

# DISCOVERY CHURCH COVENANT PARTNERSHIP GUIDE



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# CHURCH MEMBERSHIP, COVENANT PARTNERSHIP

Membership and marriage are not the same thing. Yet, they are similar enough that marriage can help us understand the role of membership in a local congregation.

When we choose to get married it is *not* because we perceive a benefit for ourselves. Marriage is a choice to commit our lives to serving another person, in good times or bad, in plenty or in want, in health or in sickness. *Marriage is covenant for the sake of another.* A marriage covenant is a commitment to another person, for their benefit, until death do us part.

In a culture where companies and organizations woo us to join with them or their cause, through promises, benefits, perks, and other rewards, the church stands apart. A local church doesn't make promises about what might come as a result of joining. That is, unless the church wants to set people up for disappointment. The church, a local collection of God's people, extends its hand in covenant. Covenant is a commitment to people, for their sake and for their benefit, unless God should lead us apart.

People often come to a church wondering what it might do for them. But people join a church eager to do something for others.

In all honesty, covenant doesn't make any sense unless we have a real sense that God has bound us together by his Spirit and has called us to be partners in life and in mission.

There are many who at different times and different seasons will *associate* with a local congregation. It is important for a local church to create space in its life and worship for those who can offer little more than a seeking heart and desire to learn and participate. But membership is a deeper, more intentional commitment that is dependable.

Starting on page 13, you will find our Membership Covenant. Pages 14 through 23 then provide brief commentary on each of our covenant commitments.

Thank you for joining with Discovery as covenant partners.

Curtis Lillie

# WHO WE ARE

Discovery Church is a local congregation of the Church of the Nazarene, a Protestant denomination in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition (*See the Introduction to the Church of the Nazarene*).

Discovery's members are covenant partners in the mission of *sending disciple-making communities into the world*.

Guiding our efforts to fulfill this mission are four biblical values: **faithfulness**, **community**, **discipleship**, and **hospitality**.

- We value **faithfulness**. Because our God is faithful to His creation and to the covenant promises He makes to His people, we are concerned above all else with our own faithful response to God. With the help of God's Spirit, we intend to bring our lives and our ministries into alignment with God's character and will. We leave results in God's hands, concerning ourselves with faithfully being who God has made us to be and faithfully doing what God has asked us to do.
- We value **community**. The Christian faith is not a solitary journey. God has made us for community and He has given us Spirit-bound communities in which to live, mature, and serve. We are committed to nurturing these communities so that they are healthy and vibrant, providing space for people to read Scripture together, to pray with and for one another, learning to trust Jesus, and sharing our very lives with one another.
- We value **discipleship**. It is our central calling to grow up into Christian maturity, learning to live and walk with God by His Spirit, while leading others to do the same. Christian maturity involves learning everything we can about God and His kingdom, having our desires conformed to God's desires, and imitating Jesus with our lives. Scripture is our source for knowledge about God. Prayer is the means by which God confirms our understanding. The fruit of our lives then bears witness that we are maturing into the likeness of the Messiah.
- We value **hospitality**. We will never forget the purpose for which we have been called. Our adoption into God's family is not for our own sake, but for the sake of the entire world. In our lives, our homes, our groups, and our congregational worship, we will make space and welcome our neighbors, strangers, foreigners, and enemies. We are committed to offering the same generous welcome we first experienced when we found that God welcomed us among His people.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

The Church of the Nazarene is a Protestant Christian church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. Organized in 1908, the Church is now home to more than 2 million members worshiping in over 26,000 local congregations in 159 world areas.

The mission of the Church of the Nazarene is to make Christlike disciples in the nations.

## *We Are a Christian People*

As of the Church Universal, we join with all true believers in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in embracing the historic Trinitarian creedal statements of Christian faith. We value our Wesleyan-Holiness heritage and believe it to be a way of understanding the faith that is true to Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.

## *We Are a Holiness People*

God, who is holy, calls us to a life of holiness. We believe that the Holy Spirit seeks to do in us a second work of grace, called by various terms including "entire sanctification" and "baptism with the Holy Spirit"-cleansing us from all sin, renewing us in the image of God, empowering us to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, and producing in us the character of Christ. Holiness in the life of believers is most clearly understood as Christlikeness.

