

The Garden Membership Covenant

“You can’t enjoy the fruit of community, without the root of commitment.” - Dr. Glenn Packiam

In this, we covenant to enjoy the fruit of community by employing the root of commitment to God, self and others within The Garden Church family.

What is a Covenant?

A covenant is a promise; an agreement by which two or more parties obligate themselves to each other to perform certain duties or to live a certain way. Within the Scriptures we find a number of examples of covenants, some between God and man (Gen 6, 9, 15; Ezk 20; Hos 2; Jer 31; Matt 26), others solely between people (I Sam 18; II Sam 5). Some covenants are unconditional, meaning there is a pledge to be faithful to the covenant regardless of the other person’s faithfulness. Other covenants are conditional, meaning that the obligation of one party is at least in part dependent upon the faithfulness of the other. Though the family membership covenant of The Garden Church does define the relationship between members and the local church, it is first and foremost a promise made to God as a commitment to His glory, His household, His bride; the Church.

Therefore, this membership covenant simply reiterates the biblical obligations of all Christians, whether partnered with a local church or not. For example, all Christians are required to submit to the Scriptures, pursue holiness, steward resources, etc. It is assumed that Christians will follow these universal obligations even if the local church fails in its covenant obligations. In other words, these Christian duties are unconditional.

Certain aspects of this covenant, however, are conditioned upon the faithfulness of both parties. For example, if a family member feels as though the leadership of The Garden Church is not remaining faithful to the requirements of the covenant, it is the responsibility of the member to lovingly and humbly express concerns to the leadership of the church. If the church elders have clearly broken covenant faithfulness and are unwilling to change, then the member is freed from his or her obligations to this particular church and is encouraged to seek membership elsewhere given the church’s disobedience. In addition, certain circumstances may provide sufficient and righteous grounds to transfer membership elsewhere.

Statement of Biblical Doctrine

(Closed-Handed Issues)

The following beliefs represent the core of central orthodox belief from a biblical and historical perspective and should be universal to all followers of Christ. The explicit rejection of any one of these particular beliefs disqualifies one from membership with The Garden Church.

I believe:

- that the Scriptures are completely true, authoritative and sufficient (*Psalm 19:7-11; II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20-21*).
- that there is only one God (*Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-6; 46:9-10; John 17:3; I Corinthians 8:4-6; I Timothy 2:5*).

- that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; that the members of the Trinity are equal in nature yet distinct in their roles (*Genesis 1:26; Psalm 45:6-7; 110:1; Matthew 3:13-17; 28:17-20; I Corinthians 12:4-6*).
- that I am, along with all humanity (Christ excluded), by birth and action, a sinner (*Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:23; 5:8,12-21; 7:18; Ephesians 2:1-3*).
- that the deserved penalty for sin is death, both physical and spiritual (*Genesis 2:15-17; 3:19; Romans 5:12; 6:23; James 1:14-15*).
- that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, was born of a virgin, is both fully God and fully human, and is without sin (*Matthew 1:20; Luke 2:52; John 1:1-4,14; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3*).
- that Jesus Christ died as my substitute to pay the penalty for my sin (*John 1:29; 10:1-18; Romans 5:8; I Corinthians 15:1-4; II Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 1:4; I Peter 3:18*).
- that Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead (*Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-53; John 20-21; I Corinthians 15:12-34*).
- that Jesus Christ physically ascended into heaven and will one day physically return (*John 14:3; Acts 1:11; I Thessalonians 4:16; Hebrews 9:28; I John 3:2; Revelation 1:7*).
- that only by trusting in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone can I be reconciled to God and experience true life and joy (*John 3:18; 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:21-26; I Timothy 2:5-6*).
- in a future, physical resurrection of the dead. Those who trust in Jesus Christ alone will be raised to eternal reward. Those who have not trusted in Jesus Christ will be raised to eternal punishment (*Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15*).

(Open-Handed Issues)

The member also understands that the eldership of The Garden Church holds particular positions in the following areas (there are additional doctrinal requirements for leadership within The Garden Church), but allows for differing positions to be held by members. We ask those in disagreement to study these issues thoughtfully, to agree to not be divisive, and to actively pursue unity and peace.

