

Membership Covenant

(Membership Purpose & Requirements)

Fall 2014 (7.3)
The Resurrection

Membership Covenant

The Resurrection is a young, growing church plant. This membership covenant exists to provide for our congregation some basic structure for commitment, appropriate to our current needs, size, and age as a congregation. We anticipate that in the next two years we will develop a more detailed process for membership. At that time we may create a new or significantly revised membership covenant to reflect that new membership process. Until such time, this document defines the commitment of membership in our congregation.

Membership at the Resurrection

When a person commits to membership in our church, they are making a commitment both *to God* and *to the other members of the church*. We make this commitment because we believe in the shared values and goals of our church, and because we want to commit to working together to make them happen. There is much that we believe, care about, and want to see the Lord Jesus accomplish through us in our church (which is really *His church*)! Below we list our basic *beliefs, purpose, goals, structure, and commitment*.

Our Beliefs

These are our core beliefs at the Resurrection:

We believe the Gospel. There are three non-negotiable aspects of the gospel (good news). They are *Jesus' authority, Jesus' finished work, and Jesus' love*. As the Bible points out in many places (such as 2 Peter 1:11) Jesus the Christ is both our Lord (*i.e.* our authority) and our Saviour (meaning that he finished the work which earned our salvation). Both Christ's Lordship and Saving Work can only be understood in light of his deep personal love for human beings (John 3:16). Jesus, available to humanity as the only perfectly loving, saving, authoritative leader is the Good News.

Jesus' Authority:¹ The Bible talks about Jesus' authority in lots of ways, calling him *Lord, King, Messiah, Son of David, Son of Man, Lion of Judah, Christ, and God*. Jesus alone is authority of the whole world and he is our perfectly capable and good ruler. He really loves us and cares for us! But his love takes the form of a loving authority. He is powerful and wonderful, and has come to lead us and help us even though we don't deserve him. All people are inclined to believe we should be in charge of ourselves. The truth is that Jesus is in charge of us, and has the right to command us regarding our thoughts and

actions. Only Jesus knows what human life is supposed to be, and why he made us. The entire world is obligated to love and obey him every moment of our lives. Choosing to honor and trust Jesus' authority over us is called *repentance*. So his authority includes both the idea that he has both the *right* to lead us, and the *ability* to do it perfectly. That's why Jesus being in charge is such good news! However, because all people have already failed to honor Jesus as we should, we also need his *finished work*.

Jesus' Finished Work: The Bible talks about Jesus' Finished work in lots of ways too, calling him *Savior*, *Suffering Servant*, *Lamb of God*, *Righteous One*, and *Son of God*, and describing the work he accomplished as *a finished sacrifice*, *a substitute punishment*, *a righteous life*, and *a victory*. Jesus' love for us as our authority has taken the most astounding form: dying on our behalf! Through his sinless life, substitutionary death, and physical resurrection, Jesus did 100% of what it takes to save us sinful people. We can do nothing to save ourselves because we are not good. We are truly guilty for our wrongdoing. We all need Jesus (alone) to pay our punishment in our place so we can be free. Trusting in what Jesus has done for us, rather than our own goodness, is called *faith*. Jesus earning our forgiveness is very good news.

Jesus' Love: All human beings are made to have a personal relationship with God through the living Christ. A real relationship must take the form of knowing and experiencing Jesus as a living person who cares for us as individual people. We must believe not only that Jesus is a good leader, and not only that he *can* save us. We must believe he *has saved* us, because he loves us, personally. God does not love or accept us because we are good. He loves and accepts us because he is good, and because Jesus was good on our behalf. "Jesus loves you" is no trite slogan, but a vital truth capable of penetrating and transforming the human heart (1 John 4:7-21).

We all need this Loving Lord and Savior. The good news is that this is exactly who Jesus is for all who want him. This is the gospel. Our church seeks to make this gospel the center of all that we do as a congregation. Because Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth, we tell all the world what he has done and promises yet to do.

