

Description of Covenant Community

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Introduction

Throughout the history of Imago Dei Community, we have had formal church membership. This document represents an evolution of how we currently understand and practice our faith together. This is not “membership” as traditionally understood, so we are choosing to describe it as a “covenant community.” We believe that as culture has changed dramatically over the last two decades of Imago Dei’s life, we too as God’s people must continue to change how we express our faith and live faithfully together in the place and time that God has us. This document serves to explain what covenant community is, what we believe and how we practice that belief.

Covenant Community

The story of Scripture is the story of a God who is covenantal—God pursued relationship with His people prior to sin entering the world, and continues to do so after sin entered the world. In Christ, the Church is made up of those who have put their faith in Jesus and have entered the New Covenant which He created for us through His life, death, resurrection, ascension and present reign at the right hand of the Father. We experience this New Covenant through the Holy Spirit who resides within the life of the believer, uniting us to the body of Christ, and expressing that unity locally through specific communities of faith who together, as brothers and sisters, worship the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Covenant community is the outward expression of the inward reality that if you are in Christ, you belong to His people. We express this relationship to each other by uniting our hearts in worship, serving each other and the world through our spiritual gifts, practicing our faith together in ways that build up the body of Christ, faithfully presenting Christ to the world and prophetically bearing witness against the false beliefs and false gods of our culture. In short, covenant community is the place within Imago Dei where believers express their unity in Jesus and live out their faith together.

The reason we use the word “covenant” is because it is a word describing not only the commitments we make, but also the relational nature in which we make them. Similar to the marriage covenant, we are not related to one another through a contract, we are related to each other through the work of Christ and the sealing of the Holy Spirit. We demonstrate this spiritual reality through the tangible expression of agreeing to a common confession and practice of faith, fulfilling a common mission in our city and world. We therefore commit to be faithful to this covenant, knowing that we all fail, but trusting the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of Jesus to empower us to be faithful to the commitments we make to God and to one another.

Covenant Community at Imago Dei Community

All believers are part of the Church. Through Christ, we are all adopted into His family and belong to one another. We seek to live in harmony with our brothers and sisters from other churches because we believe that we are ultimately part of the same family as God’s children. If we think about the larger church of Portland as one extended family, and each family lives in a particular house, it helps us to understand how Imago Dei is a particular house of God in

Portland with distinctive characteristics. These distinctions do not make us superior to other churches, but rather a complement to other churches, as each church has its own unique way of expressing our common faith to form the wider body of Christ in our city.

Imago Dei Community Distinctives

- Pastors don't lead ministries to the city. Instead, people in the congregation are equipped and empowered to fulfill their calling, which has created several unique and powerful ministries that serve hundreds of people in our city week in and week out.
- In 2014 we began to address the issues of diversity, learning to embrace one another in our differences while working together to address racial injustices within our city and our nation.
- We have always been a church that pushes to the margins to display Christ's love to those who are often neglected by the world.
- We empower our artists and are blessed by their creative contribution.
- We place a high value on preaching and teaching the Scriptures with an eye toward changing our hearts' affections, not simply our behaviors.
- We are a church planting community that recently has focused on becoming a family of congregations through our local Portland church plants.
- We strive to live out a core set of practices: Hear and Obey the Word and Spirit, Hospitality, Generosity, Vocation and Celebration/Sabbath.
- We endeavor to faithfully worship Jesus and to share the good news of salvation in word and deed to our city and world.
- We share a great unity with other churches, serving and worshipping together with the larger Body of Christ.
- We have a Council of Elders that is composed of both men and women who serve together to oversee and govern the church.

Common Confession

We believe the Bible is God's divinely inspired Word and is our rule and authority of faith.¹ We agree with the description of Scripture as written in the French Confession:

“We believe that the Word contained in these books (66 books of the Bible) has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from Him alone, and not from humans. And inasmuch as it is the rule of all truth, containing all that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation, it is not lawful for people, nor even for angels, to add to it, to take away from it, or to change it. Therefore it follows that no authority, whether of history, or custom, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or councils, or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures, but, on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them.”

In summary, we believe that Scripture is the lens through which we see life, the world and all things. It is the rule of our faith and final authority on belief, and through it we find everything we need for salvation, life and godliness.

¹ Psalm 19:7-14; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17

We have chosen to adopt the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed to summarize our doctrinal beliefs. These two historic creeds have served the Church for generations, summarizing what the Scriptures teach pertaining to salvation. The creeds describe the mystery of salvation through Jesus as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. We recite them as a way of saying "this is what we give our hearts to" as we continue to believe in God the Father, Son and Spirit.