## *We Are a Missional People*

We are a sent people, responding to the call of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into all the world, witnessing to the Lordship of Christ and participating with God in the building of the Church and the extension of His kingdom (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Corinthians 6:1). Our mission (a) begins in worship, (b) ministers to the world in evangelism and compassion, (c) encourages believers toward Christian maturity through discipleship, and (d) prepares women and men for Christian service through Christian higher education.

# WHAT WE BELIEVE

## ARTICLES OF FAITH

### **I. The Triune God**

We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe; that He only is God, holy in nature, attributes, and purpose. The God who is holy love and light is Triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **II. Jesus Christ**

2. We believe in Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead; that He was eternally one with the Father; that He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary, so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say the Godhead and manhood, are thus united in one Person very God and very man, the God-man.

We believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and that He truly arose from the dead and took again His body, together with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith He ascended into heaven and is there engaged in intercession for us.

### **III. The Holy Spirit**

3. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Triune Godhead, that He is ever present and efficiently active in and with the Church of Christ, convincing the world of sin, regenerating those who repent and believe, sanctifying believers, and guiding into all truth as it is in Jesus.

### **IV. The Holy Scriptures**

4. We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith.

## **V. Sin, Original and Personal**

5. We believe that sin came into the world through the disobedience of our first parents, and death by sin. We believe that sin is of two kinds: original sin or depravity, and actual or personal sin.

5.1. We believe that original sin, or depravity, is that corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam by reason of which everyone is very far gone from original righteousness or the pure state of our first parents at the time of their creation, is averse to God, is without spiritual life, and inclined to evil, and that continually. We further believe that original sin continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate, until the heart is fully cleansed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

5.2. We believe that original sin differs from actual sin in that it constitutes an inherited propensity to actual sin for which no one is accountable until its divinely provided remedy is neglected or rejected.

5.3. We believe that actual or personal sin is a voluntary violation of a known law of God by a morally responsible person. It is therefore not to be confused with involuntary and inescapable shortcomings, infirmities, faults, mistakes, failures, or other deviations from a standard of perfect conduct that are the residual effects of the Fall. However, such innocent effects do not include attitudes or responses contrary to the spirit of Christ, which may properly be called sins of the spirit. We believe that personal sin is primarily and essentially a violation of the law of love; and that in relation to Christ sin may be defined as unbelief.

## **VI. Atonement**

6. We believe that Jesus Christ, by His sufferings, by the shedding of His own blood, and by His death on the Cross, made a full atonement for all human sin, and that this Atonement is the only ground of salvation, and that it is sufficient for every individual of Adam's race. The Atonement is graciously efficacious for the salvation of those incapable of moral responsibility and for the children in innocency but is efficacious for the salvation of those who reach the age of responsibility only when they repent and believe.

## **VII. Preventive Grace**

7. We believe that the human race's creation in Godlikeness included ability to choose between right and wrong, and that thus human beings were made morally responsible; that through the fall of Adam they became depraved so that they cannot now turn and prepare themselves by their own natural strength and

works to faith and calling upon God. But we also believe that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is freely bestowed upon all people, enabling all who will to turn from sin to righteousness, believe on Jesus Christ for pardon and cleansing from sin, and follow good works pleasing and acceptable in His sight.

We believe that all persons, though in the possession of the experience of regeneration and entire sanctification, may fall from grace and apostatize and, unless they repent of their sins, be hopelessly and eternally lost.

### **VIII. Repentance**

8. We believe that repentance, which is a sincere and thorough change of the mind in regard to sin, involving a sense of personal guilt and a voluntary turning away from sin, is demanded of all who have by act or purpose become sinners against God. The Spirit of God gives to all who will repent the gracious help of penitence of heart and hope of mercy, that they may believe unto pardon and spiritual life.

