

Preparing the Covenant Biblical and Theological– February, 2019

Why Covenants?

The Comprehensive Review Task Group (2012-2015) had proposed to GC42 (2015) that there be a written covenant between regional councils and communities of faith, and had developed a draft covenant. GC42 authorized a remit which anticipated having written covenants and, with the authorization of the remits by GC43 (2018), a covenant is now a regular part of the relationship between a regional council and a community of faith.

Biblical & Theological Reflections on Covenants

“Covenant” language is used in a variety of ways in the church. Quite often it focuses of the relationship between a minister and the church, as in *Manual* Section I.1:

A “covenant” is between God, the ministry personnel, the community of faith or other ministry, and the wider United Church as represented by the regional council. The covenant may include other parties that are integral to living out the gospel in community as God calls us.

But covenant is not limited to pastoral relationships.

“Covenant” is a term with deep roots in the Christian tradition. The term is used in various ways in both Testaments. However, the most important motif is relationship.

The covenant made at Sinai signified both a relationship with God based on gratitude for God’s activity on our behalf and the creation of a new people who would live according to certain principles. The covenant was the foundation for how the people would serve God and live with one another. The Ten Commandments reflect both these dimensions, the earlier ones speaking about how the people would relate to God and the later ones offering guidance for how they would live together in community, following a particular set of values and principles.

Similarly, the “new covenant” we associate with Jesus’ actions in the upper room is based on thanks for what God has done and will do and includes a key guiding principle (“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.” John 13:34) for the creation of a new [Christian] community going forward.

Characteristic of both these covenants was the formation of a community with a system of values different from the surrounding society (see, for example, Galatians 3:28), a community where members cared for one another, where promises and commitments were kept, where fairness and integrity were assumed.

When the covenant was between people or different groups (e.g., the covenant between Jacob and Laban), the covenant was understood to be made in the presence of God, often with God as a type of arbiter if either party violated the covenant. We understand the covenants we make in the church to be made in the presence of God.

Some significant parallels exist between the Biblical concept of “covenant” and some Indigenous understandings of the term “treaty.” Treaties, whether among Indigenous

people themselves or (from the Indigenous perspective) what they understood themselves to be doing when entering into treaties with settlers, saw Mother Earth as a gift from the Creator. The Earth, and all its creatures, were to be treated with respect. Relationship with one another, with the Creator, and with Mother Earth was key. There was not to be dominance, one of another, but, rather, respect for one another and a set of values designed to enable people to live peaceably with one another and to share the gifts Creator has given us.

The Manual and Developing a covenant

The Manual (2019)

B.1.3 Covenantal Relationship

B.1.3.1 Terms of Covenant

A community of faith is recognized by the regional council through a covenantal relationship with the regional council. The community of faith and the regional council have the flexibility to negotiate and create a covenant that is responsive to the contextual reality of the community of faith and its unique needs and challenges.

The terms of the covenant include

- a) the governance requirements for the community of faith in these bylaws;
- b) any applicable policies set by the General Council; and
- c) any other terms that the community of faith and the regional council may agree to include within denominational policies.

B.1.3.2 Changes to the Covenant

The terms of the covenant may be changed from time to time within denominational policies with the agreement of the community of faith and the regional council.

Each regional council will develop its own process for determining how a covenant with a community of faith will be initiated, worded, implemented and evaluated. At a minimum, discussions between the community of faith and the regional council will involve a review of Sections B and C of *The Manual*.

Covenants between Indigenous communities of faith and regional councils will be developed in consultation and cooperation with the National Indigenous Council. This sample covenant may be a resource to those discussions, but the covenants involving Indigenous communities of faith may look very different than this sample.

The most recent edition of the United Church Manual is available at https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/the-manual_2019.pdf. It is not available to buy at this time.

Preparing the Covenant
Notes to Help Prepare the Covenant of Mutual Commitment, Accountability and Support Between a Community of Faith and Prairie to Pine Regional Council

The Governing body of the Community of Faith, or a few designated people will likely work on drafting the covenant, in consultations with ministry personnel and / or pastoral charge supervisor. It should then be approved by the Governing Body, and the Community of Faith made aware of the Covenant.

The Community of Faith portion of the Covenant does not need to be lengthy ½ to 1 page would normally be adequate. Please feel free to consult members of the Committee on Community of Faith Support if there are questions. Send email inquires with subject line "Community of Faith covenant question" to CAbad@united-church.ca and they will be directed to one of the committee members. Please include inquirer's contact info phone and/or email.

1 Community of Faith

The preamble and 1.A will be essentially the same as in sample.

