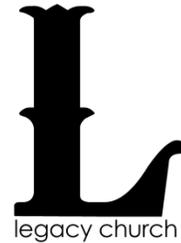


# Covenant Partnership in Legacy Church



## What is church membership?

This is the obvious question right? Why not just show up? Why not just let attendance be the factor that decides my involvement with the church? This is what the majority of Christians live by regarding their investment in church community today. We live in an age and a place where Christians can go to a church and attend and consume and draw resources with no intention of building, investing, or being a functioning member of the body. This is highly un-Biblical, un-Christian and should not be so.

While people covenanting to the church as “members” or “partners” isn't explicitly stated in Scripture, it is implicit throughout the Bible, as God sovereignly makes us one covenant people, sealed with one Holy Spirit.<sup>1,2</sup> Simply put, we cannot be a covenant people and refrain from covenanting with each other. So covenanting as members or partners of a local church is simply formalizing biblical truths that already exist: you are a member of God's covenant community; you are pursuing God, each other, and mission; and you are agreeing to do that within the biblical context of an individual, local church.

Our desire is to be a church that pursues Biblically led partnership between individuals and the whole. Notice I said partnership and not membership. It seems like a slight distinction, but for one to be a member in the body of Christ they need only be a Christian. Christians are already members of the body universal and the “front door” to be a part of Jesus' body is dictated by him to be by grace and through faith upon the repentance of sin<sup>3</sup>. Partnership with a local church is the formalization of what is already a reality, which is belonging to the covenant community of God.

From the very beginning of our lives in Christ we were called to each other as well as to Christ.<sup>4,5</sup> Think of the fact that when we enter the world as babies, we don't just have a father, we also have mothers, brothers, sisters, cousins and other family as well. The Gospel doesn't just save us; it saves us into community – into family. This communal aspect to our lives is an image of our God, who also expresses an eternal community we typically refer to as the Trinity. Even the leaders of Legacy exemplify life in community and not each of us unto ourselves as an independent island (see appendix: Ecclesiological Position for Male Biblical Eldership). Whether the Bible uses language referring to us as members of a structure<sup>6</sup> or a human body<sup>2</sup> or a family<sup>7</sup>, God is very clear in his view and intent for us to be connected in a local context where we are joined together on God's mission<sup>8</sup>.

As a covenant community, we not only belong to each other but we have responsibilities to each other and are called to be Gospel oriented towards those in community. The Bible tells us as covenant communities to care for

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 1:27

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:8

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 5:1-2

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

<sup>7</sup> Romans 8:14-17

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 10:24-25

each other<sup>9</sup>, speak truth to one another<sup>10</sup>, equip each other<sup>11</sup>, and live out our faith together<sup>12</sup>. We are responsible to each other the same way my left foot has obligations to the right. If a piece of our body is missing, the rest of the body hurts as a result. To simply summarize, we are a community of people born together by the Gospel for the purpose of propagating the Gospel as we image the Gospel among each other.

## What is a covenant?

The word “covenant” isn’t really used as much anymore unless you either go to church or are caught up in medieval movies or video games, but the concept is beautifully simple and important to God and therefore us at Legacy. It simply means a commitment either binding people together before God or with God. Like marriage, it’s a solemn oath before God towards another person. We see examples of covenants between man and God all throughout the Bible as well as between individuals and groups. Many times a covenant is formalized by a sign of some kind, whether it is rings in a marriage ceremony, animals cut in half, circumcision, or even the bloody cross itself. In covenants, there are typically terms that each party carries out as they are obligated to each other.

Some covenants, like those between God and people, are *unconditional*, and aren’t broken based on actions by either party. On the other hand, virtually all covenants between people, including covenant partnership in Legacy Church and even the covenant of marriage<sup>13</sup> are *conditional*. This means that the covenant is able to be broken if either side fails in keeping their commitment, and if they remain unrepentant about their failure. However, as is the case even within marriage, the breaking of a covenant should never be a “first response,” but is only done after a discipline process is carried out, and the offender remains unrepentant.<sup>14</sup>

## Why is formally covenanting with a local church so important?

At this point it might be obvious that being connected in the local church community and engaging God’s mission within community is God’s plan, *but why so formal?* Currently, we believe there is a false understanding of how the early church assembled and grew regarding its structure. Many today desire an “organic” model that sprawls without needless structure and parameters. They see the early Acts church as one without structure, beautifully springing forth naturally and with no conduit to restrain the power. We agree that structure can get needless sometimes and overdone in many cases, but a better examination of the early church reveals a high level of structure.