### **IX. Justification, Regeneration, and Adoption**

9. We believe that justification is the gracious and judicial act of God by which He grants full pardon of all guilt and complete release from the penalty of sins committed, and acceptance as righteous, to all who believe on Jesus Christ and receive Him as Lord and Savior.

10. We believe that regeneration, or the new birth, is that gracious work of God whereby the moral nature of the repentant believer is spiritually quickened and given a distinctively spiritual life, capable of faith, love, and obedience.

11. We believe that adoption is that gracious act of God by which the justified and regenerated believer is constituted a son of God.

12. We believe that justification, regeneration, and adoption are simultaneous in the experience of seekers after God and are obtained upon the condition of faith, preceded by repentance; and that to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.

### **X. Christian Holiness and Entire Sanctification**

13. We believe that sanctification is the work of God which transforms believers into the likeness of Christ. It is wrought by God's grace through the Holy Spirit in initial sanctification, or regeneration (simultaneous with justification), entire sanctification, and the continued perfecting work of the Holy Spirit culminating in glorification. In glorification we are fully conformed to the image of the Son.



We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect.

It is wrought by the baptism with or infilling of the Holy Spirit, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service.

Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, is wrought instantaneously by grace through faith, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.

This experience is also known by various terms representing its different phases, such as “Christian perfection,” “perfect love,” “heart purity,” “the baptism with or infilling of the Holy Spirit,” “the fullness of the blessing,” and “Christian holiness.”

14. We believe that there is a marked distinction between a pure heart and a mature character. The former is obtained in an instant, the result of entire sanctification; the latter is the result of growth in grace.

We believe that the grace of entire sanctification includes the divine impulse to grow in grace as a Christlike disciple. However, this impulse must be consciously nurtured, and careful attention given to the requisites and processes of spiritual development and improvement in Christlikeness of character and personality. Without such purposeful endeavor, one’s witness may be impaired and the grace itself frustrated and ultimately lost.

Participating in the means of grace, especially the fellowship, disciplines, and sacraments of the Church, believers grow in grace and in wholehearted love to God and neighbor.

## **XI. The Church**

15. We believe in the Church, the community that confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, the covenant people of God made new in Christ, the Body of Christ called together by the Holy Spirit through the Word.

God calls the Church to express its life in the unity and fellowship of the Spirit; in worship through the preaching of the Word, observance of the sacraments, and ministry in His name; by obedience to Christ, holy living, and mutual accountability.

The mission of the Church in the world is to share in the redemptive and reconciling ministry of Christ in the power of the Spirit. The Church fulfills its mission by making disciples through evangelism, education, showing compassion, working for justice, and bearing witness to the kingdom of God.

The Church is a historical reality, which organizes itself in culturally conditioned forms; exists both as local congregations and as a universal body; sets apart persons called of God for specific ministries. God calls the Church to live under His rule in anticipation of the consummation at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **XII. Baptism**

16. We believe that Christian baptism, commanded by our Lord, is a sacrament signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ, to be administered to believers and declarative of their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and full purpose of obedience in holiness and righteousness.

Baptism being a symbol of the new covenant, young children may be baptized, upon request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary Christian training.

Baptism may be administered by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, according to the choice of the applicant.

## **XIII. The Lord's Supper**

17. We believe that the Memorial and Communion Supper instituted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is essentially a New Testament sacrament, declarative of His sacrificial death, through the merits of which believers have life and salvation and promise of all spiritual blessings in Christ. It is distinctively for those who are prepared for reverent appreciation of its significance, and by it they show forth the Lord's death till He come again. It being the Communion feast, only those who have faith in Christ and love for the saints should be called to participate therein.

## **XIV. Divine Healing**

18. We believe in the Bible doctrine of divine healing and urge our people to seek to offer the prayer of faith for the healing of the sick. We also believe God heals through the means of medical science.

## **XV. Second Coming of Christ**

19. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will come again; that we who are alive at His coming shall not precede them that are asleep in Christ Jesus; but

that, if we are abiding in Him, we shall be caught up with the risen saints to meet the Lord in the air, so that we shall ever be with the Lord.