1.B. Governance – if you use one of the common or traditional models of governance from the handbook, "Models of Board Governance", briefly describe the model you use, as shown in the sample covenant for St. Luke's by the Lake.

If you use a governance structure that differs significantly from the common models, and it has been previously approved by Presbytery, please attach a copy of the governance structure document as part of the covenant, and provide the date of approval.

If your governance structure differs significantly from the common models and it has not been approved by presbytery, please attach a clear description of your governance policies & practices, to be reviewed by the Committee on Community of Faith Support. Revisions may be suggested before the Committee presents it to the Regional Council Executive for Approval. A draft governance document is ok for the initial covenant.

1.C. Ministry Summary –This would be a good place to include a vision or mission statement along with a brief description of the ways the community of faith puts that vision or mission into practice.

As you read the Governance Requirements for All Communities of Faith (Manual B.2), consider any unique or special ways you live out these locally, things that might set you apart from other communities of faith.

The following are ideas to get you thinking about what you might want to include.

Briefly identify particular goals or projects you are working on in the short or longer term.

Describe in a few words any particular ecumenical or inter-faith co-operation, or shared work with another United Church Community of Faith.

What are the circumstances, context which your community of faith exercises ministry? carries out its work? What's the setting for ministry in your community of faith?

Describe any particular mission or outreach work (faith-based or secular) in which your community of faith is a significant player, or which involves many of your members.

Some of what you decide to put in this section may be very similar to, or exactly the same as, parts of a recent Joint Needs Assessment Report or Ministry Profile, or your living faith story that you preparing to put into the Church HUB.

The format can be points, paragraphs, or (almost) anything else that serves to describe the purpose, work, and challenges of your Community of Faith.

**Preparing the Covenant - A Sample Covenant of
Mutual Commitment, Accountability and Support
between
St. Luke's by the Lake Community of Faith
and
Prairie to Pine Regional Council**

Preamble:

Communities of faith and regional councils share ministry in mutual respect as part of The United Church of Canada. Together they celebrate God's presence, seek justice, and love and serve others. A covenantal relationship, intentionally and willingly entered into by the parties, is an important symbol of this commitment.

A community of faith is recognized ... within the United Church by the regional council through a covenantal relationship between the community of faith and the regional council. (Manual 2019, B.1.1.b)

The terms of the covenant include

- a) the governance requirements for the community of faith in [The Manual];
- b) any applicable policies set by the General Council; and
- c) any other terms that the community of faith and the regional council may agree to include within denominational policies. (Manual 2019, B.1.3.1)

Changes to the Covenant

The terms of the covenant may be changed from time to time within denominational policies with the agreement of the community of faith and the regional council. (Manual, B.1.3.2)

1. Community of Faith

St Luke's by the Lake covenants to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in the current Manual of The United Church of Canada, particularly sections B and G (for congregations), and its accompanying handbooks.

The following terms and/or attachments are additional parts of this covenant:

- 1.A. The Manual: The chair of the governing body, ministry personnel and / or pastoral charge supervisor will have access to and be familiar with the Manual, at least section B, and section G (if the Community of Faith is a congregation),
- 1.B. Governance: *The governance structure for St. Luke's by the Lake resembles the Church Council model described in the handbook titled "Models of Board Governance." We have an M&P Committee and Board of Trustees, and as well as the following committees: Worship & Education; Community Care; Property, Finance, & Administration. Committees meet once every 4 months or more frequently when needed. Church Council normally meets in Sept, Oct. Nov., Feb, March, May. Executive is empowered to meet between regular Council meetings to carry out routine business but may not create or revise policies.*
- 1.C. Other terms -Ministry Summary: *St. Luke's by the Lake is a family size rural congregation which highly values the involvement of all ages in the worship and work of the church. Children share in leadership and participate as they are able in various*

projects planned by committees. We are the only church in our community, so give leadership for celebrations of civic anniversaries, events like Remembrance Day, and a memorial service before Christmas. We do not have regular Sunday worship through July & August, - instead we spend a weekend together at Luke Lake Camp. We have recently built a ramp and have plans to modify the washroom to make access easier. Part of our vision is to be a place where all are welcome, so we are exploring what we'd have to do to be recognized as an Affirming Congregation, and how we might live into some of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We contribute to the Women's Shelter in NextBigTown and the Food Cupboard at the Health Clinic. We keep a list of capable people willing to assist community members with emergency travel related to medical care. Our building is used without cost by youth groups in the community.

2. Regional Council

Prairie to Pine Regional Council covenants to fulfill the responsibilities of a regional council as outlined in *The Manual* of The United Church of Canada and its accompanying handbooks. See especially section C.2 Responsibilities

In addition, Prairie to Pine Regional Council will...