We believe every person must believe the gospel of Christ to be saved from the consequences of sin (God's wrath), and to be able to have a relationship with God, which is the meaning and goal of human life. This relationship with God is called *eternal life*. Eternal life does not only refer to what happens after we die, but also refers to what begins in this life at the moment of faith in Jesus Christ: a right and satisfying relationship with God and people. From the moment of faith, we have forgiveness for all our sins: past, present, future. If people do not trust in Christ, but trust instead in their own goodness, then they do not have forgiveness for their sins. Those who do not have forgiveness at death owe God an eternal punishment called hell. *Only* those who believe the gospel can be saved. *All* who believe the gospel are saved. We thank God for this good news!

We believe the Gospel not only saves sinners, but also transforms this world. We believe God will make the whole world right again, which is called *redemption*. Full redemption will not take place until Jesus returns, but God is calling the church to partner with him to transform lives, culture, and the world we live in through the Gospel here and

now. (This is really important, and often overlooked.) The gospel, as it reaches into the world through God's church, is how God redeems the whole world until Jesus completes this great work at his Second Coming. People who do not believe the gospel are excluded from this great worldwide redemption. However, those of us who trust in him not only experience personal redemption (forgiveness and life-transformation), but we also begin to partner with God in his redemptive plans for others, both now and in the future. This is simply amazing! God's plans are incredible.

We believe the Church is God's plan to show off how great the Gospel is, and all the good it does. The church is both a family and a team. God is creating a maturing family of gospel-believing people, so that we can work together to share God's redeeming work and plans with our lost world. As we share the gospel message, so too we live out the changed lives the gospel brings in a very public way, working hard to make our world work the way God designed. All this displays the goodness of our God and his plans, which is called *glorifying God*. This is the mission of God's church, and is therefore the mission of our church, the Resurrection. The local, gospel-believing church is God's *Plan A* for humanity, and there is no *Plan B*. Therefore we are committed to this local church, and desire to partner with other gospel-believing churches everywhere.

We believe the Bible, which is totally trustworthy and authoritative. The only reason we believe a single word in this membership covenant is because we believe we are faithfully reproducing the message of the bible. The original text of the bible is the sole completely trustworthy source of knowledge about God and us. The bible clearly communicates the gospel, and along with it many other vital things we must know. The bible is authoritative over all people as God's trustworthy Word. Trusting the bible is no act of blind faith. It is a deep trust, firmly rooted in historical evidence, and centered on the historical reality of the Christ's life, death, and physical resurrection. The bible (and the gospel it communicates) is authoritative because it is *true*: historically, spiritually, and experientially. Both the Old and New Testaments are equally trustworthy, good, and important in communicating the gospel of Christ. All Scripture is the very Word of God. God's Word is wonderful, and it drives all we believe and do as a congregation.

We believe many other things about God, ourselves, the world, the church, and the bible, too. Other Christians have historically used labels to define themselves to other Christians. **We are comfortable describing our congregation to others as 1) Christian, 2) Evangelical, 3) Missional, 4) Reformed, 5) Charismatic, 6) Baptist, 7) Complementarian (in that basic order).**² The first three of these beliefs are required for membership. But labels are not as important as our belief in being a gospel-centered, gospel-believing, gospel-communicating, gospel-exemplifying church who truly love God and all the people he has made. Some of our members may still be learning to understand these beliefs. Further, some in our congregation might disagree with certain aspects of beliefs 4 through 7, above. Yet our congregation is united in that we agree about what the Gospel is, we understand what it means for us and the world, and we want to be a part of this wonderful work of redemption that God is doing. There are many other vital things we as a

congregation do and must agree on, and the pastors of the Resurrection have the responsibility and freedom from God to lead our congregation into all biblical truth, as circumstance and wisdom call for.

Our Purpose

Our gospel-centered beliefs are the basis for our purpose as a church congregation.

We are called by God to believe the gospel ourselves. Our congregation must trust in the free gift of Christ's finished work alone for all our justification as sinners. We must trust in Christ's authority alone for the good leadership we need as God's repentant people. We must trust in Jesus' personal love for us as the sole basis for our acceptance from God and the source of his choice of us for salvation and an eternal relationship (Romans 8:31-39). The ongoing process of continuing to believe in Jesus and be intentionally transformed by him is called *discipleship*, which means to be trained for gospel-centered living. When we believe the Gospel, we must step into a discipleship relationship with Jesus and his church.

