

CONFESSION & COVENANT (2)

Church Covenant

A. Introduction

1. There are three documents that every local church needs.

One that explains what the church believes.

One that explains how the church lives.

One that explains how the church runs.

2. These documents are referred to as the 'Confession of Faith', the 'Church Covenant', and the 'Constitution of the Church'.

What are they?

Why are they needed?

What should be in them?

The second document we are going to consider is the Church Covenant which explains how the church lives.

B. What is the Church Covenant?

1. A Church Covenant is a summary of how the church (its members) are to live together.

It is the Queen of documents that a church needs.

It outlines the responsibilities of being a church member.

By agreeing to it, the members are making a pledge or promise to God, to the local church, and to themselves that they will live in particular way.

2. The clearest example of God's people having some form of a covenant is found in the book of Nehemiah.

When God's people returned to Jerusalem after the exile was over, they made an agreement or covenant with each other and with God.

"In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it." (Nehemiah 9:38)

They agreed to follow and obey all the Law, the commands, regulations, and decrees of God.

"...all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord." (Nehemiah 10:29)

The covenant they made reminded all the members of the community of their commitment to live a certain way.

3. Whilst there is no mention of any of the early churches having an official Church Covenant in the New Testament, it is clear that the members of these churches were expected to live in a particular way.

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?" (1 Corinthians 5:1-2)

“Expel the wicked man from among you.” (1 Corinthians 5:14)

All the ‘one another’ commands are another indication of this.

The Church Covenant as we know it today, became popular as independent churches began to form during the 16th Century. They are a part of our heritage!

4. Does Banstead Community Church have a church covenant?

The answer is, sort of.

All the members of this local church have agreed to live in a certain way. So to be a member you need to be someone who:

*has repented of sin and trusts in Jesus Christ alone for salvation;
and has publicly declared their trust in Jesus Christ and their desire to follow Him as Lord, normally through baptism by immersion;
and regularly attends the Church;
and accepts the [Confession of Faith];
and is willing to serve in the life of the Church;
and maintains a lifestyle that is consistent with their profession of faith.*

Each Member must accept that their role includes the responsibility to:

*support, respect and encourage other Members (Hebrews 10:24-25);
and accept that Members have different gifts and talents which should be used for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7-11);
and serve as they are able (Ephesians 4:12);
and support, respect and accept godly leadership, especially of the Pastors and Elders (Hebrews 13:7,17);
and grow to become more Christ-like in character and show the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23);
and resolve resentments and disagreements in order to maintain true love and fellowship (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Peter 4:7-8).¹*

But what a Church Covenant does is spell out these responsibilities in more detail and frame them in the language of a vow or a promise.

C. Why do we need a Church Covenant?

1. What are some of the benefits of having a Church Covenant?

It’s beneficial for evangelism – it outlines what some of the ways Christians should be distinct from the world.

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.” (Titus 2:11-12)

It’s beneficial for teaching – it is a tool for discipling new Christians and instructing them about how a Christian should live.

“and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:20)

It’s beneficial for church membership – it makes clear to those wishing to join the church what is expected of them.

It’s beneficial for ongoing unity within the church – it reminds the members that they have agreed to live together in a certain way.

It’s beneficial for church discipline – if someone no longer lives consistently in the way outlined by the Church Covenant they should expect a process of warning and discipline to begin.

¹ From the Constitution of Banstead Community Church

It's beneficial for appointing leaders – the elders are to set an example, so how they live matters.

“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Timothy 4:16)

It's beneficial for prayer – it highlights what some of the things we should be praying for one another are.

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (Ephesians 6:18)

It's beneficial for the Lord's Supper – as a tool for self-examination.

“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.” (1 Corinthians 11:28-29)

It's beneficial for members to know they will be cared for and prayed for and encouraged by other members.

D. What should be in a Church Covenant?

1. A Church Covenant should be Biblical.

It must be rooted in Scripture otherwise we are binding members to what Jesus has not bound them to.

2. A Church Covenant should cover two main areas.

It should define what the members of the church should be – Christians.

It should define what the members of the church should do – live like a Christian (to attend, pray, serve, give, submit to the elders and discipline of the church, love, and commit).

E. What does a Church Covenant look like?

1. There are three parts to a Church Covenant.

An Introduction – who it is that is making this commitment to God, to the other members of the local church, and to themselves.

A set of Promises – what they are committing to do.

A Benediction – which is a blessing reminding them that God will provide what they need to keep these promises.

2. An example of a Church Covenant.²

“We were once dead in our sins, and deserving of God's wrath, but now having been brought by God's amazing grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son; and having been forgiven, and adopted into His family; we now, in dependence upon His Spirit, joyfully renew our commitment to one another:

We will love one another as a family; rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep; helping to carry each other's burdens and sorrows; and with humility and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving as Christ forgave us, encouraging each other, and sensitively correcting each other whenever necessary. (*Romans 12:15, Galatians 6:2, 1 Peter 1:22, Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 2 Timothy 4:2, Luke 17:3*)

² Thank you to Jonathan Worsley (Pastor, Kew Baptist Church)

We will make every effort to remain united as a church as those whom Christ has reconciled, obeying our leaders, and submitting to their authority so that their work will be a joy. (*Ephesians 4:3, Hebrews 13:17*)

We will defend a Bible-based and Christ-centred ministry in this church by supporting the preaching of the Word of God, the administration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the exercising of loving church discipline. (*2 Timothy 1:13-14; 4:15; Matthew 18:15-20, 26:26-29; 28:16-20; Acts 2:41, 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 13, 11:18, 20, 33*)

We will continue to gather together as a church family, and to pray for others and ourselves. (*Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:25; Colossians 4:2, Ephesians 6:18-19*)

We will seek to bring up our children in the knowledge of God through the teaching of His Word, and by a loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends. (*Mark 10:13-16, Ephesians 6:4, John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 3:1*)

We will contribute cheerfully, generously, and regularly to the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations. (*2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:6-14; Proverbs 22:9; Luke 11:41; 1 Timothy 6:18*)

We will welcome people into our gatherings and into our lives as we practice hospitality. (*Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2, 1 Peter 4:9; 3 John:8*)

We will commit ourselves to being ambassadors for God's Kingdom in this city [town; village] through the proclamation of the Gospel and love towards all people. (*Matthew 28:18-20, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Mark 12:31, Galatians 6:10*)

We will seek to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness, enduring suffering for the sake of Gospel, remembering that we are called to display God's glory together, as we wait for the appearing of our great Saviour, Jesus Christ. (*Ephesians 5:15; Titus 2:11-14, 1 Peter 1:14-15, 2:20*)

We will, if we move from this place, unite with another church, as soon as possible, where we can carry out the spirit of this promise and the principles of God's Word. (*Acts 2:42, 1 John 1:7*)

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen. (*2 Corinthians 13:14*)"