## **XVI. Resurrection, Judgment, and Destiny**

20. We believe in the resurrection of the dead, that the bodies both of the just and of the unjust shall be raised to life and united with their spirits—“they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

21. We believe in future judgment in which every person shall appear before God to be judged according to his or her deeds in this life.

22. We believe that glorious and everlasting life is assured to all who savingly believe in, and obediently follow, Jesus Christ our Lord; and that the finally impenitent shall suffer eternally in hell.

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## **A SUMMARY OF OUR FAITH**

**We believe** in the one true God of Israel-revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**We believe** that the First and New Testament Scriptures, given by complete inspiration, contain all truth necessary to faith and Christian living.

**We believe** that man is born with a fallen nature, and is, therefore, inclined to evil, and that continually.

**We believe** that the finally impenitent are hopelessly and eternally lost.

**We believe** that the atonement through Jesus Christ is for the whole human race; and that whosoever repents and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is justified and regenerated and saved from the dominion of sin.

**We believe** that believers are to be sanctified wholly, subsequent to regeneration, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**We believe** that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the new birth, and also to the entire sanctification of believers.

**We believe** that our Lord will return, the dead will be raised, and the final judgment will take place.

# WHAT WE DO

## ***Sending Disciple-Making Communities into the World***

God's work happens in and through Discovery in *four* primary spheres: the *individual, household, small group, and congregation*. In each of these spheres disciples are growing and helping others grow.

**Individuals:** *Faith is personal.* Disciple-making begins with individuals who invest in their own personal spiritual growth. They then help others grow as disciples of Jesus.

**Households:** *Faith is lived.* Disciple-making happens when disciples seek to honor the Lord in their rising, eating, working, conversing, and resting. Disciple-making happens as disciples intentionally help other household members grow.

**Small Groups:** *Faith is shared.* Disciple-making happens when households join together to help, support, encourage, and challenge each other.

**Congregation:** *Faith is big.* Disciple-making happens when small groups partner with each other to accomplish what no single group could effectively do alone.

# THE COVENANT: OUR COMMITMENT TO EACH OTHER

Those covenanted together in membership acknowledge Jesus, the Messiah as Lord and as Savior.

Those covenanted together in membership share this confession of faith: We believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as revealed to us in the Scriptures. We believe that human beings are born in sin; that they need the work of forgiveness through the Messiah and the new birth by the Holy Spirit; that following this there is the deeper work of heart cleansing or entire sanctification through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and that to each of these works of grace the Holy Spirit gives witness. We believe that our Lord will return, the dead shall be raised, and that all shall come to final judgment.

The saints of Discovery Church covenant together in membership, making these commitments to one another:

- We are committed to individual growth, not merely for personal betterment, but also for the sake of the congregation. This includes an intense devotion to hearing and doing what is in the Scripture.
- We are committed to praying for the health and fruitfulness of the congregation.
- We are committed to advancing the mission of the congregation, which is the work shared by all Christians: to bear public witness to the good news of Jesus and the kingdom of God, and to make disciples.
- We are committed to playing an active role in the life of the congregation. This includes taking seriously the official duties of membership (nominating, voting, or serving in an elected capacity).
- We are committed to using God-given gifts and abilities for the building up of other members and the congregation as a whole.
- We are committed to providing helpful and honest feedback.
- We are committed to forgiving and seeking forgiveness.
- We are committed to supporting the kingdom-work of the local church through generous, joyful giving.
- We are committed to discerning God's will *together*.
- We are committed to supporting, following, and holding accountable those selected by the congregation for leadership.

# COVENANT EXPECTATIONS

## FURTHER EXPLANATION OF OUR COVENANT COMMITMENTS:

***“We are committed to individual growth, not merely for personal betterment, but also for the sake of the congregation. This includes an intense devotion to hearing and doing what is in the Scripture.”***

There is no way to get around it, one essential aim of this life is the Holy Spirit's preparation of God's people as the radiant and holy bride, made ready for the Messiah. The Bible uses a range of words and metaphors to describe this preparation: growth, maturity, sanctification, etc.

It is non-negotiable. And it happens within the context of community.

This growth results in a transformed heart, where we now want to want the things that God wants us to want.