“Organic” shouldn’t mean sloppy and without process or purpose to us. Look through a microscope at any biological sample or chemical process and you will witness God’s incredibly high structural insight and intent. A truly “organic”

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:25

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 4:25

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 4:11-16

<sup>12</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:9

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:15, Matthew 5:32

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5

church shouldn't mean sloppy and chaotic, but ordered and with purpose. An example of this is the early Acts church maintaining and keeping roles or lists of local members<sup>15</sup> and developing a process to set people in to better serve the church.<sup>16</sup> The early church was organic in the fact that growth was natural, and at the same time the organic nature yields order and purpose for the sake of unity, health, and Gospel propagation. For Legacy Church, part of our order and purpose is covenant partnership just as is witnessed in the early church.

Another functional reason we endorse local church partnership is the responsibility placed on the local shepherd to do a noble and faithful job of leading the flock and family of God.<sup>17</sup> The author of Hebrews basically tells his readers *"don't be a pain in the butt to your leaders but assess and consider their lives, imitate them, and submit to them because one day they will have to give an account to God for the job they did."*<sup>18</sup> The passage implies that the shepherd knows who he is leading. Conversely, the passage implies that the Christian knows who their leader is.

At Legacy Church, we have placed a high premium on such a serious calling as elder leadership and we see clearly that our calling involves accountability before God, that formal partnership allows us to know who we're accountable for. As pastors we refuse to be accountable for people who see no value in commitment to the local body or who hold their investment yet demand more investment from the church. We see the Bible leading such a position. Of course we will love and convey the Gospel truth to anyone and everyone, but we see our accountability and responsibility for shepherding to implicate only those who covenant with us.

Finally, we desire to formalize and enact something already true spiritually *to protect the body*. Sounds odd, but a formal membership or partnership in a church can aid in church discipline in cases of unrepentant sin that can harm the body. Paul dealt with this surgically in his pastoring of the church in Corinth regarding an unrepentant sinner who was indulging in sexual sin that was set to infect the rest of the church.<sup>19</sup> As leaders of Legacy, we vow to protect the precious families God has called to be in community and on mission with us by "purging the evil person" among us as Paul says. For a person to be set "out" of fellowship officially however, they would have needed to be "in" fellowship officially. People slipping in and out capriciously make the job of the pastor difficult in church discipline and infiltrate the safe harbors of families in the body. Biblically, church discipline necessitates partnership and body involvement to make any sense to us at all.

## F.A.Q.'s

What do you have to do to become a covenant partner of Legacy? This is a great question. Basically, you need to be a Christian who has been baptized and is willing to agree to the covenant the leadership has deemed for Legacy's community. Our recommendation is that you "kick tires" on us as a church for a few months and attend our Gospel Classes to better inform you of our beliefs and practices. There might also be a meeting between you and an elder to give you the opportunity to ask any question or gain better clarity on any issue.

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<sup>15</sup> Acts 2:37-47, Romans 16:1-16

<sup>16</sup> Acts 6:1-7

<sup>17</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1

<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 13:7-17

<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 5

Why do I need to be a Christian? Remember that we're talking about a covenant, which is an agreement with God *towards* another party. Marriage is a covenant before God towards a spouse. Covenant partnership with a local church is before God towards a people. Without an understanding and belief of the ultimate covenant before us in the Gospel and the cross of Christ, none of the other covenants make sense. Our community is anchored and is intensely focused on God's Gospel to us in Jesus and collecting partners who don't believe in that which we orbit is nonsensical. Besides, as we have already said, this partnership is a formal representation of a spiritual reality of being a member of Christ's body – which an unregenerate person has not experienced yet.