We use the creeds for instruction on what the Gospel is, for worship as we recite them in our Sunday celebrations and to guard us against false teachings about the nature and person of God, which are rampant in our pluralistic culture.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended to the dead.
On the third day He rose again;
He ascended into heaven,
He is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic² church,
the communion of saints³,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Nicene Creed

We Believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only begotten Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
light from light,
true God from true God,

² The term "catholic" refers to the Church throughout the world.

³ Communion of saints refers to the unity we share with all believers who have professed this belief throughout the past, present and future.

begotten not made,
of one substance with the Father,
through Whom all things came into existence,
Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down from the heavens,
and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became man,
and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,
and suffered and was buried,
and rose again on the third day according to the Scripture
and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father,
and will come again with glory to judge living and dead,
of Whose kingdom there will be no end;
and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver,
Who proceeds from the Father,
Who with the Father and the Son is together worshiped and together glorified,
Who spoke through the Prophets;
in one holy Catholic and apostolic Church⁴.
We confess one baptism to the remission of sins;
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

Common Practice

As a covenant community, we seek to live a life of common practice. We believe that the following five practices are *tri-formational*, meaning they transform us in three ways. First, the practices *change us* by calling us back to Jesus to be changed by His Word and Spirit so that we can live out each one with authentic love and faith. Second, when God's people follow these practices, we display the *faithful presence* of Jesus in our community. Third, these practices are a *prophetic witness*, protecting us from the idols of our culture and challenging cultural values and ideas that are far from God.

Hear and Obey the Word and Spirit

Our Heavenly Father speaks to us and is present with us—through Jesus the living Voice and Word of God,⁵ and through His Spirit, the very Breath and Presence of God.⁶ Our posture is one of receiving and responding: seeking to go deeper through holy listening, dependent trust and obedient faith.⁷

We come to the Word of God with a response of trust and obedience. When we approach Scripture in this way, it changes us through radical dependence. As people who trust the Word of

⁴ The term “catholic” again refers to the Church throughout the world. The term “apostolic” means that the same faith and witness of the Apostles has been passed through the generations and is still the faith and witness the Church professes today.

⁵ Matthew 28:18-20; John 1:1-14

⁶ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

⁷ John 16:13-15; John 14:17

God and the Spirit of God, we become a faithful presence of Christ blessing the people around us, and we simultaneously learn to discern and resist the false teachings and false gods of our culture.⁸

Hospitality

Jesus makes space for us, embraces us and welcomes us into the household of God. Jesus humbles himself as Servant of all to take our sin, suffering and shame upon Himself, that we might enter as sons and daughters into the gracious hospitality of God.⁹ We follow Him by welcoming and serving our neighbors and strangers—even enemies—making space for others through inclusive meals, acts of compassion, welcoming service and sharing the grace and knowledge of Christ.¹⁰

We strive to make space in our lives to share a common table with people who are different than us—ethnically, politically and religiously. We believe that Christ is at the table with us, and so we are invited to share Christ, meet Christ and be changed by Christ. We practice hospitality because we remember that we were once strangers, and Christ welcomed us despite how different and far we were from Him. We extend that welcome to each other in His name.

Generosity

Jesus is the Generous One who “made himself poor, that we might become rich”¹¹ and gave the best He had—His life—that we might become one family of God.¹² We join Jesus in selfless service and revolutionary sacrifice, using our time, our energy and our resources to bless each other and the world.¹³

In a culture of consumerism, generosity is counterculture to our experience. Yet a hallmark of being the people of God is an overwhelming sense of gratitude and willingness to share. We practice generosity through regular, sacrificial and joyful giving to the community of Imago Dei, and we give to other causes in the broader church. We give our time and our whole person by living a generous life. We proclaim the God of generous grace when we live a life of generosity.

As we practice generosity, we do so through serving our Imago Dei family, helping to meet needs on Sunday and throughout the week. Generosity makes us available to meet others’ needs because our God has met our needs in Christ Jesus. The world lives out of a mindset of scarcity, but God’s people live into the call of His abundant provision.