This growth results in a transformed mind, where the biblical story has drenched our imaginations and with the Spirit's help we are now able to discern God's perfect and pleasing will.

This growth results in a renewed vision of the world that God is rescuing along with how we might join in on the work.

This growth results in an expanding ability to live and make decisions apart from the driving impulses of emotion and the seductive wiles of our desires.

This results in the contemporary imitation of Jesus's self-giving, generous, and hospitable love for one's enemies.

***We do not arrive at maturity on accident.*** It is always the result of a dynamic partnership between the transforming-Spirit and us as we open our lives to receive the Spirit's work. Three things are necessary for this kind of maturity: lives built on a strong commitment to knowing and understanding the Scriptures as they are our only source for God's personal revelation to humanity. Maturity is also grounded in prayer as we nurture relationship with the God that has revealed himself in Scripture. Finally, the community of faith is the crucible in which this love for God and neighbors is learned, practiced and can take mature form.

Are you committed to this kind of growth? The best way to find out is to ask someone who will be honest with you and ask questions like these:

- \* Do I prioritize the reading of Scripture and prayerful conversation with God?
- \* In what areas of my life do I still lack maturity? Where do I have it?
- \* In what ways do I "carry my cross daily?"
- \* Is my life becoming more God-oriented or Me-oriented?
- \* What are my less obvious sins?

***"We are committed to praying for the health and fruitfulness of the congregation."***

I know a pastor whose ministry requires him to preach in a different church every Sunday. One of his customary practices, once he has taken a seat in the sanctuary, is to read through the prayer requests.

He has two reasons for doing this. The first, there is nothing that joins our spirits with others and with the Spirit of God like prayer does. This then is a way of grounding his sermon in the honest prayers of real people. The second reason for looking to the prayer list is that it can be revealing. A prayer list can provide insight as to a congregation's expectations for God.

If a prayer list is dominated by the church's administrative needs, a church might be overly focused on the institutional church.

If a prayer list is dominated by health concerns, a church might be overly focused on God's miracles.

If a prayer list has only requests, a church might struggle to name and praise God for his blessings, activity, and presence.

If a prayer list is dominated by the requests of cousins, aunts, friends of friends, and other people in the church's extended network, a church might lack the vulnerability and relationship necessary for sharing personal requests.

I say "might" above because a prayer list doesn't guarantee these things. But it does suggest them about a church, its interpersonal relationships, and its relationship to God.

People often assume that hanging out or "fellowshipping" are the doorways to deep and meaningful relationships within a church. Quality time can't explain the



kind of relationships Paul had with the churches he served with. No, his letters suggest it was his constant and fervent prayer for each of his churches that created such deep connections.

It is easy to talk about prayer. It is much harder to pray for one another's spiritual growth, to pray for spiritual renewal and wisdom for our leaders, to pray for the kingdom of God to come and for Discovery to be faithful to its missional calling.

Yet this is precisely what we covenant to do.

***"We are committed to advancing the mission of the congregation, which is the work shared by all Christians: to bear public witness to the good news of Jesus and the kingdom of God, and to make disciples."***

Imagine you have gone out to watch your child's soccer game. The two teams take the field, but you notice that one of the coaches is on the field with his team. You shrug it off. Until the coach takes the kick-off and passes it to himself. As he dribbles down the field his whole team follows him, cheering him on, though keeping their distance. Occasionally, the coach passes to a kid who passes it right back. On several occasions, the kids stand in front of other players, creating space for the coach to keep moving the ball forward. Several times, the coach had to hurry back to play goalie just to block a shot.

You should immediately recognize that this is insane. No parent signs their kids up to play soccer in order to cheer their kids on as the kids cheer their coach on as he plays the game. Not even if the kids are on the field and get to help the coach play.

This wild caricature of youth soccer is a compelling analogy to what we commonly do with the work of the church. We all sign up to follow the same Jesus and then we tell all the non-pastoral players that the pastors are the ones who get to "play the game." Sure, we're all on the field and we're all a part of it and may even get to help sometimes, but it is clear who is playing the game and who is merely filling space.

