

## **BEHAVIORAL COVENANTS**

### **WHAT IS A BEHAVIORAL COVENANT?**

- An agreement outlining what God is calling the group to do/be and how the group will do it/be it.
- An agreement between members of a group (e.g. congregation council or congregation) that outlines expectations regarding behavior within the group.
- An agreement on how a group/community lives out its faith in loving ways.

### **WHO CREATES THE COVENANT?**

- members of the group

### **WHO ABIDES BY THE COVENANT?**

- Each member of the group promises to uphold all tenets of the covenant

### **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENFORCING THE COVENANT?**

- Each member of the group takes responsibility for enforcing the covenant.
- The mutuality of covenant is key: members of the group support/lift one another up with the covenant and keep one another accountable for living in the covenant.

### **WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF A COVENANT?**

- In agreeing to be in community and relationship in certain ways, members of the group support one another and bear one another's burdens (e.g. Gal. 6:2)
- Covenants make it clear what members of the group expect of one another; in delineating such expectations and agreements to abide by the covenant, a climate of safety is created.
- Covenants help groups discern and discuss difficult issues in a civil manner, without a win/lose mentality. In covenant groups, the well-being of the group is primary, not the will of a segment of the congregation or group.
- No one person in the group is responsible for the behavior of the group; it is a shared responsibility.
- When groups make a covenant to behave in a certain way toward one another, members covenant with one another; however, they also make promises to the wider community that they will behave in certain ways. The behavior of the small group can have significant impact on the behavior of the larger group (modeling healthy ways of relating to one another).
- In the process of creating a covenant, the group has fruitful discussions and agreements on who they are as leaders (or people of God), as well as what is acceptable behavior and acceptable styles of communication.

### **WHAT CAN A BEHAVIORAL COVENANT INCLUDE?**

- Can be built around shared core values
- Content of the covenant depends on the values, needs, context, desires of the group developing the covenant.
- Ways members will treat one another; how the group will show Christ-like characteristics to one another

- Ways members of the group will communicate (e.g. direct)
- Guidelines for open, honest and reasonable discussion
- All agree to abide by all components of the covenant.

#### WHAT SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS MIGHT BE INCLUDED?

- Prayer for one another
- Regular worship, study and giving
- Listen to one another with respect, openness, and with genuine desire to understand the other person, without interruption
- Speak for oneself and not others, using “I” rather than “you” statements represent others fairly, avoiding stereotypes
- Recognize that others’ views/opinions are valid
- Speak the truth in love, care and humility
- Acknowledge that conflict and differences are a normal part of life in the church
- Ask questions for clarification, instead of making judgments
- Put best construction on what others say and do in the group
- Forgive one another
- No secret meetings or behind the scenes mailings, phone campaigns, etc.
- How trust of one another will be lived out
- How support of one another will be lived out
- Agree to focus on interests, not positions
- Agree to focus on problems and issues, not people (e.g. no blaming others)
- How gossip or backbiting will be handled (and avoided), speaking with one another rather than about one another
- Find times for humor and fun in the midst of struggle
- How the group will listen to one another, communicate with one another, cooperate with one another, care for one another, etc.
- Honor and support the decisions made by the group
- Others?

For more details, see [\*Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences\*](#) by Gil Rendle (Alban, 1999)

