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Reflections for Writing Your Covenant:

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Why We Covenant

We covenant to join this church. Each year we must covenant to remain members of this church-annually on the second Sunday in November, "Covenant Sunday." We do this to grow as an intentional and faithful spiritual community, serious about our walk with Christ.

By following the model of our spiritual ancestors Abraham, Moses, the Puritans-we enter into relationship with our Lord and with one another, a relationship based on trust and commitment and love. In so doing, we are strengthened as individuals and as faith community in that we are a gathering of individuals who have thought about and prayed about our faith journey, making commitments to God for the furthering of His Kingdom in this realm.

At the very least we announce our intention to remain members of this faith community each year. This simple act changes how we relate to one another: we know we are each here because of call, desire and specific intention; all brothers and sisters in Christ's Church. At our best we think about, pray about and commit to those areas of life specific to Christian community and the furthering of God's Kingdom. These areas include the giving of our financial resources, the giving of our time and conversation (service and evangelism), our participation in the life of the church, and areas of personal growth and goals for the upcoming year. We enter into a renewed relationship with one another and with Christ.

There is no right or wrong way to write a covenant. This is between you and God and thus will be individual and personal. As church, we honor and respect the private nature of the covenant. It is read by at least one minister and the designated member of the diaconate. Financial information is given to the Financial Secretary. Information regarding willingness to serve is given to the Nominating Committee. No one may challenge or comment on the suitability of a covenant.

In the weeks preceding Covenant Sunday, the diaconate has prepared a series of reflections on aspects of the life of the church. We invite you to use them to contemplate the contents of your covenant. Additionally, materials to aid you in covenant preparation-including a covenant form-will be available as of October 12. (You may pick up your package in the church office.) You need not use a form; it is merely a tool provided for those who desire it.

I thank you in advance for honoring the covenant deadline of November 13. This is a great help to the church as we plan for the year 2005.

Finally, we recognize that, as pilgrims and imperfect, our covenants will contain errors both large and small, nor will we be able to keep our promises as perfectly as we would like. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we fill each other's weak spots and keep growing. The power is in our faithful response to God, as individuals and together as a faith family.

If you are a visitor to this church and would like to join, this is a good time to do so. Contact Pastor Chip Fisher at 949.644.7400, extension 23 or Barbara Anderson, Chair of the Diaconate, at 949.646.1139

Participation

in worship services, study groups, retreats, workshops and in other gatherings of the church community.

Participation in the life of the church matters. Why? Because we are the church. Whenever we gather together to worship, study, pray, work, celebrate, play or support one another, we are strengthened; the church is strengthened. Worshipping together is a cornerstone of being Christ's Church. The body of Christ gathers itself together. It is so much more than just going to church. It is being the church. We come to worship our Lord and share our faith with one another. We gather together as faith community: pilgrims walking the Path together. It makes a difference to us all when we show up. It reinforces us as faith family, unites us, and promotes our personal growth and continued awakening to the presence of God.

Participation can go beyond attendance each Sunday. We participate in Bible study groups to learn about our heritage and Truths contained in the Word. In being a part of a small study group, we forge deep relationships with one another, relationships that sustain and nurture us.

Each year we have the opportunity to attend retreats:

Men's and Women's Retreats, Prayer 101 and 202. In these sacred spaces of time we open more and more to receiving God.

We come together for Logos, our mid-week program on Wednesdays, further living the life of authentic Christian community, while we contribute to helping the children and youth grow in their relationships with God and with one another.

The annual congregational meeting is in January 2005.

After sharing a meal together, we meet to do the business of the church, approving the budget and board members. We take the time to acknowledge the many gifts of service that people have given throughout the year. It matters when we show up for one another in this way; it matters to Christ's Church

There are many other opportunities to participate and be in fellowship with one another: Special workshops are offered each year. Maundy Thursday program and service. Being a part of special fellowship events or simply serving coffee on the patio after worship service. Being a part of anything that is part of the life of the church strengthens us individually and as community. In a world brimming over with external demands and too-full schedules, we make room for the one important thing: Christ. Because in so doing, we get our priorities straight and all else can organize around it. Organized around the Cross, we become more receptive to God's presence and God's action in our lives.

Please take this simple cornerstone of walking the Christian Path-participation in the life of the church-into prayer and incorporate the essence of your understanding of its importance and your commitments into your covenant for 2005 membership.

Each time we gather to worship, work, study or play, we are strengthened. We open to God and each other. The church is strengthened. Because *we are the church*.

1 Corinthians 12:12

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body,

Evangelism

Our extending Christ's invitation to those currently outside the fellowship of Christians.

When we have something we care about and value, we naturally want to share it. This is the essence of evangelism: sharing what we've found in our life with Christ with those we care about. The life we have been called into is one in which we experience authentic community; where we experience love, where we are valued, where we learn and grow and share ourselves truly. It is a place where we can bring our hearts' repentance and find forgiveness; a place where we have come to know the mercy and grace of Christ, a gift undeserved yet extended to each of us.