We are called by God to communicate the gospel to others. Our congregation must learn to be faithful in the Great Commission. While the gospel is the best news ever, it is often difficult to convey and sometimes poorly received. We expect this mission to be very costly. It takes money, time, practice, effort, teamwork, commitment, humility, bravery, faith, and above all the grace and power of God. Because there are people all around us who would rather kill than submit to the authority of Christ, it may cost some of us our lives. Jesus expects us to count and choose this cost. We expect this mission to be very successful. When we are on God's mission, the Lord will lead us to people. We can believe that *all* who have been appointed to eternal life will be saved by God (Acts 13:47-48). People will believe. People will be transformed. People will join in the mission.

We are called to live out the results that God intends for the gospel to produce. Our congregation must learn to live in a public way that shows off the goodness of God in Christ. As we grow in our understanding that Jesus' authority over us is the best thing for all people, we make decisions that showcase this truth. We teach others how to obey God by trusting him, rather than from mere obedience or fear. We teach and help others to trust that Christ' plans for all aspects of our lives are exactly the right plans. When people experience the perfect goodness of Christ's authority, they are truly experiencing the *Kingdom of God*. As we grow in our understanding of the redemption that Christ has given us through his finished work, we will live lives that seek to participate with Christ in his ongoing work of making all things renewed in this life. We will love and serve others in radical ways, knowing it takes plans, practice, and long-range commitment. Christ will use his church to change the world here and now, in preparation of the full-fledged changes he will bring in the age to come. This coming destiny is the reunification and utter renewal of both heaven and earth, the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

Our Goals

1. Know and **love God and people** with the whole heart and life.
2. **Preach**, teach, and believe the gospel always.
3. **Be disciples**, who make disciples, who make disciples.
4. **Sustain** a biblically faithful, gospel-centered congregation.
5. **Grow** in areas vital to the life and health of our church in our place and time. These areas of growth include holiness, love, faith, skill, cultural impact, membership, and anything pertaining to glorifying God as a gospel-centered movement. This means we seek to be used by God to create a new vibrant Christian culture for and among our people, focused on God personally and all that he desires for us and others. This includes breaking free from our addictions, our pasts, and our lives built on worshipping the self. The Lord has so much better for us and others!
6. Be a catalyst for a fresh, powerful, and lively **gospel-centered movement** in our area, especially within the American Bottom river valley, working with anyone else striving towards this same end.
7. **Reach out** in bold, sustained, sometimes-risky ways to the non-believing and de-churched populace around us, making ourselves sacrificial servants who are godly leaders in our region, ushering in the holistic redemption that only the gospel produces.

Our Structure

We seek to structure our church in accordance with the Scriptures. Our congregation is *not* a democracy, but we *are* a loving and accountable family. The following offices (biblical roles) and titles (extra-biblical terms) define how our church family relates to one another to accomplish the Lord's goals for us. These roles are *not* ways to earn forgiveness, acceptance, or blessing from God. They are rather roles for people *already* forgiven, accepted, and blessed by God through the Gospel, and structured for his purposes rather than our own.

Christian - A Christian is a person who believes the gospel. The Bible uses many words to describe us, including *Christians, Believers, Disciples, Brother & Sisters, the Church, Followers of the Way, Saints* (which means *Holy Ones*), *a Royal Priesthood, the People of God, and God's Chosen People*. Christians have a saving faith in Christ, a relationship with God, the free gifts of forgiveness and eternal life, and a place in Christ's church. All who believe the gospel are Christians. No one who fails to believe the gospel is a Christian. To be a Christian is the highest honor God can give to any human being, and is entirely a gift from God. Officers and members in the Resurrection are Christians, first and foremost.