This analogy breaks down a bit since in ministry we don't want the pastor on the sidelines either, merely watching (supporting) the game. However, the analogy remains suggestive as it reveals the underlying expectation that ministry is what



pastors do. Everyone else just has minor, token, support roles that help the pastors do the real work of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples.

Our conviction at Discovery is that the real work, the work of bearing witness to the good news and making disciples, is the work of all the church. It belongs to all of us. In word and deed we all are to make explicit the good news of Jesus, the Messiah and the kingdom of God. We are all also tasked with the work of making disciples.

Members of Discovery don't just ask the pastor how they can support his ministry, they ask each other how they can support each other's ministries. They also ask the pastor to support their ministry. Because their ministry and his ministry is all of our ministry.

These core ministry opportunities, witnessing and making disciples, belong to the whole church and so members covenant to take responsibility for them.

***"We are committed to playing an active role in the life of the congregation. This includes taking seriously the official duties of membership (nominating, voting, or serving in an elected capacity)."***

We're all a part of groups made up of people who refuse to play their part. We have family members who don't show up for family events. We have teammates who refuse to be team players. We have neighbors who don't want to help put on the block party. We have co-workers who do their own thing.

The life of the church is no different. We expect to have people among us who want to learn about God and what it means to be fully human. They don't yet know what it is to be a dynamic participant in a God-shaped community. This is okay.

Membership is different. The process of becoming a member is a bit like the D.T.R. (Define the Relationship) talk new couples have to determine their relationship-trajectory. Are we in this? To what extent? How much can I count on you and expect from you? Are we exclusive? These are the kinds of questions a D.T.R. answers for a couple and membership answers for people in the church.

Being active in the life of the congregation doesn't refer only to showing up at church-wide events, though it certainly includes that. Being active means being

engaged in the ministries, worship, rhythms, and conversations that the whole church is engaged in.

For example, if you are unable to be in worship on a Sunday. Playing an active role in the congregation might mean getting "up to speed" by listening to the sermon and then talking about it with someone who was there. Or it means assuming some level of responsibility for something just because it needs to be done. Nobody is particularly gifted in nurserywork, so many of us share that responsibility. Even by reading the weekly newsletter and worship folder you make a conscious choice to be an engaged participant in our life together.

There are many ways for us to "be in this together." Doing your part(s) as a member of the Discovery family, as a teammate on the Discovery team, as a neighbor in the Discovery community, and as a co-worker in the Discovery mission is one way you help cultivate a vibrant and healthy community of faith.

***"We are committed to using God-given gifts and abilities for the building up of other members and the congregation as a whole."***

We are different. Very different. Our differences go far beyond tastes and preferences and interests. Our differences are coded into our D.N.A. from before birth and our differences have been slowly hardwired into our brains over many, many years.

God has made us to think in different ways and to solve problems in different ways. God has given us different personalities. We have different skill sets: innate *and* developed. One of our jobs is to determine what components of us are *God-intended* by Him- and which are *not*. We are a dynamic combination of grace and sin, not quite "good" as God intended, but also quite "good" with the help of God's Spirit empowering and transforming us.

We struggle to discern between the good and the not-so-good in our own lives and in the lives of others. It becomes harder when we start noticing differences between us and others. What is God-given? What is not? Our default is to assume that another's way of thinking, approach to a problem, personality, or skill is somehow better or worse than our own. We devalue our own offering or we devalue the offerings of others. One is better and one is less. One is from God, another is not.

The Church of the Messiah, one body with many parts, has sinned against its parts. The Church is guilty of taking God-given differences among its members and then making a value determination between these parts of the body. The Church has tried to make a body in the image of only her favorite parts.

While the Church has sinned against its members, the parts of the body-its members-have sinned against the body. Every time a part of the body devalues itself or withholds its God-given contribution from the work of the body, the body is less than it could be.

Members of our local *body* must be who God made them to be, giving their very best and unique offering, using their God-given gifts and abilities so that the church can become what God intended.