- The extent of God's sovereignty
- Predestination and election
- The timeline of creation (literal days vs. periods of time)
- God's active work in creation (i.e., gap theory, literal days, day age theory)
- The gifts of the Holy Spirit (continuism or cessationism)
- Women and the role of pastor/elder
- Divorce and remarriage
- The relationship of God's glory to man's joy (they are not at odds)
- Views on eschatology (end times)

Biblical Obligations of The Garden Church Elders to The Garden Church Body

As shepherds and overseers of a local church, elders are entrusted with humbly protecting, leading, equipping, and caring for the church body and her individual members. The following is a rather comprehensive overview of the requirements for elders as spelled out within the Scriptures.

The elders covenant:

- to appoint elders and deacons according to the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (*I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; I Peter 5:1-4*).
- to prayerfully seek God's will for our church community and steward her resources to the best of our ability based on our study of the Scriptures and following the Spirit (*Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:1-4*).
- to care for the church, in part by praying for you regularly, and to seek her growth in grace, truth, and love (*Matthew 28:16-20; Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 1:28; James 5:14; I Peter 5:1-4*).
- to provide teaching and counsel from the whole of Scripture (*Acts 20:27-28; I Timothy 4:16; II Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 2:1*).

- to equip the members of the church for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16).
- to be on guard against false teachers and teachings (Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:28-31; I Timothy 1:3-7; I John 4:1).
- to lovingly exercise biblical discipline when necessary for the glory of God, the good of the one disciplined, and the health of the church as a whole (*Matthew 18:15-20; I Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20*).
- to set an example for and join members in fulfilling the obligations of church membership stated below (*Philippians 3:17; I Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8; I Peter 5:3*).

Biblical Obligations of The Garden Family Member to The Garden Church Body

The heart of the elders and the purpose of this covenant are to develop intentional disciples, and provide accountability, encouragement, and correction for the many triumphs and trials that will surely accompany the life of all who choose to follow Jesus.

And as those who have experienced the grace of a life changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to reflect the character of Jesus through the pursuit of certain attitudes and actions and the rejection of others. The Scriptures refer to this reality as “living by the Spirit” (Romans 8). The requirements of this membership covenant are in no way intended as an addition to the biblical obligations of a believer. Rather, this document functions primarily as an accessible, yet non-exhaustive, explanation of what the Scriptures teach about the obedience that faith produces.

At The Garden Church we value:

PRESENCE: Be with Jesus. Through the rhythms of Devotion, Prayer, Fellowship, and Worship we want to create spaces where we can be with Jesus.

PRACTICE: Become like Jesus. Through the rhythms of Repentance, Generosity and Service we want to create spaces where we can become like Jesus.

PROCLAMATION: Do what Jesus did. Through the rhythms of Witnessing, Partnering and Multiplication we want to create spaces where we can do what Jesus did.

As a family member of The Garden Church, I covenant:

PRESENCE

- To abide in Jesus through the ongoing process of transformation, and proclaim Jesus with my voice and my life.
- To train my heart and household in the Word of God and the way of Jesus.
- To gather with the body through Sunday services, and vine groups.
- To consciously worship Jesus as Lord, by daily reorienting my heart to his gospel of grace.
- To actively seek ways to remain in awe and wonder of his majesty.

PRACTICE

- To reach my neighbor with the life-giving goodness of the gospel by loving and serving them.
- To give generously of my time, talent and treasure; with Christ’s example of radical generosity as my template.
- To model the gospel with my life.

- To be unreasonably hospitable by opening my heart and my home in the service of King Jesus.

PROCLAMATION

- To serve as a member of The Garden Church on mission to seek and save the lost by laying down my life to help others find theirs in Christ.
- To share my story of the gospel of grace at work in my life.
- To partner with other disciples of Jesus both in and around Parker County, allowing others to witness that Jesus and his work are much bigger than any one congregation.
- To actively be a blessing to my heart, household and community.
- To encourage, develop, and deploy disciples of Jesus to make more disciples for our good and his glory. (*Multiplication of groups, ministries, and planting new churches*)

What is written above is elaborated and given scriptural evidence below.