Pastor - The Resurrection is under the leadership of our founding Pastor, James Amos. We believe that the biblical terms *Pastor, Shepherd, Elder, and Overseer* all refer to the same office in the church, which is the office directly accountable to the Lord for the congregation, and given authority to lead the congregation in accordance with the Scriptures. We believe the Lord's ideal for a congregation is to be led by a group of biblically qualified pastors with equal authority (though one may still function as the leader

of the group). We are praying for the Lord to raise up other biblically qualified, faithful pastors from among our ranks over the next year or two, and are currently training potential pastors through our Shepherding Team. We believe the bible requires that pastors be male. (This is not because of superior ability, but is simply the Lord's revealed will. No other office in the church has a defined gender-role.) Until the Lord raises up these men among us, we are led by Pastor James, who is under Christ and held to the Word of God in all things.

Servant - Under the final authority of our pastor, our church is led in most aspects of its life and ministry by a team called the Servant-Leadership Council (SLC). In the bible, the office of *Servant* is also called a *Deacon* ("deacon" simply means "servant"). The men and women servants in our church meet the biblical qualifications for a deacon, and lead us with humility and faithfulness. All ministries at the Resurrection have servant leaders (usually only one) who have been given authority by the council (with the oversight of a pastor) to lead that ministry.

Member - The concept of *church membership* comes from 1 Corinthians 12:1-31a, which compares the church of Christ to a human body with many diverse *members* (meaning parts such as eyes, noses and feet). The idea is that in order for a church (a body) to function properly, all the people who make up the church congregation (the members of the body) must play their unique part well, in harmony with various other members. While in this passage *member* refers to all Christians, we use this term in a more nuanced way. In many aspects of human life, membership in an organization is designed to bring privileges to its members. But at the Resurrection, membership is a formal commitment to *serve God and other people*. Our members are gospel-believing, sin-repenting, baptized Christians who have committed to the goals of our congregation by signing this membership covenant. Our members do not vote on the normal affairs of the operations of our church, though they do offer a vote of "affirmation" in regards to our annual budget, and the ordination of new church elders. Members do have the right to be deeply involved in the life and ministry of this church. Our members are together the family of God in our town who have banded together as the Resurrection, under the name of Jesus Christ. (It's Jesus' name that saves, not our church's name!)

Our Commitment

We, the Christian people who make up the church of Jesus Christ called the Resurrection, in Granite City, Illinois, USA, here commit to our God and one another. We do not expect perfection from one another. Indeed, only Christ has such perfection. But *in Christ*, we will seek to be faithful in these ways:

1. We will trust and obey our God in all areas of life, including confession, repentance, and faith. We will not choose to intentionally persist in sin in any way, knowing that the Gospel offers us both the forgiveness and power necessary to follow God with the whole heart, moment by moment.

2. We will honor and help one another as a family and a team. We will seek each others' good, and handle our grievances with one another according to our Lord's instructions (Matthew 18:15-17).
3. We will commit to the means of discipleship growth in our church, including regular participation in our worship services, neighborhood teams, discipleship ministries, and other ministries, if and when possible. We need these things to become what God wants us to be. We will not regularly miss these ministries at the resurrection to attend ministries of other congregations. We believe we are called to this place and people.
4. We will faithfully commit to joyful, sacrificial giving of our money, possessions, effort, time, and love.
5. We will not be a member of another church congregation at the same time that we are a member of the Resurrection. If we have a membership at another church, we will end that membership before signing this membership covenant. (See a pastor for instructions on this situation.)
6. We will submit to the biblical authority and leadership of our pastors.
7. We will share Christ and his gospel with others, with increasing faithfulness.
8. We will speak with Pastor James Amos if we decide the time has come to end this commitment, so that we may be released from our membership at the Resurrection in good faith and standing.

Becoming a Member

Step 1: Any Christian desiring to become a member at the Resurrection should read this document thoroughly. They are advised to circle anything in the text that they might have a question about (including in the endnotes), and bring those questions to Pastor James Amos. If, after discussion with the Pastor, there is any aspect of this membership covenant that the prospective member cannot agree to, they should simply explain how their beliefs deviate from this document by writing a description on this signature page.

Step 2: In addition, anyone seeking membership must write a concise (1 to 3 page) testimony, explaining how God has led them to understand and trust in the Gospel. This can be typed or hand-written. Please include your name on this document. See the Testimony instructions on the next page of this membership covenant.