- *enable access to specialized technical and professional services from the staff of the denominational council if such services are beyond the knowledge of the regional council staff;*
- *make information available about grants for communities of faith whose ministers will be on sabbatical leave;*
- *ensure that sources of funds are widely known throughout the regional council;*
- *serve as a liaison with mission partners in other denominations and faiths for mission projects on a regional, national, or international level;*
- *encourage the development and ongoing activities of local clusters of communities of faith and of networks that lift up different aspects of the life of the United Church.*

Dispute resolution

If there is disagreement on any of the terms of this covenant, St. Luke's by the Lake and Prairie to Pine Regional Council agree to:

1. as a first step, engage in whatever informal processes have been set up within the regional council (*name the process clearly*); if this process is unsuccessful in achieving resolution;
2. engage a conflict resolution facilitator to discuss the issues in dispute;
3. agree to binding arbitration if necessary to determine all outstanding issues; and
4. comply with any agreement reached or decision issued.

Dated at {insert place and date}

Dated at {insert place and date}

on behalf of St. Luke's by the Lake
Community of Faith

on behalf of Prairie to Pine
Regional Council

B.2 Governance Requirements for All Communities of Faith

B.2.1 Responsibilities

B.2.1.1 Purpose

The community of faith

- a) lives in covenant with the regional council with mutual responsibilities for the life and mission of the community of faith, and for fulfilling its responsibilities under the covenant;
- b) regularly self-assesses its ministry and files the self-assessment report with the regional council;
- c) joins the hearts, voices, and resources of the community to witness to the gospel and vision of Jesus for a compassionate and just society, both in Canada and around the world;
- d) engages in local, regional, national, and global initiatives and partnerships (community, ecumenical, and interfaith) for ministry, mission, and justice work;
- e) ministers with children and youth and young adults;
- f) honours and lives into intercultural mission and ministry; and

Honouring and living into intercultural mission and ministry is described in Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church, a resource available from the General Council Office.

- g) lives in covenant with Mother Earth and All My Relations in the Earth community.

B.2.1.2 Governance and Administration

The community of faith is responsible for

- a) making decisions about the life of the community of faith, including worship, care, spiritual practice, and learning; local administration, finances, and governance; and local mission, justice, and evangelism;
- b) meeting at least annually;
- c) complying with denominational and regional council policies;
- d) buying, selling, leasing, and renovating community of faith property in cooperation with the regional council, within denominational guidelines; and
- e) remitting to the General Council the applicable assessed contribution for funding governance and support services of the regional council and General Council.

B.2.1.3 Spiritual Life

The community of faith is responsible for

- a) setting policies for membership, within denominational guidelines, and receiving and celebrating new members in the community of faith;

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- b) helping members on their journey as they explore and deepen their faith; and
- c) ensuring the proper administration of the sacraments.

B.2.1.4 Ministry and Other Leadership

The community of faith is responsible for

- a) co-operation with the regional council, within denominational guidelines, in recruiting, choosing, calling, appointing, and covenanting with ministry personnel and other staff, and in ending calls and appointments/covenants with ministry personnel and other staff;
- b) encouraging members to consider ministry roles a responsibility shared through the whole community of faith; and
- c) calling forth individuals for ministry leadership.

B.2.1.5 Participation in Regional and Denominational Life

The community of faith is responsible for

- a) helping to fund the cost of sending members to the meetings of the regional council; and
- b) receiving, dealing with, and forwarding proposals from members of the community of faith to regional councils.

B.2.1.6 Election of Regional Council Representatives

The community of faith is responsible for electing representatives of the community of faith to the regional council. Representatives must be members of the community of faith. The number of representatives depends on the size of the community of faith:

- a) one representative if the community of faith has 100 or fewer members;
- b) two representatives if the community of faith has 101 to 200 members;
- c) three representatives if the community of faith has 201 to 300 members; and
- d) four representatives if the community of faith has more than 300 members.

B.2.1.7 Organization

The community of faith is responsible for having a governance structure as a framework for the life and work of the community of faith. The governance structure must free people to live out their commitment to God and to each other.

B.2.1.8 Limitation

All authority and responsibility of the community of faith is subject to

- a) the policies set by the General Council on membership, governance, pastoral relations, property, and any other area within the authority of the General Council;

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- b) the covenantal relationship between the community of faith and the regional council; and
- c) the authority of the regional council to assume control of the community of faith in extraordinary circumstances where the community of faith is unable to or refuses to meet its responsibilities or acts outside of denominational or regional council policies.