I covenant:

- to understand and adhere to the beliefs contained in The Garden Church Confessional Statement as well as in this document and will not be divisive to the church's teaching. I also understand the importance of submission to church leadership and will diligently pursue and preserve unity and peace (*Ephesians 4:1-3; Hebrews 13:7,17*).
- to submit to the authority of the Scriptures as the final arbiter on all issues (*Psalms 119; II Timothy 3:14-17; II Peter 1:19-21*).
- to pursue and maintain a close relationship with the Lord Jesus through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and practice of spiritual disciplines (*Luke 18:1; Acts 17:11; I Corinthians 9:24-27; Ephesians 5:1-21; I Thessalonians 5:12-22*).
- to follow the command and example of Jesus by participating in the ordinances prescribed to His Church:
 - by being baptized after my conversion (*Acts 2:38; 22:16; I Corinthians 12:13*)
 - by regularly remembering and celebrating the person and work of Christ through communion (*Mark 14:22-25; I Corinthians 11:17-34*).
- to regularly participate in the life of The Garden Church by attending weekly gatherings, engaging in biblical community, serving those inside and outside of this church, living intentionally as a missionary to the people God has placed in my life, and living a life that glorifies Jesus (*Acts 2:42-47; I Corinthians 10:31; II Corinthians 5:11-21; Hebrews 10:23-25; Titus 3:14 I Peter 2:9-12*).
- to steward the resources God has given me, including time, talents, spiritual gifts, and finances. This includes regular financial giving, service, and participation in community that is sacrificial, cheerful, and voluntary (*Matthew 25:14-30; Romans 12:1-2; II Corinthians 8-9; I Peter 4:10-11*).
- to not function in leadership or as a member of another church family (*Hebrews 13:17*).
- by God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, to pursue holiness in all areas of life as an act of worship to Jesus Christ, who has saved me from my sin that I might live a new life (*II Corinthians 5:17; I Peter 1:13-16; 4:1-3*). Believers must strive to put certain attitudes and actions to death, while stirring and stimulating love and good deeds through the Spirit. Below are a few examples addressed in the Scriptures:
 - I will practice complete chastity unless married and, if married, complete fidelity within heterosexual and monogamous marriage. Complete chastity and fidelity mean, among other things, that regardless of my marital status, I will pursue purity and abstain from sexually immoral practices such as adultery, premarital sex, and pornography (*Romans 13:11-14; I Corinthians 6:15-20; 10:8; Ephesians 5:3; I Thessalonians 4:1-8; Hebrews 13:4*).

- I will seek to preserve the gift of marriage and agree to walk through the steps of marriage reconciliation at The Garden Church before pursuing divorce from my spouse (*Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18; I Corinthians 6; 7:10-11*).
 - I will refrain from illegal drug use, drunkenness, gossip, and other sinful behavior as the Bible dictates (*Romans 1:28-32; 13:13; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:18; James 3:3-18*).
- to take seriously the responsibility of Christian freedom, not condemning fellow believers in areas where the Bible allows differing views and practices, and being careful not to create stumbling blocks for others in my own use of such freedom (*1 Corinthians 8:1-13*).
- to submit to the discipline of God through His Holy Spirit by:
- humbly following the biblical procedures for church discipline in my relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ, the hope of such discipline being repentance and restoration
 - receiving righteous and loving discipline when approached biblically by fellow believers
 - to submit to discipline by church leadership if the need should ever arise (*Psalms 141:5; Matthew 18:15-20; I Corinthians 5:9-13; Hebrews 12:5-11*).
- to do the following when I sin:
- confess my sin to God and to fellow believers
 - repent and seek help to put my sin to death (*Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5; James 5:16; I John 1:6-10*)
 - to submit to the elders and other appointed leaders of the church, being diligent to strive for unity and peace (*Ephesians 4:1-3; Hebrews 13:17; I Peter 5:5*).

My Commitment to The Garden Church

I have completed the Membership Class in its entirety and fully understand the doctrine and direction of The Garden Church. I have repented (turned away) from all that keeps me from believing and following Jesus as Lord and Savior of all. I have been baptized as a Christian, and commit to live as a diligent, faithful disciple of Jesus; that my identity would be in him, my worship would be for him, my fellowship would be through him, and my interaction with people and culture would be for his glory.

I understand that this covenant obligates me to the members of The Garden Church and is an acknowledgement of my submission to the elders of the church, and of their commitment to me before God (*Hebrews 13:17*). I accept the responsibility to notify the leadership if at any time I can no longer commit to this covenant, if I need to find another church home, or if I have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding The Garden Church.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____