



COVENANT
AFFIRMATIONS

A conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit. The Covenant Church, rooted in historic Christianity, affirms one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit continues the creative work of the Father and the redeeming work of the Son within the life of the church. It is for this reason the Covenant Church has emphasized the continuing work of the Spirit.

According to the Gospel of John, the earthly Jesus promised that the same Spirit of God that “remained on him” (1:32) would one day live in his disciples as a result of his crucifixion and resurrection. The Spirit “abides with you,” he said, “and will be in you” (14:17). It was this Holy Spirit that came to abide in Paul, filling him with the presence of God and directing him, just as it had Jesus. For this reason Paul could claim, “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). It is the spirit in us that enables us to continue Christ’s mission in the world (Acts 1:8).

The New Testament affirms that the Holy Spirit works both within and among individuals. It is the Holy Spirit that draws together those who are far off and estranged, causing them to be made one in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22). It is the Holy Spirit that stirs within each of us a deep sense of familial affection for one another, so that we are beloved to one another (1 Corinthians 15:58). It is because Christ has become our brother (Romans 8:29) that we are together members of the family of God (Ephesians 3:14-16). It is the Spirit of God within us that cries “Abba,” as we have been adopted into the family of God, sisters and brothers one with another (Galatians 4:4-7). It is the Holy Spirit, Paul asserted, that affords a sense of unity and common purpose among Christians (Philippians 1:27; 2:1-2).

The Covenant understanding of the Holy Spirit, rooted in the New Testament, is further informed by the Reformation idea that word and Spirit are inseparable. It is the Spirit of God that enlivens the preaching of the gospel within the community of faith and grants efficacy to the sacraments participated in by the community of faith. The Covenant also draws upon its Pietist heritage for understanding the Holy Spirit. We believe it is the work of the Holy Spirit to instill in the human heart a desire to turn to Christ. We believe it is the work of the Holy Spirit to assure believers that Christ dwells within them.

We believe that the Holy Spirit, in concert with our obedience, conforms us to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-29).

The early Covenanters in Sweden were linked by a common awareness of the grace of God in their lives. They spoke of the Holy Spirit communicating this warm sense of God's grace to each one individually and directing them to a common devotion to God in Christ through the reading of the Bible and frequent meetings for the purpose of mutual encouragement and edification. They perceived the Holy Spirit leading them corporately to common mission and purpose.

The early Covenanters in North America were conscious of the presence and purpose of God through the activity of the Holy Spirit among them. They were certain the Holy Spirit was at work in their churches and particularly in leading them to form the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant denomination. At the organizational meeting of the Covenant, C.A. Björk spoke to the effect that an organizational meeting can never produce unity; God's people become one, he said, through the leading of the Holy Spirit. The early Covenanters believed that each Christian needs to await the voice of God as revealed not only to the individual, but also through the witness of other believers. They believed the Holy Spirit is alive and active, working through preaching, the sacraments, the Scriptures, and in the witness of one another.

The Covenant Church believes that the Spirit of God is active and "blows where it chooses" (John 3:8). The Spirit is the prevenient actor in the drama of salvation, the creator of hunger for Christ's life, and the fulfiller of that hunger. We are often surprised at the unfolding of God's purpose, suggesting that our ways and thoughts are not always the ways and thoughts of God. For this reason Covenanters desire to cultivate a healthy humility before God open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. When God is about doing a new thing (Isaiah 43:19), we wish to perceive God at work rather than be found dull to the divine purpose. We wish to see with the eyes of the Spirit, and not merely with our own. The Covenant Church believes with Paul that the Holy Spirit endows believers with spiritual gifts, the purpose of which is to serve the Christian community that is the very body of Christ. As a believer's church the Covenant has valued the Reformation concept of the priesthood of all believers, and sees it rooted in the idea of mutual interdependence expressed in Paul's notion of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). The Spirit bestows

gifts on individual Christians for the benefit of others, not the benefit of the one who has received the gift. It is the plan of God through the work of the Spirit that within the body of Christ we need one another. Accordingly, while recognizing the legitimacy of all the spiritual gifts, the Covenant Church has historically been unmarked by an emphasis on any one or one type of spiritual gift. This deep trust in the gentle leading of the Spirit has remained true of the Covenant Church through the years.