:19-21; 25:14-30; 2 Cor 9:6-15; Rom 12:3-8).

We will pray for the salvation of others, live uprightly and humbly before them, love them and proclaim the gospel of Jesus to them as God gives us opportunity (Acts 26:15-18; Rom 10:1; Col 4:3).

Should we leave this congregation, we will seek membership in another Bible-believing church.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit enable us to keep these promises. Amen.

MEMBERSHIP COVENANT F.A.Q.

What is a membership covenant?

At its core, it is a summary of how we agree to live as Christians – or more importantly, how God would have us live together. It is also a promise made to God, to a local church, and oneself about our commitments to God, His church, and to personal holiness. You'll notice that our membership covenant is tailored after our church's 3 values of "in communion-in community-on mission." You'll also notice that each statement is supported by several scripture references.

How should Christians think about covenants? Is a membership covenant mentioned in the Bible?

"Covenant" is a biblical motif. Simply put, it is a meaningful agreement between two parties. We see examples of covenants in both the Old and New Testaments – covenants between God and man, and between man and man. Jonathan & David make a covenant, and of course Christian marriage is a covenant. Moses gives a covenant from God to the people of Israel. Ezra & Nehemiah do so as well. Some human covenants are unconditional, while others are conditional. Biblical covenants between God and man have both conditional and unconditional elements (e.g. Abrahamic Covenant).

In the New Testament we see that "Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, which is the new covenant in Christ's blood" (Heb. 9:15). Within the New Covenant, we have the freedom to make "small c" covenants, agreements, and oaths between each other (e.g. marriage covenant, Israel's agreement in Neh. 10 etc.). *Thus, a church covenant functions within and under the New Covenant, by clarifying what unique New Covenant expectations God has for Christians within local churches.*

Church covenants come from the understanding that churches are to be composed of people who are truly born again. Church covenants outline how members agree to do life and ministry together, under the authority of Christ and his under-shepherds (i.e. Elders).

Why is a membership covenant important for Faith Church?

Faith Church doesn't have a clear definition of what it means to be an involved member of our local church. We have a statement of faith, which outlines what Faith Church believes. We have a Constitution & By-Laws, which details how Faith Church operates. Thus, we believe it would be very helpful to adopt a membership covenant. None of these 3 documents are required by scripture. However, all 3 are useful tools in helping guide our church forward according to God's ways.

What about Jesus' teaching on oaths in Matt. 5:33-34? *Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by earth, for it is his footstool...*

Good question! Understanding 1st century Jewish practices helps us to see what Jesus meant in this teaching. To keep people from breaking the law's rules regarding our promises (Numbers 30:1-2), Jewish teachers invented a system by which they could determine whether a vow had to be kept. Many rabbis did not consider it a sin to break a vow, unless it was made "in the name of God."

So oaths made in the name of heaven or even the gold of the temple were not ultimately binding. As a result, many 1st century Jews vowed by persons or objects other than God to give them an out!

In Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus points out the foolishness of this teaching by reminding His audience of God's omnipresence. People might think they can get out of their obligations because they did not swear an oath in the name of the Lord, but the Creator is present with those things by which people might swear, and He is the sovereign Creator of all. All things exist by His authority, so to swear an oath at all is to finally swear an oath in His name. A mere change of words does not give one a "get-out-of-oaths-free" card.

Thus, Jesus is NOT forbidding Christians from making agreements, covenants, or oaths. He is forbidding making oaths "in the name" of anything, as a way to get out of their promises. He is emphasizing that when we make agreements, we need to stick to our word.

Are we going to ask every member (present and future) to sign the document?

No, we will not ask our members to sign it. If we adopt the membership covenant, we will ask prospective members to verbally affirm our statement of faith and the membership covenant.

How will we use this document?

Both the statement of faith and membership covenant will be used in teaching during our new membership process. We may also read portions of this document at our quarterly congregational meetings, as a way of celebrating our covenant together. Because this is a good summary of Christian living, we will also use this as an accountability rubric to help us walk with Christ together.

Please know that your elders don't plan to use this document as a whip! Rather, it provides the biblical guard rails necessary to walk together in love. Much like marital vows, the expectation is not perfection – after all, we are all growing in sanctification! When we inevitably fall short, we repent and grab hold of the gospel. This membership covenant uniquely helps us to remember our commitments to one another, while making space for repentance, gospel assurance, and spiritual growth. As the covenant itself states, these promises to each other are kept only "by God's grace...with God's help...and by the power of the Spirit."

When are we going to vote to adopt this document?

We will vote to adopt this covenant as an official document of Faith Church on March 28th, 2021, at our Annual Congregational Meeting.