

Summary of Proposed Changes to Membership By-Laws- updated 11.19.25

- **Terminology**
 - **Current:** Uses the word *Membership* and *members*.
 - **Proposed:** Replaces this with *Covenant Partnership* and *Covenant Partners*.
- **Purpose**
 - **Current:** Membership is about joining with other followers of Christ in prayer, worship, sacraments, fellowship, equipping Christians, evangelism, ministry, and justice.
 - **Proposed:** Covenant Partnership frames participation as part of God's covenant story, emphasizes relational identity, and highlights annual *Covenant Commitments*.
- **Responsibilities**
 - **Current:** Members are encouraged to live according to biblical standards, support the church (attendance, prayer, service, giving), encourage others, reflect servant love, and support ECC and NWC.
 - **Proposed:** Covenant Partners commit to relational promises to one another and God. Includes a **two-way commitment**:
 - Leadership to Partners (honesty, integrity, annual check-ins, care).
 - Partners to one another (prayer, empathy, forgiveness, sacrificial love).
 - Four key commitments: participation, generosity/stewardship, discipleship, and service.
- **Admission / Renewal**
 - **Current:** Admission after class, testimony to Spiritual Care Team, vote by Leadership Team. Membership is indefinite unless withdrawn or removed.
 - **Proposed:** *Initial* admission after class, application, testimony to Spiritual Life Team, approval by Leadership Team. **Subsequent annual renewal required** each January (or throughout year) *without* class, testimony, vote by LT. Non-renewing Partners become *Legacy Members*.
- **Children**
 - **Current:** Children nurtured in church, taught ECC confirmation materials, may apply at age 16.
 - **Proposed:** Children and youth are valued holistically (mentorship, ministries, participation). At 16, or after confirmation and baptism, they may apply for Covenant Partnership.
- **Support and Accountability of Covenant Partners (formerly Discipline)**
 - **Current:** Erring members admonished, counseled, possibly dismissed by 2/3 Leadership Team vote. Can appeal to congregation.
 - **Proposed:** Focus shifts to restorative care. Partner Care and Spiritual Life Teams may be included. Neglect or misconduct leads to restorative conversations; dismissal is last resort by 2/3 Leadership Team vote, with appeal option.
- **Withdrawal / Removal**
 - **Current:** Members may request withdrawal in writing; Leadership Team may remove for inactivity. Dismissed/withdrawn members lose rights.
 - **Proposed:** Covenant Partners may withdraw in writing. Non-renewals become *Legacy Members* (non-voting, permanent recognition).
- **Recording**
 - **Current:** Names of members joining/leaving recorded and reported at next congregational meeting.
 - **Proposed:** Names of new, withdrawn, or expired Covenant Partners recorded **annually**.

ARTICLE I

Membership

Section 1. Purpose. The purpose of membership is to join with other followers of Christ in building a community of worship committed to prayer, preaching and study of the Word of God, the celebration of the sacraments, and fellowship across gender, race, age, culture, and class. In so doing, the membership covenants together to equip loving, giving, growing Christians to reach out with the good news of Jesus Christ – evangelizing the lost, ministering to those in need, and seeking justice for the oppressed.

Section 2. Responsibilities. The members of this church do covenant together by God's grace to live lives in a manner consistent with the standards of biblical teaching, including the support of this congregation in attendance, prayer, service, and giving, to live lives in word and deed that are an encouragement to others to know and be like Jesus Christ, to reflect in all our relationships the servant love of our Lord, and to support the broader mission of Christ through the ECC and the NWC.

Section 3. Admission into Membership.

- a. Membership in the church is granted to those who through faith in God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, have been born anew to a living hope through the Holy Spirit, have been baptized according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to live a Christian life, promise to faithfully support the mission, ministries, and policies of the church, and to share in its fellowship and obligations.
- b. Upon completion of a membership class, persons desiring to apply for membership shall submit their application to the Lead Pastor and Spiritual Care Team. Applicants shall meet with the Spiritual Care Team to give testimony to their personal faith in Jesus Christ. Upon completion of such, the Spiritual Care Team shall submit its recommendations on the applications to the Leadership Team who will then vote to accept them.
- c. Applicants who are accepted into membership of the church by the Leadership Team shall be recognized at a worship service and make public confession of their Christian faith, as outlined in The Covenant Book of Worship.

