

## **Covenant of the Region Board Mission Northwest**

In response to the stated desire of the 2008-09 Region Board of Mission Northwest to create a living document that would form the basis of its life and work together, the following document was developed. Information about the background and foundations of covenants, and purpose and use of this covenant are contained at the end of this document.

### **Covenant**

We understand that covenants are based on biblical **values** and articulate behaviors or **actions** those in covenant seek to take for the purpose of strengthening our mutual work and witness. Therefore, we, the board and staff of Mission Northwest, acknowledge ourselves to be in covenant with the Triune God and each other for the purpose of carrying out our mutual work for Christ's kingdom.

**Values:** Together we value

- the growth of Christ's kingdom on earth through the redemption of those who are lost (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 19:10);
- prayer – practiced personally, corporately, and daily (Acts 2:41-43);
- personal spiritual and mental growth (2 Peter 3:18; Eph. 4:15);
- the practice of grace and love that leads to unity (Eph. 4: 2-3), support for each other (Gal. 6:2) and patience with each other (Eph. 4:32);
- humor (Acts 13:52; Gal. 5:22).

**Actions:** We desire that our values will find expression in the following ways:

- in regular prayer for the churches, for the work of the board and staff, and for each other;
- in mutual respect, which we understand to include
  - the practice of confidentiality,
  - the refusal to gossip,
  - honoring the decisions made by the board acting as a whole, and
  - valuing each other's opinions;
- in stewardship of our time together and use of resources entrusted to us by the churches through
  - making responsible travel plans,
  - endeavoring to complete assignments and being engaged in the work,
  - attendance for the full meeting time,
  - removing ourselves from decision-making where we have a conflict of interest, and
  - making a decision to step down from the board if we find we are unable to attend the majority of the meetings;
- in advocating for engagement with and support of Region ministry among our churches;
- in support of the Region's vision, landmarks, Commonly Held Essentials, and Resolution on Human Sexuality.

We covenant together to live and work in such a way that all we do would assist our congregations to be "...living stones, ...being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

## Background

Some key ideas about covenants noted here are summaries of the discussions during the 2008-2009 board meetings. The quotes below serve as highlights; though they are concerned primarily with the local church, the principles apply to the work of brothers and sisters together for the wider ministry. A covenant is a particular expression of what it looks like to live and work together in the community of Christ's body. "A church covenant is a series of written pledges based on the Bible which church members voluntarily make to God and to one another regarding their basic moral and spiritual commitments and the practice of their faith. A covenant deals mainly with conduct (although it contains some doctrinal elements), while a confession of faith centers more heavily on beliefs. The basic meaning of a covenant resides in divine/human relationships in the context of church membership. Through the centuries Baptist churches have tended to write and/or adopt church covenants and confessions of faith in tandem as basic constitutive documents of their congregational life. The process has sought a balance between faith and practice, words and deeds, beliefs and behavior, doctrine and conduct." (Deweese, Charles W. Baptist Church Covenants. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1990. viii-ix.)

Deweese also notes everything in a covenant has a biblical foundation and does not "create new tasks for Christians; it summarizes biblical responsibilities and applies them to contemporary life" (p. 204). He also notes that covenants are best designed around positive features of Christian conduct rather than becoming simply a list of negatives to be avoided. The specific elements should guide the conduct of Christians, not govern it. "The strength of a covenant does not lie in a legalistic attachment to its wording but in reliance upon the biblical principles which lie beneath the wording" (p. 204).

In addition, Bob Damkoehler observed, "Covenant is a partnership which creates community in which the partners become like blood brothers and sisters. ... According to the New Testament, it [the covenant] has not been abandoned by God" (pp. 41-42). Further, "Covenant refers to the forgiveness and fellowship established between God and the believer. It also means the believer's voluntary entrance into that covenant with God. This covenant also establishes, at the same time, a covenant between believers themselves by which they enter consciously into an agreement to live in a committed, disciplined, and loving fellowship with each other. This covenant involves the willingness to abide by rules of common life and godly admonitions of communal discipleship" (p. 45).

## Foundations

Covenants are evident throughout the Bible and are evidence of a relational commitment between God and people (Deut 7:6 and further implementations of the covenant at Mt Sinai and the giving of the Torah and establishment of the Davidic throne [Damkoehler, pp 30, 32]), ultimately culminating in the covenant Christ established in his death and resurrection (1 Cor. 11:23-25). People model this action of God in Christ by being in covenant together (Gal. 5:13-14). The foundations for *this* covenant come out of the desire of the Mission Northwest board and staff to work more effectively as an organic body of committed followers of Christ with a specific goal. That goal is to provide leadership and guidance for the vision and ministry of the churches together – "the region."

## Use / Purpose

The use and purpose of this document are intended to be

- for mutual accountability: that we might encourage one another in the good work the Lord has given us responsibility for (Rom. 14:19);
- for recruitment: that those who are asked to serve might know how the board operates and what the stated expectations for engagement and behavior are;
- for personal encouragement: that in articulating these expectations, we are set us free from legalism on the one hand or vague assumptions on the other (I John 3:21-24). We desire to affirm that we have met the expectations and obligations in being a member of this board.