***“We are committed to providing helpful and honest feedback.”***

We participate in assessments in every area of our lives. We have pop quizzes and exams, midterms and finals, placement tests and exit exams; we have annual reviews and drop-in assessments, personality tests and proficiency tests. We are constantly being poked and prodded and evaluated. Why in the world would we want to bring that into the church? This is a common sentiment. The church is the place where I escape all that stuff, where I don't have to worry if I've given enough uplifting comments to balance the one critical one that I also need to give.

Most of us don't want to be a trouble-maker. Few of us are interested in hurting anyone's feelings, being known as "the complainer," or rocking the boat.

Yet, our pastors can never and will never know *everything* about what's going on. Our board members can never and will never know *everything* about how people are feeling. Our ministry team leaders can never and will never know *everything* about how well things are going. Each of us can look and listen and try to understand the best we can, but apart from your observations and your insights, the church's leaders will always have a limited vision. The church needs your input and your vision.

There is another advantage to giving feedback. Sometimes we discover we've made some assumptions based on unspoken expectations. These kinds of expectations can become a source of frustration and bitterness. When we give

feedback, we have the opportunity to clarify expectations to bring us all into greater alignment.

Members of Discovery recognize that we're all in this together and are committed to the most faithful ministry we are capable of. We are committed to giving helpful and honest feedback for the sake of greater ministry faithfulness.

***“We are committed to forgiving and seeking forgiveness.”***

What marks the church of Jesus is not the absence of conflict, but the healthy resolution of it. Life in the community of faith is hard. It's hard because a covenant commitment leaves no easy escape when life is not pleasant or when one has been wronged.

Healthy conflict resolution should be one of the most visible aspects of a covenant community. Peacemaking is one of the most distinctively Christian elements of the church as a community of people.

Though it is common for men and women who profess the name of Jesus to do unChristian things, the refusal to be reconciled to those we've hurt or who have hurt us is one of our most egregious and sub-Christian acts. If our holy God can be reconciled to his sinner enemies, we can certainly work toward forgiveness and peace.

To move toward forgiveness and peace requires effort, a lot of effort. Those who avoid conflict have to get over themselves. Those who confront in unloving and unhealthy ways have to get over themselves. Those who are defensive when confronted have to get over themselves. Those who let anger and fear, jealousy and bitterness, shame and pride control their responses have to get over themselves. Notice the pattern?

Our general inability to be reconciled has almost everything to do with an inflated sense of self. Our egos expand, our flesh takes over, and we become inattentive to the leading of God's Spirit.

Discovery's members live against the grain of the ease found in conflict avoidance. Covenanted together, we are in this for the long-haul, committed to each other's spiritual growth. Growth, that will be stunted and left to die in immaturity if we choose too often the seductive path of avoidance.

***“We are committed to supporting the kingdom-work of the local church through generous, joyful giving.”***

We are part of a joiner-culture. We become members of organizations, clubs, teams, groups, and on and on. In all of these cases, we are generally persuaded to join because of some perk that membership will provide us. We join primarily out of self-interest.

And then there's the church.

This awkward community we know as "church" says, "commit yourself to us." But the invitation to join has nothing to do with what we might hope to get from the church. Instead, we are invited into membership so that the rest of the community can know what they will get from us. Membership is a commitment to give our very lives for the sake of the community and its mission, to use our skills and abilities for the sake of the community and its mission, and to give our time and resources for the sake of the community and its mission.

What's in it for us?

Maybe nothing. At least not here and now or in some obvious and measurable way. And yet, our commitment to a local congregation keeps us invested in the community's health and the faithfulness of its mission. One of the ways we invest ourselves in the community's health and mission is through our financial giving. There is no way around it in Jesus' teaching, what we do with our money has everything to do with the kingdom of God.

A church committed to the kingdom of God is a church marked by visible generosity and an increasing joy found in costly giving. Members of Discovery are committed to the work of the kingdom and are thereby committed to generous and joyful giving.

***“We are committed to discerning God's will together.”***

Each of the following statements have something in common. Can you find it?

"*Pastor*, where is God leading us?"

"God told *me* to..."

"I've been praying about God's will for *my* life."

"What is God saying to *you*?"

