

Statement of Welcome (for bulletin, website, etc.)

We welcome and invite all people to begin or deepen their relationship with Christ and to fully participate in the life and ministry of our church as worshippers, members, leaders, and lay staff. We celebrate the gifts and presence of diverse Christians among us—whether those differences be race, ethnicity, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, or socioeconomic class. We are blessed by our diversity and are unified in Christ.

North Park Covenant Church Statement on Inclusion and Our Life Together

We welcome and invite all people to begin or deepen their relationship with Christ and to fully participate in the life and ministry of our church.

A Created and Called People

We believe that all people are created with the essential dignity and intrinsic value that comes from being made in the image of God (Genesis 1). This fundamental identity calls us as individuals and church communities to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as our self (Luke 10:27). We recognize that sin, both individual and social, has distorted our relationships with God, self, and others (Romans 3). Though broken in these relationships, we believe that, by grace through faith, nothing can ultimately separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38–39). Because we have been so reconciled in Christ, God has called us to the ministry of reconciliation with each other (2 Corinthians 5:16–21). We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Our Covenant Identity

“The Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) is a communion of congregations gathered by God, united in Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey the great commandment and the great commission.”¹ As a member congregation of the ECC, our founding identity is to be a friend of all who fear God (Psalm 119:63). Our vitality stems from our new life in Christ, which foremost calls us to live for God’s glory and neighbors’ good. Our authority is the living word of Scripture, which we confess as the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct.²

Recognizing that faithful people can and will come to different interpretations of Scripture, we commit to fellowship with one another, as together we seek God and participate in God’s mission. Our church’s core mission is guided by a faith active in love—knowing “the two cannot be separated without diminishing the gospel.”³ As Christ’s representative in the world, the church is to be an agent of grace, entrusted with the message of reconciliation, hope, justice, and peace. We strive to model Christ both in how we agree and disagree with one another; our unity does not require uniformity. These values have guided the ECC since its founding in 1885.

Our Lament

We confess that our church has not fully lived into its call to be the body of Christ. This confession is more than a generic admission of sin; it recognizes and admits that at times we have neglected marginalized friends and members. Too often we have chosen to remain in the quiet comfort of the familiar rather than be challenged by the diverse witnesses Christ brings to our church (Matthew 25:14–46). We confess that our silence has hurt individuals, driven some away, and prevented us from being a truly welcoming community. We repent and seek forgiveness for what we have done and for what we have left undone.

¹Constitution of North Park Covenant Church, Preamble; Evangelical Covenant Church Constitution and Bylaws, Preamble.

²Evangelical Covenant Church Constitution and Bylaws, “Confession,” Article II, Section 2.1.

³*Covenant Affirmations*, “Whole Mission of the Church” (2005), 12.

On Human Sexuality and the Life of Our Church

As a congregation, North Park Covenant Church (NPCC) has met to discuss, pray, and discern questions of human sexuality and what it means to love our neighbor. We have considered scriptural, theological, and ecclesial interpretations of these matters, consulted resources from the ECC, and listened to personal experiences.⁴ We acknowledge that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) persons have been a part of our church community throughout our congregation's many years, and it may not have been a safe space for LGBTQ people to come out. In light of this, it is important that we make clear our welcome to LGBTQ persons and families.

We invite all persons—regardless of gender identity, marital status, or sexual orientation—to receive baptism, communion, and pastoral care and to fully participate in our life together as worshippers, members, leaders, and lay staff.

We recognize the complexity of journeying together in a theologically diverse congregation and denomination. Our credentialed Covenant pastors are not able to officiate or host same-sex weddings. We are likewise restricted from calling LGBTQ pastors to lead our church unless they are committed to living by the ECC's discerned position on human sexuality, which is faithfulness in heterosexual marriage and celibacy in singleness.⁵ We realize that not all our members will come to the same conclusion about the Bible's teaching on same-sex relationships and gender identity, and that people's convictions may change over time. In this context, nevertheless, we will support and trust each other, including our LGBTQ members, to discern God's guidance in our lives.

Our Mutual Commitments

Church membership brings individuals and the body of Christ into mutual commitment. "Membership does not purport to be spiritual maturity, but rather the indication of having given oneself unreservedly to Christ while recognizing the importance of community for that journey going forward."⁶ "Membership in the church shall be granted on application to those who through faith in God's son, our Lord Jesus Christ, have been born anew to a living hope, have been baptized according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to live a Christian life, and promise to support the overall ministry of the church and to share in its worship, fellowship, and service."⁷

Through grace, all are equally capable of a personal relationship with God, and we welcome the gifts and presence of diverse Christians among us—whether those be differences of race, ethnicity, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, or socioeconomic class. We are blessed by our diversity and are unified in Christ. As a body we are committed to listen to and learn from all within our community so that together we may better dwell in Christ's love and live into our calling to be the church. We exhort every believer to submit humbly to the conviction and guidance of the Holy Spirit in all areas of their life.

While the work of reconciliation can be fraught with risk and fear, our sentiment is not to fight a culture war but to seek Christ and to love people. In this spirit, we commit to advocate for those who are marginalized and to not be a barrier to those seeking access to the church and God's love, grace, and forgiveness. We pray that Christ's love will dwell deeply within us all, and that we will continue to share that love with one another.

Conclusion

Our welcome arises from the presence of Christ in our lives, the witness of the Holy Scriptures, and our character as a congregation in the North Park neighborhood and the ECC. It neither seeks to settle any theological debate nor argue for a particular interpretation of specific Scriptures. Rather, it welcomes into our common life all who seek Christ and fellowship with his people.

⁴For more information on this process and for additional resources, see <http://www.npcovenant.org/hstf-resources/>.

⁵Evangelical Covenant Church, "Guidelines for Covenant Pastors and Congregations Regarding Human Sexuality," 2015, available at <http://www.covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/10/Guidelines-for-Covenant-Pastors-and-Congregations-Regarding-Human-Sexuality.pdf>.

⁶Evangelical Covenant Church, "Guidelines for Covenant Pastors and Congregations Regarding Human Sexuality."

⁷North Park Covenant Church Constitution, Article V.