

Paupers' Chapel Covenant for Christian Living

Preface

Paupers' Chapel Covenant in its original form was adopted by the Moravian Church at Herrnhut, Saxony, as the *Brotherly Agreement* on May 12 of the year that marked the Church's spiritual renewal, 1727. The *Covenant* was not intended to be a "discipline" forced on the congregation from above, but rather an "agreement" into which the members entered voluntarily. This pervades the new *Covenant*, which in itself is only a recommended form, to be voluntarily accepted by each of the local congregations before it becomes effective for their congregational life.

Most of the *Covenant* deals with the Christian life, and since it is in terms of everyday life that the Christian witness is often most effectively borne, the document is subtitled "Principles by Which We Live and Bear Our Witness." The theme of "witness" is carried out in all the sections. The introductory section, "Ground of Our Witness," deals briefly with the faith and doctrine of Paupers' Chapel. Section I, "The Witness of the Christian Life," describes the "how" of the life in Christ and thus forms a basis for all that follows. The following sections then consider various areas of Christian responsibility. Section II deals largely with Christian responsibility in the local congregation and in relation to Christians of other churches; III, responsibility in the home; IV, one's duties as a citizen; and V, as a Christian in the world.

Principles by Which We Live and Bear Our Witness

The Ground of Our Witness

1 We are called into a Christian fellowship by the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the eternal purpose of God the Father (Ephesians 3:11) by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:18-21), and as members of Christ's Body, the Church, to serve all people by proclaiming the Gospel and witnessing to our faith by word and deed.

2 The Triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as revealed in the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is the only source of our life and salvation; and this Scripture is the sole standard of the doctrine and therefore shapes our life.

3 With the universal Christian Church, we share our faith in the Triune God, who revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Savior of all people. We particularly declare His living presence and Lordship over the Church, joy in the benefits of His life, sufferings, death and resurrection and emphasize a close bond of fellowship with each other in His name. We believe that Christ is present with us in Word and Sacrament. We decline to determine as binding what the Scriptures have left undetermined, or to argue about mysteries impenetrable to human reason. In this regard, we hold to the principle "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity."

4 We thankfully recognize the value of the historic creeds of the Christian Church in calling upon believers in every age to give an obedient and fearless testimony, recognizing Jesus Christ as Lord. A Pauper's confession of faith is the Jesus Christ the Son of God, sent on our behalf to offer a holy and pleasing sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, but credited to those who confess Jesus Christ as the Lord of their life.

I The Witness of the Christian Life

5 We believe that as in baptism (water immersion after verbal profession of faith, Romans 10:8-13) we have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection, so we have died to sin and should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-11).

6 When seeking guidance we find that the simplest expression of Christian living is contained in the earliest of Christian confessions, "Jesus Christ is Lord." This implies that obedience is due Him as the absolute Ruler and Lord of our lives. Not only His teachings (e.g., Matthew 5-7 & the Gospels/Revelations) but, even more, the example of His life (Philippians 2:5; Ephesians 4:20) provide an understanding of the obedience that He desires. Although the early Church, guided by the Holy Spirit in glorifying Christ, did not develop a code covering all issues, it offered guidance in various areas of Christian living (e.g. Colossians 3:1-4,6; 1 Peter 2:11- 3:12; Ephesians 4:1-6:20).

7 Living the Christian life depends not only on our own effort but upon God our Father, who in Jesus Christ accepts us as heirs of God (Galatians 4:4-7) and strengthens and sustains us (Philippians 4:13) and upon the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14-17) to accomplish our purpose as ambassadors of Christ.

8 We realize that our Christian faith must continually be nourished if it is to remain living and vital. Therefore, we desire to grow in our Christian lives through family devotions, personal prayer and study, and the opportunities for spiritual development offered by the Church.

II The Witness of a Living Church

A. Paupers' Chapel Unity

9 Recognition of Authority

As members of the Paupers' Chapel we will abide by the decisions made by the official Elders of our congregation, and agree to be governed by the Elders and identified leaders within the congregation.

10 Stewardship

We deem it a sacred responsibility and genuine opportunity to be faithful stewards of all God has entrusted to us: our time, our talents, and our financial resources. We view all of life as a sacred trust to be used wisely.