As we come to value this life we've found, it is natural to share what brings us joy and purpose and meaning. In this context, evangelism is embraced. Because we are *inviting* others into our very own faith family, where they too will be supported and strengthened and loved and share the journey with fellow pilgrims. It is in this spirit that we are asked to extend the invitation with intentionality, targeting those people we sense that Spirit is calling us into greater relationship with, and "sowing seeds." The timing is not up to us; timing belongs to Spirit. Our task is the sowing of seeds-God does his own closing.

In preparation for the writing of your covenant, pray about how you might go about sharing what is meaningful to you. How do we extend Christ's invitation-the invitation we ourselves have received-to others? The details are individual; there is no formula. You may invite a friend to worship service, a fellowship event, or retreat. You may actively practice the discipline of evangelism by "choosing your six."

The most meaningful invitation is the personal one. And our most meaningful gifts to others are the opening up of our homes and hearts to them, sharing what we ourselves have received. Inviting someone into your faith family is like inviting someone into your home; exactly like inviting someone into your spiritual home.

And the Kingdom in this earthly realm grows.

From our weekly recall:

"... Finally we hope that our faith and love and discipline will increase until itflows beyond our fellowship and becomes a blessing to others. "

Tithing

or

your financial commitment to our church.

Some people still think money is a sticky subject, and wish it didn't keep getting mixed up with spiritual matters. But more and more of us rejoice that all areas of life are integrated in our Faith-and we rejoice to be able to give to our church, and to share our gifts and resources with God.

While the Church is here as a spiritual entity it also exists in this world, and thus, is subject to all the mundane aspects of life that all of us deal with. It takes money to run a church: to pay ministers, to keep the electricity on, to create and support programs for adults, children, youth. And, like it or not, money -gold- is one measure of what is of value in our lives. We use it to support the life that is important to us.

Tithing is a spiritual discipline that is age-old in our tradition. God asks for "first-fruits," first-born. Then ten percent of our spendable income. Unpracticed it seems an exorbitant request. Practiced it seems a small return on God's investment in us-and constant care and blessing to us. Tithing makes clear our allegiance and priorities. In tithing, we acknowledge that all that comes to us is a gift from God, and in gratitude we give back a tenth to support God's work in the Church on earth.

There is no guilt trip here. We come to the spiritual discipline of tithing just like we come to all the others: when we're ready. This week we invite you to enter into a dialogue with Spirit, clearing out any "shoulds" that hamper the conversation. What you give to the church is between you and God. We ask that you discuss this with Him, in prayer. It is in the earnest searching that we are guided to what is best. As a faith family, we affirm each week that "we move earnestly toward tithing" or that we are a tithing community. We have become conscious of our giving, and assess each year the percentage of our income that is given to Christ's Church, increasing it as we are called to do. Many who have reached their tithing goal have experienced the blessing of so doing. Always, this faith family trusts that what we do for the church is guided by the Holy Spirit. Your gifts of every kind are honored by Christ.

There are many areas in the life of the church that we need to support financially. A request budget tells part of the story. In addition, the trustees have shared with us a list of "wishes and dreams" that would support and grow this faith community, which includes the much-needed kitchen and Mertz Hall remodel and painting of our church buildings. There is no end to the good we can accomplish with Spirit in charge.

Approaching all our involvement in the church-including our financial gifts-in a prayerful manner is more meaningful, and much more powerful, than trying to "fund a budget." In this manner we form our budget, but far more important, the life of the church becomes a reflection of our love and care and devotion.

Genesis 28:20-22

Jacob made this vow: 'If God will be with me, if he will protect me on my journey and give me food to eat and clothes to wear, so that I come safely to my father's house, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone which I have set up as a sacred pillar shall become a house of God. and all that you give me, I shall give a tenth to thee.'

Service

to the Life of the Church.

When we are serving our church, it is a form of worship. We give our time and talents as we are called and in so doing build up the Kingdom in this realm. Ideally, we accept the opportunity to serve where we have the most interest and enthusiasm.

Last year we are introduced a new way to be in relationship with one another and in service to our Lord. It's called **Faith** Teams: Spirit-filled and fun seasonal groups who get together to pray and have fun doing the work of the church. You are invited to join in fellowship with a team for one season of the year:

Advent & Christmas, Ashes &, Resurrection, Pentecost & Revival, or Retreat & Thanksgiving. Each group will be involved in the active life of the church for approximately three months (the actual time is determined by the liturgical calendar). It is intended that these are Spirit-guided fellowships using intentional prayer to allow the Holy Spirit to inspire, guide and direct the group, and thus, the activities of the church.

Additionally, you are invited to pray about your involvement as an officer of the church, your participation on any board or committee, your involvement with Sunday School, LOGOS or retreats. These vital aspects of the life of the church will still be in place; indeed, they are necessary components of our life together and with the Faith Teams of each season. If you are serving on a board or committee, you may also serve on a faith Team for a season of fellowship.

A complete list of service opportunities is included in your covenant preparation package. Please take the time to prayerfully consider where you are called in the Life of the Church and how you are called to serve, and include that commitment in your covenant.

Romans 12:6

Let us use the different gifts allotted each of us by Gods grace ...

If you are a visitor to this church and would like to join this faith family, the covenant season is a good time to do so. For more information, contact Pastor Chip Fisher (949.644.7400 ext. 23).

We will welcome you!