Step 3: When the person can sign this document in good conscience, they may put this signature page (only), and their written testimony in the offering plate during worship services.

Step 4: Members are presented before the congregation at a future date, once their membership has been approved.

Covenant Signature

I, _____, commit myself to membership in the Resurrection, according to the above membership covenant, on this day.

Signature _____ Date _____

Writing your Personal Testimony

Instructions

We want to hear how you've come to believe the Gospel. While every person's story is unique, there are parts of the story that are the same for everyone. (There are many experiences one can have with Jesus, but only one Jesus!)

This testimony should be fun. You don't need to tell your life's story. Just help us to understand the process of how you came to understand and believe the Gospel. What is it like to personally know and trust Jesus, who is alive and real?

Below is a basic pattern we ask you to use, to tell your story. It has three stages. If you're finding it hard to distinguish between these three stages of your life, just let the pastor know. (Phone or personal conversation is fine.) There is no expectation being placed upon you to tell things in ways that aren't true, just to fit this structure. Tell your story the way it is.

We recommend 1-3 pages, hand-written or typed. Enjoy!

Sequence

1. Before I trusted Christ:
2. How I began trusting Christ:
3. My life now trusting Christ:

Endnotes

¹ Some people may be uncomfortable with the idea that Jesus' authority is the Gospel. On first blush this statement could be perceived as legalistic. Yet the Bible refers to Jesus' role as our Messianic Leader frequently as "the Gospel." Romans 1:1-4, for example, says that *"the gospel of God [concerns God's] Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord"* (ESV). Jesus is Lord because he is the promised ruler of God's people (David's descendant), and his resurrection is the supreme demonstration of this authority. The idea here in Romans 1 is *not* that he died for our sins, but that he is the ruler of God's people. Jesus' role as our "Lord" is the Gospel, along with the part of his rule we most desperately need: his atoning work as our "Savior." We seek to hold Christ's twin roles as our Lord and Savior together, just as the New Testament does throughout its pages. Jesus' unsurpassed leadership and power, his authority, is very "good news." We believe that Jesus' authority (centering on his resurrection), his finished work (centering on his cross), and his love (the reason our Authority takes our cross), are necessary components of the gospel, and we believe that a person must trust that these three truths are all genuinely good news to be saved (*Authority*: Romans 10:9; Mark 10:17-31/ *Finished Work*: Romans 3:21-26; Mark 10:33-34, 45/ *Love*: John 3:16; Romans 8:31-39; 1 John 4:7-10).

² Here are some concise definitions of what we mean by these terms, all of which indicate something about what we *do* and *do not* believe. *The beliefs described below as Christian, Evangelical, and Missional are required for membership at the Resurrection.* The other beliefs are not required, but believers are required to indicate in simple written form where they may differ when signing the covenant, and to handle such dissension with sensitivity, Christian unity, and biblical care.

Christian - We believe in the God of the Christian Bible, who is God the Father, Son and Spirit. He's a powerful, saving, wonderful God. He is not the god(s) of the other world religions (Islam, Buddhism, etc.) nor the cults (Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.). While he is the God of Israel in the Old Testament, he is different than the understanding of God held by non-Christian Jews. Only the God who reveals himself as the God-man Jesus can save human beings.

Evangelical - We believe that Jesus alone paid 100% of the punishment we deserve for our sins. We can do absolutely nothing to earn heaven or forgiveness; these are free gifts of grace from God, earned for us by Christ. We also believe that one must be born-again. This new birth happens upon hearing and believing the Gospel, when God transforms each individual supernaturally, beginning the process of loving and obeying God rightly in this life in a way not possible from natural birth. We believe we have forgiveness for all sins from the moment of faith in Christ. These beliefs distinguish us from Roman Catholics and others.

Missional - We believe that after we first trust the Gospel and receive forgiveness, God wants us all to begin reorienting our lives so that we become missionaries to those around us. We team together as the church to carry God's gospel message, love, and works to those around us in a way that tries to make God look as good as he really is. This requires wisdom, self-sacrifice, thoughtful planning, and a willingness to "be all things to all people, so that by all means [we] might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22 ESV). The church is genuinely accountable for how we do or do not take up the reigns of the mission of God in the place and among the people that God has placed us. This is our responsibility and our joy, because we want people to know God as we know him: saving and wonderful. These beliefs distinguish us from those who refuse to radically reorient their lives and Christian practice for the sake of reaching others.