Section 4. Children. Children of the church shall be nurtured under its spiritual care. They shall receive instruction in the Word of God, Christian doctrine, and the history of the church, normally using the confirmation/discipleship material of the ECC. At age 16, they may apply for church membership as outlined under Section 3 of this article.

Section 5. Discipline.

- a. Discipline of members. The Leadership Team shall be responsible for admonishing members who willfully neglect their responsibilities to the church or who err in doctrine or conduct.
- b. Erring members. Any member known to err in doctrine or conduct shall be counseled according to the procedure outlined in Matthew 18:15-18 and Galatians 6:1. Any member having knowledge of such error shall, in the spirit of Christian love, seek to restore the erring member. If he or she does not heed this counsel, the matter shall be brought to the attention of the Leadership Team in writing, which shall in meekness and gentleness seek to restore the member.
- c. After the above process has been completed, dismissal of a member remaining in gross error in doctrine or conduct may result by a two-thirds vote of all current Leadership Team members. Such action may be appealed by the member to the congregation for consideration at the next congregational meeting.
- d. Forfeiture of rights. A member who has been properly dismissed from the church, or has withdrawn membership, has forfeited all rights and privileges of membership in the church.

Section 6. Withdrawal and Removal of Membership. Any member desiring to transfer or withdraw from membership shall make such request in writing to the Lead Pastor or Leadership Team. Letters of transfer shall be issued by the Lead Pastor if so requested, and the member is in good standing. The Leadership Team shall periodically review the membership roster to determine inactivity. Those determined to have neglected their responsibilities may be approached under the process outlined in Section 5 of this article.

Section 7. Recording. The names of those joining and terminating membership shall be duly recorded and reported to the congregational meeting following action.

ARTICLE I

Covenant Partnership

Section 1. Purpose. The purpose of Covenant Partnership is to frame both the identity and function of church participation in a way consistent with scripture and the arc of God's long vision for the restoration of all things. The Covenant relationship initiated by God speaks to the essential role relationships play in the perpetuation of blessing out into the world. Hope Covenant Partners are formed in community and called out together in mission. Scripture offers several images to express this identity and purpose of community (Body of Christ, temple, Holy nation, Royal Priest (1 Peter 2:9). Covenant Partners are formed through worship, shaped by prayer, healed through love and sent out to be hope for the life of the world through renewable yearly Covenant Commitments.

Section 2. Responsibilities.

- a. Calling our members "Covenant Partners" highlights that we are making meaningful promises to one another. It shows that our relationships at Hope Covenant matter and play a vital role in living out our mission to be Hope for the Life of the World. We see this Covenant Commitment playing out in two relationship dynamics.
 1. **God's Relationship to his Church.** God initiated a covenant relationship with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and then a new Covenant through Jesus! In each of these Covenants, God establishes a relationship for a purpose: Partnership in mission. God invites us into a Covenantal relationship to receive his blessing in order to bring that blessing out into the world.
 2. **Relationship to one another.** Covenant Partners are invited by God's grace to make a Covenant Commitment to one another, reflecting an intentional commitment to be a blessing to one another and to reflect that blessing out into our community. This commitment includes but is not limited to prayer, empathy, believing the best in each other, patience, generosity, forgiveness and loving one another sacrificially in a manner fitting of the gospel.
- b. **Hope Covenant Partner Commitments**
 1. **Commitment of Church leadership to Covenant Partners.** Hope Covenant leadership commits to a standard of conduct in line with the biblical ethic which includes but is not limited to transparency, honesty, generosity and integrity. Hope Covenant also commits to a regular habit of checking in with Covenant Partners at least once a year, for the purpose of encouragement, support, and prayer. This is done through the Covenant Partner Team who are tasked with welcoming new Covenant Partners and scheduling personal check-in visits.
 2. **Commitment of Covenant Partners to one another.** Covenant Partners are formed by four main commitments to the church as an extension of our walk with Jesus.
 - Commitment to invest in the life of Hope Covenant through regular participation as able (weekend gatherings, Congregational meetings).
 - Commitment to invest in the mission and vision of Hope, the Conference and Denomination through generosity and whole life stewardship.
 - Commitment to invest in one's walk with Jesus through the discipleship opportunities as provided.
 - Commitment to invest in the community of Hope through regular acts of service.