Did the italics help you see the pattern? Pastor, me, I, my, and you are all words that indicate a single individual. But what are these individuals doing? They are discerning God's will by *themselves*. The Scriptures indicate only two types of people who with any confidence are capable of doing this alone: prophets and apostles.

And so what if *pastors* aren't called to discern God's will for a congregation? And what if it is more than just *me* that is necessary to discern God's will? And what if *you* and *I* are limited in our ability to hear God by ourselves?

*What if...* when God tells us in Romans 12:2 that *you all* will discern the good and acceptable and perfect will of God that he intends for us to understand this as something that we do *together*, when we offer our bodies as a *single living* sacrifice.

What if God doesn't have a "will for my life" apart from the will he has for your life? What if our paths are so inextricably linked that we must pray together and talk together and discern together to know what God might have for Discovery, for our neighborhoods, for our families, and for our lives?

Members of Discovery Church are committed to discerning God's will *together* so that as we offer our bodies to God as a single living sacrifice, we might be able to say in unison and with confidence, "It seems good to us and to the Holy Spirit."

***“We are committed to supporting, following, and holding accountable those selected by the congregation for leadership.”***

Believe it or not, there are real reasons why oppressed people will stick with a totalitarian dictatorship rather than try to transition to a democratic form of government. For one, democracy is really hard work. Even when democracy isn't direct and you merely elect representatives to do your work for you, it is hard work. It requires something of you. You have to know something about society, the government, the people running for office, and the future you envision.

Truth is, we like the idea of democracy. But when we've proudly and visibly secured our patriotic "I voted" sticker to our shirt, we walk out of our voting booth and our daily democratic duties. Until the next interesting election comes around we settle back into our own lives and our own interests. We remain a largely ignorant electorate making us susceptible to emotionalism and manipulation. We either blindly support "our guy" or we irrationally bash "the other guy." And while



we talk about change and holding our leaders accountable, we ignore our elected officials until they are running again; we don't ask them to say anything of substance, and we elect and reelect them even though we're dissatisfied with them.

Though we imagine ourselves to be a beacon of hope for democracies around the world, when 50% of the population does not vote and the voters abdicate their daily duties, what we have is a farce. It is government with the illusion of citizen-influence and engagement.

Why the political science lesson here at the end of 10 weeks of explanations on Discovery's Membership Covenant?

Because, every church has a polity. We are part of a social order with a particular governing structure that includes democratic involvement, education, and active participation. As a church under the umbrella of The Church of the Nazarene we have a polity closely related to the representative democracy of the United States. In this governing system, there are leaders who specialize in the task of leadership, but the work of the church is done by all of the saints (the church's members), the citizens of this polity. Our "civic" or "church" responsibilities don't end with the election of our leaders.

Citizens of the kingdom of God can and do submit themselves to any number of local congregations. Members of Discovery Church have committed their citizenship to the welfare of this local congregation. This means that members have accepted responsibility to wisely and prayerfully select leaders and to the daily opportunity to seek the welfare of the congregation.

# PARTNERSHIP PROCESS

1. **PRAY** - Seek God, submit to Jesus, be attentive to the Holy Spirit.
2. **DISCERN** - What kind of relationship do you intend to have with a local congregation? Is Discovery a church that would benefit from your abilities, service, and presence? Can you commit to covenant partnership?
3. **JOIN** - During worship on a Sunday morning or during our annual Covenant Renewal Service, participate in a covenant-making ceremony.
4. **PARTNER** - Live out your covenant commitment.
5. **RE-NEW** - Each year we will renew our covenant partnership during our annual Covenant Renewal Service. It is important that every church member participate.

## **If you decide *not* to renew your covenant partnership...**

If at some point during the year you become inactive in Discovery's ministry, you intentionally decide to leave, *or* you decide not to participate in the Covenant Renewal Service, your membership status will change to "inactive."

Inactive members cannot vote in yearly elections.

You may request to end your membership with us. You may also maintain an "inactive" status with us for two years before your membership expires.

At any time you may restore your status from "inactive" to "active" by participating in the Covenant Renewal Service or publicly recommitting to covenant partnership with Discovery.