11 We will support, according to our ability, the financial needs of the local congregation. We will consider the support of the benevolent causes of Paupers' Chapel, both at home and abroad, as a privilege, an opportunity, and a responsibility.

12 We will also recognize the support of worthy causes outside of the Church as part of our stewardship.

13 Personal Relationships

Since disciples of Jesus are to be known by the love they have to one another (John 13:35), we will cherish Christian love towards other brothers and sisters in Christ as of prime importance.

14 We will be eager to maintain the unity of the Church. Realizing that God has called us from many and varied backgrounds, we recognize the possibility of disagreements or differences. Often these differences enrich the Church, but sometimes they divide. We consider it to be our responsibility to demonstrate within the congregational life the unity and togetherness created by God who made us one through our mottos of "Experience Grace. Live By Faith. Anchored by Hope." . How well we accomplish this will be a witness to our community as to the validity of our faith, and to the power of the Holy Spirit working through the teachings of Christ within the body of Christ.

15 We will endeavor to settle our differences with others in a Christian manner (Galatians 6:1), amicably, and with meditation, and, if at all possible, avoid resort to a court of law (Matthew 18:15-17).

16 Worship and Sunday Observance

Remembering that worship is one of our proper responses to Almighty God, an experience designed for our benefit, and a part of our Christian witness, we and our children will faithfully attend the worship services of the Church.

17 We, therefore, will be careful to avoid unnecessary events that would conflict with events of worship and plan that the recreations in which we engage on that day do not interfere with our own attendance or that of others at divine worship.

18 Holy Communion

In the celebration of this Sacrament we receive the renewed assurance of the forgiveness of our sins, and of our fellowship with Christ; unite with one another as members of His Body; and rejoice in the hope of His return in glory. Therefore, we will commune faithfully and thus renew our pledge of allegiance to Him.

B. The Unity We Seek

19 We will have fellowship, in all sincerity, with children of God in other Christian churches, and will carefully avoid all disputes respecting opinions and ceremonies peculiar to one or another church. In this fellowship we will cooperate with other churches in the support of public charities or Christian enterprises, which have a just claim upon us as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

20 We realize that it is the Lord's will that the Church of Jesus Christ should give evidence of and seek unity in Him with zeal and love. We see how such unity has been promised us and laid upon us as a charge. We recognize that through the grace of Christ the different denominations have received many gifts and that the Church of Christ may be enriched by these many and varied contributions. It is our desire that we may learn from one another and rejoice together in the riches of the love of Christ and the manifold wisdom of God. We welcome every step that brings us nearer the goal of unity in Him.

III The Witness of the Christian Home

A. Marriage - defined in scripture (Mt 19:4-6) as one Man and one Woman of legal age. The Elders of Paupers respects the leadership of our government, and chooses to appreciate and operate in the safety of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. In an attempt to hold to these convictions of scripture, the Elders will only perform weddings for a man and a woman who agree with this covenant and its definitions.

21 We regard it as a sacred obligation to hold to the ideal of Christian marriage as a lifelong commitment given by our Lord in His teaching. We consider it essential, therefore, that all persons contemplating marriage should receive premarital counseling and that our young people should be instructed, beginning in adolescence, in the meaning and obligation of Christian marriage. This instruction should be given through the Church and home.

22 We regard Christian marriage as a lifelong covenant before God which requires the continuous loyalty of the man and the woman toward each other. Any breaking of the marriage bond is a result of sin and causes human suffering; therefore it is the duty of husband and wife to meet all frictions, offenses, and disagreements with a humble, forgiving spirit that persistently works for reconciliation. If at any time the stability of their marriage is threatened, the couple is to (any of the following); seek the counsel of a pastor, of other spiritual leaders in the Church, or of other professional Christian counselors as soon as possible before any other action is taken. It is our aim and prayer that the vows made to God will be held in place by the power of the Spirit and not allow the failures of the flesh to result in a divorce.

23 Following the example and teaching of our Lord, we acknowledge the responsibility to deal compassionately and redemptively with human frailty and sin in every area of life, including the failure of marriage. As ambassadors of Christ we are called to be agents of reconciliation, we recognize that people of sincere faith and with good counsel may still decide or be forced to divorce. We believe it is our Christian responsibility to pray for, support, and encourage those who have divorced, the children of the divorced, and all who are wounded by divorce.