Why do I need to be baptized? While we don't require your baptism to take place in Legacy Church, we do require that every covenant partner have been baptized after his or her conversion to Christ. If you haven't been baptized, please tell your community leader, or a pastor-elder, and we'll celebrate with you and baptize you. We believe baptism to be an outward, public expression of the change Jesus has made in your life. It's one of the two ordinances we believe in (along with communion), in which Jesus participated, and which Jesus commanded of his disciples<sup>20</sup>. Believers throughout the Bible and history model baptism: you've died to sin and risen anew to Christ.

Is there an age limit to being a covenant partner with Legacy Church? No. The only requirements are that you are a professing, practicing Christian who has been baptized; that you are able to understand our theology and philosophy; and that you are willing and able to live out our covenant. We ask parents to be discerning as to what age their child covenants with Legacy Church.

What if I don't want to be a covenant partner? If you're not a covenant member in Legacy Church, then you're technically our "guest." We rejoice in this if you're not yet a believer in Christ or if you're a visitor: you're welcome to participate with, be involved with, and fellowship with Legacy Church and any missional community or church expression. But if you're a Christian who refrains from becoming a member over an extended time (generally more than a year of involvement), you do a disservice to Jesus' body and bride, and to yourself: you consume from God's church, but don't commit to it or sacrifice for it, and you hinder the work of the church family<sup>21</sup>. Practically, if you're not a covenant partner, you're disallowed from serving in children's ministry of any kind, leading a missional community, class, attending partner meetings, and from some of the other Legacy ministries reserved specifically for the church family, the covenant partners. Finally, our pastor-elders cannot commit to provide the same level of personal shepherding and support to you, because the Bible requires that we take care of our family first<sup>22</sup>.

What happens if I want to become a partner when there are no classes going on? Generally, you'll just talk with your missional community leader or a pastor-elder, and they'll walk you through the covenant and your personal growth plan for that year. You'll sign yourself into covenant membership, and then commit to the body until the next set of classes comes around.

How do I know if the church's leadership is holding up their end of the covenant? We do our best to keep you informed of leadership decisions, direction, etc... but if you have a question, you're always free to simply ask a pastor-elder, or another leader in the area you have a question about. We have quarterly meetings discussing the

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 12

<sup>22</sup> Galatians 6:10

“state of the union” of the church and even call special meetings to discuss and be clear regarding new campuses, new plants, venue changes, leadership changes, church discipline, financial issues, etc... But again, if you have a question, please ask us. If there’s something you don’t feel like you know, we’re happy to talk with you about it.

What do I do if I feel like Legacy’s leadership isn’t holding up to their end of the covenant? If you feel like a pastor-elder or another leader isn’t fulfilling their covenant with you, it is your right and responsibility to first lovingly and humbly express your concerns to that leader, as well as to the pastor-elders, who will handle it according to the biblical mandate for charging an elder<sup>23</sup>. If the pastor-elders are unwilling to change and pursue a solution, or to pursue faithfulness to the covenant, then you are freed from your covenant membership obligations and are free to seek membership elsewhere, based on the church’s disobedience. The other pastor-elders handle the issue and decide the steps of reconciliation, discipline, or removal of that pastor-elder or leader.

How do I know if I’m fulfilling my end of the covenant? Within your missional community, you’ll periodically review your membership covenant and personal growth plan together, celebrate together, and discuss areas where you’re struggling, need discipleship and/or discipline, and need to shepherd each other. Additionally, we encourage you to be in regular discipleship relationships with other same-sex folks, who you trust and who can push and exhort you in areas of the Christian life where you need discipleship and growth. Regarding the financial giving aspect of the covenant, Legacy Church’s leadership sends annual giving statements to each covenant member. Finally, if you ever have a question about your end of the member covenant, feel free to ask a pastor-elder.

What happens if someone thinks I’m not upholding my end of the covenant? Failure to uphold your covenant – the breaking of a vow, oath, or covenant – is a sin before the Lord; just as any other sin is a sin against the LORD, even if it is carried out between two people. Thus, if someone in your missional community or in your life thinks you’re being unfaithful to your member covenant, in an ongoing or regular basis, and in an unrepentant manner, they should approach you, humbly and lovingly walking through each step of the church discipline procedure outlined in Matthew 18. If they fail to approach you in this manner, or if you disagree, you’re welcome to approach a pastor-elder to act as an arbitrator between the two parties.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Timothy 5:19-20

<sup>24</sup> 1Cor 6:1-8