Reformed - We believe God is completely sovereign, which means he's always in control and that human beings (and angels and demons) never are. We believe God personally chose ("predestined") who would be saved before the foundation of the world, which is called "election" in the bible (Ephesians 1:4-5, 11; Romans 9:11). We believe God causes people to become capable of believing the Gospel, and that no human being is born with this ability. Our only hope is for God to graciously make us capable of believing the gospel, and then enable us to start learning to love to obey him. We do not believe God simply sees the future, and sees who will be wise or good enough to choose him (John 1:13; Titus 3:5). We believe God *causes* all things to occur, and *chose* how history would unfold, including the eternal destiny of individual persons, before the world began (Ephesians 1:9-10). These beliefs distinguish us from those who believe that human free will is the deciding factor in the working out of history and eternal destinies. We believe the bible teaches that our

wills are slaves to sin (the opposite of free!), until God first makes us able to believe (Romans 6:17-18, 22). God gets all the glory for planning and causing the salvation of believers, start to finish (Romans 8:29-30).

Charismatic - We believe that at the moment a person believes the gospel, they permanently, eternally receive the Holy Spirit of God within them. We believe that all the gifts the Holy Spirit gives to believers after faith in Christ are supernatural. They are given to encourage and enable the church in human life and God's mission. We believe that all the gifts mentioned in the bible are still present in the church today, though no individual believer has all the gifts. Spiritual gifts are given according to God's gracious choice, not personal levels of spirituality. These beliefs distinguish us from two main groups. Some believe that certain spiritual gifts described in the bible, such as prophecy and tongues, are no longer present in the church. Others believe these gifts are present, but are given to believers according to increasing levels of spiritual maturity. We believe these are both unbiblical positions.

Baptistic - We believe that a person should be baptized only after personally believing the gospel, and telling others that they are now a Christian. Baptism is both a symbol of what God has done for us in the gospel (Romans 6:3-5), and a way to show God, ourselves, the world, and the church that we are now choosing to publicly identify with Christ. Ideally, a person should be baptized shortly after first believing, because baptism (with verbal confession) is the initial public sign of faith in and obedience to Christ. These beliefs distinguish us from those who baptize infant children. Infants are able to know Christ and be saved, but they are *not* able to confess their belief in the gospel. We find no support for infant baptism in the bible. Instead we see a consistent pattern of first hearing and believing the gospel, and then confession and repentance with baptism as an initial response of faith. Acts 2:37-39 describes this pattern: It does mention the promise of the gospel being for children too, of course (v. 39). Which children? Those who repent and are baptized into Christ (v. 38), which means they now believe the gospel (Acts 2:31-36).

Complementarian - We believe the bible teaches that there are some differences between men and women. There is obviously much in common between the two human genders, but there are also obvious differences (such as physical differences). We see the bible drawing no lines between men and women in terms of *ability* or *worth*. Humans are given diverse abilities across the genders, *and all people have the same value*. It takes both genders together to display the image of God (Genesis 1:27c). But we believe God has made a distinction between men and women in two key areas of human life: *marriage* and *the leadership of the church*. Husbands are called to lead their families, and wives to submit to that leadership. We believe both these roles (headship and submission) require us to learn to trust God deeply. We believe they are both very challenging. We also believe they are both clear in Scripture (Ephesians 5:22-33). There is a parallel in God's church, which takes the form of pastors being male (1 Timothy 1:8-12). The roles of headship and submission *complement* each other. These complementarian beliefs distinguish us from those who believe there are no *functional* differences between men and women in the church (egalitarians). They also distinguish us from those who believe men are superior to women (or vice versa), or that men alone are made in the image of God. We believe these alternative views are unbiblical. The differences between the genders are designed, beautiful, necessary, and complement each other. Both headship and submission display the gospel of Christ, and the relationship between Jesus and his bride: the church. Both roles have in them the very dignity of Jesus.