B. Family Life

24 As parents, remembering that our children are the property of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 1:19), we will bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) and take all possible care to preserve them from evil influences. For this reason we will seek to approve ourselves as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, setting an example for our children. We will give faithful attention to the spiritual development of our children, both in the home and in the church. We will endeavor to conduct regular family devotions.

IV The Witness of a Christian Citizen

A. Recognition of Civil Authority

25 We will be subject to the civil authorities as the powers ordained of God, in accordance with the admonitions of Scripture (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13-14) and will in no way evade the taxes and other obligations which are lawfully required of us (Romans 13:7).

B. Responsibilities

26 Considering it a special privilege to live in a democratic society, we will faithfully fulfill the responsibilities of our citizenship, among which are intelligent and well-informed voting, a willingness to assume public office, guiding the decisions of government by the expression of our opinions, and supporting good government by our personal efforts.

C. A Higher Loyalty

27 Though giving our loyalty to the state of which we are citizens, we do

recognize a higher loyalty to God and conscience (Acts 5:29).

D. Peacemakers

28 For the sake of the peace which we have with God, we earnestly desire to live peaceably with all people and to seek the peace of the places where we dwell.

V Our Witness in the World

A. Love Toward All

29 As Paupers, we strive to not hate, despise, slander, or otherwise injure anyone. Our hope is to strive to manifest love towards all people, to treat them in a kind and friendly manner, and in our dealings with them to approve ourselves upright, honest, and conscientious, as becomes children of God. Together with the universal Christian Church, we have a concern for this world, opening our heart and hand to our neighbors with the message of the love of God, and being ever ready to minister of our substance to their necessities (Matthew 25:40).

B. Our Manner of Life

30 When the opportunities arise, we aim to be ready to cheerfully witness of our faith (1 Peter 3:15,16) and if need be, to suffer reproach for Christ's sake (Luke 6:22,23). Being aware that our witness is made by both what we do and what we avoid doing, we will endeavor to let our manner of life "be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27), "not being conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2). But in our yearning for the redemption of the whole creation, we will seek to meet the needs of the world in self-giving love, and as true bonded-members of Jesus Christ, willingly share in the fellowship of his sufferings, walking in his strength, by whom all things "are given us that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).

C. Temperance in All Things

31 Remembering the admonition of Scripture to be temperate in all things (1 Corinthians 9:25), we shall endeavor to look upon our bodies as temples of God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). We must also remember to respect the welfare of others who may be affected by our actions (Romans 14:20,21). We are aware of the problems that can be caused by the intemperate use of such things as alcoholic beverages, food, tobacco, drugs, and other things. We consider it the responsibility of every Christian to decide most carefully how they can be used in good conscience. We regard intemperance in any area of living as being inconsistent with the Christian life.

D. Unity

32 Christian: We recognize no distinction between those who are one in the Lord. We believe that God in Jesus Christ calls his people out of “every race, kindred, and tongue,” pardons them beneath the Cross, and brings them into a living fellowship with himself. We regard it as a commandment of our Lord to bear public witness to this and to demonstrate by word and deed that we are one in Christ.

33 Universal: Because we hold that all people are God's creatures (Genesis 1:27) and that he has made of one blood all nations (Acts 17:26), we oppose any discrimination based on color, race, creed, or land of origin and declare that we should treat everyone with love and respect. Our convictions are not others convictions and we affirm the call to love our neighbors as we would love ourselves.

E. Other Areas

34 We realize that all areas of Christian life and conduct cannot be covered in this statement of principles by which we live and bear our witness, and we call attention, therefore, to the Christian's responsibility to follow Christ as Lord of all areas of life.

VI Discipline

35 We make it a duty of the Board of Elders, which is charged with the spiritual welfare of the congregation, to see that this *Paupers Chapel Covenant* be adhered to and faithfully observed; and we will cooperate with the Board of Elders in its efforts to maintain the discipline of the congregation. As a redemptive community we will be much more concerned in aiding than censuring those who falter, being conscious of our own need for correction and forgiveness.

Execution of Membership -

I _____ (print), have read this document in its entirety and agree to the principals stated within this covenant. Knowing the Elders of Paupers' Chapel understand the hardship of following Christ and they themselves being constant recipients of God's grace, trust this church to be a safe place for the development of my calling to be a disciple and make disciples. May the Spirit of God helps us all.

Signature and Date