Section 3. Initial Admission and Renewal of Covenant Partnership. Covenant Partnership is offered to those who through faith in Jesus, have been born anew into a living hope through the Holy Spirit, have been baptized in Christ, strive to follow Jesus as his apprentice, and intend to faithfully support the vision of this church and serve the people of this community.

a. Initial Covenant Partnership

1. Covenant Partnership classes will be offered periodically throughout the year. Persons interested in *initial* Covenant Partnership shall complete a Covenant Partnership application. Applicants shall meet with the Spiritual Life Team to offer testimony to personal faith in Jesus Christ and be given a chance to voice questions or concerns about Covenant Partnership. Applicants are then recommended to the Leadership Team by the Spiritual Life Team for approval and are voted (majority required) into Covenant Partnership until January of the following year, when they will be invited to renew their Covenant Partnership (see *Covenant Partnership Renewal* below).
2. Applicants who are received into Covenant Partnership shall be introduced to the congregation. First time Covenant Partners shall be invited to make a public confession of their Christian Faith, as outlined in the Covenant Book of Worship

- b. **Renewal of Covenant Partnership.** Covenant Partnership is an annually renewed commitment as part of our ongoing formation as whole followers of Jesus. Existing Covenant Partners will be given the opportunity to renew

their Covenant Partnership each January during the weekend worship services but are allowed to renew (apply) throughout the year.

c. Withdrawal and Removal of Covenant Partnership

1. Any Covenant Partner desiring to transfer or withdraw from Covenant Partnership shall make such a request in writing to the Pastor or Leadership Team. Letters of transfer shall be issued by the Pastor if so requested. Covenant Partners in need of extra support will be cared for during their annual check-in with the Covenant Partner Team. Covenant Partners who move or choose to not renew their Covenant Commitments at the beginning of the new year will automatically be transferred to the Legacy Membership unless specifically specified otherwise by the Covenant Partner.
2. Covenant Partners who choose to NOT renew their partnership will automatically be placed on the Legacy Membership roll of Hope Covenant Church. This non-voting membership roll reflects the legacy of a Covenant Partner in perpetuity.

Section 4. Children. Children of the church shall be nurtured under its spiritual care. They shall receive instruction in the Word of God, Christian doctrine, and the history of the church, normally using the confirmation/discipleship material of the ECC. At age 16, they may apply for church Covenant Partnership as outlined under Section 3 of this article.

Section 5. Support and Accountability of Covenant Partners.

- a. **Support of Covenant Partners.** The Covenant Partner Care Team, operating as an extension of the Leadership Team, is responsible for supporting Covenant Partners who may struggle to fulfill the commitments outlined in the Covenant Partner Agreement.
- b. **When Accountability Is Required.** In the event that a Covenant Partner is not in harmony with the vision of Hope Covenant Church, the general principles of Christian community, or demonstrates obvious and ongoing neglect of Covenant Partner commitments, the Covenant Partner Care Team shall engage in healthy, relational, and restoration-minded conversations. These interactions will follow the biblical guidelines found in Matthew 18:15–18 and Galatians 6:1–10, always seeking reconciliation and growth.
- c. **Dismissal of a Covenant Partner.** Dismissal shall only be considered as a last resort, after every reasonable effort toward restoration has been made. Non-voluntary dismissal due to persistent neglect of covenant commitments or conduct unbecoming of a Covenant Partner may occur by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of all current Leadership Team members. The dismissed Covenant Partner retains the right to appeal this decision to the congregation at the next scheduled congregational meeting.
- d. **The Spirit of Support and Accountability.** All actions of support and accountability are undertaken to promote a healthy, Christ-centered community. This work is informed by Scripture, guided by the Holy Spirit and characterized by honesty, grace, and relational care — always with the ultimate aim of restoration, reconciliation, and spiritual growth.
- e. **Forfeiture of rights:** A Covenant Partner who has been properly dismissed from the church or has withdrawn their partnership, has forfeited all rights and privilege and will be moved to the legacy roster of Hope Covenant Church.

Section 6. Recording. The names of those joining, terminating, or letting their Covenant Partnership expire shall be duly recorded and reported on an annual basis.