Vocation

⁸ Psalm 1:1-3; Ephesians 4:17-5:20; Galatians 5:13-26; 1 John 5:1-3

⁹ Mark 10:43-45; Galatians 4:4-7; Ephesians 2:19-21; 1 Peter 3:18

¹⁰ Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:19; Matthew 25: 34-40; Romans 12:13; Titus 1:7-9; 1 Peter 4:8-9

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 8:9

¹² Mark 10:45; 1 John 3:16-18

¹³ Luke 10; Romans 12:1-12; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; 1 John 3:16-18

Our Heavenly Father has created all things through Jesus and sustains all things in His Spirit so nothing is mundane or ordinary—everything is spiritual.¹⁴ We reject the sacred/secular dichotomy of Western culture and participate in all of life as a gift from God. This includes work and family, which are God’s two original callings given to display His character and contribute to the flourishing of His world.¹⁵

Work

We fulfill our calling through holy work, believing that God has sent each of us into the world to work for the good of others. Therefore, all work that produces a common good is holy and sacred. It is in these spaces where we work as worship and are sent to love our co-workers, neighbors, children, etc., in the name of Jesus, that they too might know the living Christ.¹⁶

Family

We practice vocation in our singleness through our calling to be faithful to Jesus through sexual fidelity and using our singleness to serve Christ as modeled for us by the Apostle Paul. Likewise, we practice vocation in marriage through our calling to be faithful to Jesus through sexual fidelity. In our calling to be faithful, we agree with the Scriptures, which teach that marriage is between one man and one woman in monogamous union for life and that any sexual union outside of a one man and one woman covenant for life is sin. In a sexually charged culture, we encourage one another to faithfully live out our calling through singleness and marriage.¹⁷

We fulfill our vocation as parents by seeking to bring up our children in the love and knowledge of Jesus, praying together for the salvation and flourishing of our children in our community.¹⁸

Celebration

Jesus inaugurates the Wedding Feast of God, the joy of the kingdom and the Sabbath rest all creation was made for¹⁹. We join Jesus through the grace of communal worship and the submission of holy rest, cultivating an experience of gratitude, intimacy with God, celebration with others, and hope in the coming consummation of his kingdom. We gather on Sundays to celebrate through our collective worship. We sing prayers of praise, confess our sins and hear and obey God’s Word.

It is in our collective worship that we participate in the sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and baptism. We come to the Lord’s Supper (Communion) weekly to participate in the holy meal of bread and wine that symbolize Jesus’ broken body and shed blood for our sins. In eating and drinking the bread and wine we testify that Jesus indeed died for our sins in a physical body, and

¹⁴ Psalm 47; Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17

¹⁵ Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7; 2:15-25; John 1:1-4

¹⁶ Genesis 2:15; Psalm 90:17; Jeremiah 29:4-9; Matthew 25:34-40; Mark 12:29-31; Colossians 3:23

¹⁷ Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:1-15; 1 Corinthians 7; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Matthew 19:14; Ephesians 6:4; Philippians 4:6-7

¹⁹ Matthew 22:1-14; John 2:1-11; 7:37-38; Isaiah 25:6-8; 55:1-5; Hebrews 4:1-11; Revelation 21-22.

we experience the grace of Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit as we worship God at the table.²⁰

We participate in baptism, which is the identification with Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Entering the water symbolizes burial, and rising out of the water symbolizes resurrection. Throughout the year we baptize, and celebrate those who get baptized, as a community.

We also celebrate by keeping the Sabbath holy, receiving it as a gift given to us by our gracious God. This means we set apart a time for rest, ceasing from work, seeking to be present with God and one another, and remembering that this is God's world—He is in control.²¹

Common Mission

As we confess and practice our common faith in these ways, we do so knowing that we are fulfilling a common mission. The Scriptures define this mission in two ways. The Great Commandment is to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves, and the Great Commission is to go into all the world and make disciples.

The way we have said this at Imago Dei is that we strive to **take the whole Gospel, to the whole person, to the whole world, helping people to become mature in Christ.**

By being part of the covenant community at Imago Dei, you are joining this mission with other brothers and sisters. It requires all of us to faithfully pursue deep relationship with the God we confess to believe through the creeds. We need one another to faithfully practice the faith we profess through our practices. Together we love, serve, pray and share our faith. We collectively fulfill our common mission by being who God has called us to be in this moment.

Entering into Covenant Community

We enter covenant community at Imago Dei by doing two things. First, we confess our faith publicly through the creeds to other people in the covenant community. As we do this, we say "I believe in Jesus" as revealed to us through the Holy Scriptures. Second, we make a commitment to live out the five spiritual practices for one year. This may seem foreign in a culture where we typically understand membership as a piece of paper we sign, but it is a spiritual commitment that we are making.

This commitment is no small thing, and it is not simply a matter of behaving. It is an outward expression of an inward reality; we commit first and foremost to God and then to each other. We make this commitment annually to give time for reflection and to understand what it means for a person to live out these practices in the year to come. We confess our faith through the creeds, and we commit to practicing our faith through the five practices described above.

²⁰ Matthew 26:26-28; Acts 2:42;-47 Colossians 3:16;

²¹ Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23:33; Psalm 92; Matthew 12:9-12;

