



christ-centered community in a divided world

BEING

CHURCH

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction & How to Use This Guide

How can we be a Christian community in a time of growing divisions within both society and the church at large? How do faith in Christ, the surprising activity of the Holy Spirit, and the power of covenant bonds invite us into boundary-breaking forms of relationship with God and one another? The Being Church course explores questions like these and whether our shared identity in Christ might offer us a way to see our differences not as threats but rather as opportunities for growth. It uses our denomination's (Evangelical Covenant Church) Six Covenant Affirmations – 1) the centrality of the word of God, 2) the necessity of the new birth, 3) a commitment to the whole mission of the Church, 4) the Church as a fellowship of believers, 5) a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit, and 6) the reality of freedom in Christ – to assist us in these explorations. This course helps us to imagine new ways of being joined together in Christ through the transformative power of the gospel.

We don't expect everyone to come to this class with the same background or with similar life experiences. Nor do we assume that we'll land in the same places on the other side of the course. However, we do hope that all participants will commit to the journey together, upholding Highrock's values of honesty, humility, and curiosity while seeking to offer hospitality and solidarity at all times to others in the group.

This guide serves as a one-stop resource for each of the six sessions. *Prior to each session*, watch the assigned video(s) and read the Scripture passage and Covenant Affirmation for that week. Links to the videos, passages, and Affirmations are provided below. Discussion questions for each session are also provided. They are divided into "Teaching" questions, based on the overview of the Covenant Affirmation in the first part of each video, and "Conversation" questions which draw from the live dialogues contained in the second part of each recording.

Questions were formed by Scott Rice (Resident Theologian, Highrock Church). They aren't meant to be exclusive but rather conversation starters. All Scripture passages are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE).

Please adhere to the Conversation Covenant listed on the following pages.

If you are using this with a group and can't make it to one of your sessions, we encourage you to write your small group (breakout group) members a note reflecting on what was raised for you in that week's video and reading.

Consider creating a way for your group to share relevant articles, videos, or books that will help connect you throughout the week and allow your meeting time to be more focused. Examples of this might be a Slack channel, a Facebook group, or an email or text thread.

Conversation Covenant

The Conversation Covenant* is an agreement to hold respect and grace toward all participants within a discussion group, no matter the conversation topic.

*Adapted from <https://conversational-leadership.net/conversation-covenant/>

I pledge:

To act in good faith, with curiosity. I will assume the best about my conversation partners when entering into our groups. I will give the benefit of the doubt, recognizing that they may know something I don't.

To show respect. I will show respect. I will be polite and give due regard to the feelings and traditions of others. I understand that I do not have to agree with someone to show them respect.

To speak the truth. I won't use rhetorical tricks to try to win an argument. I will speak what I genuinely believe is the nuanced truth.

To aim to discover the truth. I will not enter into a conversation with the purpose of changing the mind of anyone to my way of thinking.

To focus on what we can change. I will focus on what we can do differently in the future since we cannot change what we did in the past.

To take responsibility for the conversation. I will take responsibility for the quality of the conversation and the abidance of the rules both in principle and in spirit.

To follow the covenant even when others fail to do so. I will abide by the rules regardless of whether another person breaks them.

To respect the confidentiality of the group. I will not share stories of group members verbally or in written form (including on social media and online outlets).

To lighten up and approach the conversation in good humor. I recognize that humor is a hallmark of a constructive, generative conversation and take the conversation in good humor.

Session 1:
Introduction & The Centrality of the Word of God
with Dave Swaim, David Swanson, and Dominique DuBois Gilliard

A. YouTube Links: [Introduction](#) & [Session 1](#)

B. Session Materials:

- Scripture Reading: [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)
- [Covenanters Reading Scripture Through History](#)
- Affirmation 1: [The Centrality of the Word of God](#)

C. Discussion Questions:

Teaching

1. What did you learn about this Affirmation, the Centrality of the Word of God? Is the Word of God as three-fold – Christ, Bible, biblical testimony – new to you? Do you find it helpful?
2. Rev. Dominique emphasizes human dignity and justice, hearing *and* responding to God’s word, and cultural diversity. How does this Affirmation help us to love God and others better? How might it shape our faith communities, helping us navigate diversity and unity in the church?

Conversation

3. What stood out to you in this conversation? How did it help you reflect on the first Affirmation regarding the Centrality of the Word of God?
4. How did Rev. Dominique and Pastor David’s discussion help you reflect on what it means to *be a church community*, either in terms of what was said or concerning their relationship?
5. Rev. Dominique and Pastor David talk about the “attractional capacity” of the Word of God and being inspired by the “tradition of holy resistance” in reading Scripture. Share your reflections on these ideas.
6. How is your faith, the way you read the Bible, or how you relate to God different because of your relationships with other people, particularly people whose backgrounds or traditions differ in some way from your own?

Session 2:
The Necessity of the New Birth
with John Mury and Vinnie Cappetta

A. YouTube Link: [Session 2](#)

B. Session Materials:

- Scripture Reading: [2 Corinthians 5:17](#)
- Affirmation 2: [The Necessity of the New Birth](#)

C. Discussion Questions:

Teaching

1. What are your first impressions when you hear the phrase “new birth” or being “born again”? Is it familiar, uncomfortable, appealing, or something else?
2. How, if at all, did this video change your understanding of new birth or life in Christ? What is an area in your life where God might be calling you into transformation or something new?
3. Pastor John talks about Martin Luther’s idea of not one but many conversions that happen in our life. In other words, God constantly invites us to begin again. How does this idea sit with you? How might it open up a more living and interactive relationship with God and others?

Conversation

4. What stood out to you in this conversation? How did it help you reflect on the second Affirmation regarding the necessity of new birth?
5. How has community influenced your faith? How have you found help or solace from others during a challenging time? What does it look like to discern (or see) God at work in experiences like these?
6. What might new birth as a “world of possibilities” mean for you? What’s one thing you would like to see God do in your life or church community?

Session 3:
A Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church
with Maurice Cox and Jon Woolner

A. YouTube Link: [Session 3](#)

B. Session Materials:

- Scripture Reading: [Matthew 22:34-40](#), [Matthew 28:16-20](#)
- Affirmation 3: [A Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church](#)

C. Discussion Questions:

Teaching

1. What did you learn about this Affirmation, a Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church? Did this expand your understanding of what the church's "whole" mission looks like? How so?
2. Pastor Maurice discusses the church's holistic mission in terms of the Great Commandment (Matthew 22, "love the Lord your God . . . love your neighbor as yourself") and the Great Commission (Matthew 28, "go and make disciples"). Which one do you resonate with more?
3. Of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, which has been emphasized more for you in the past? How do you think this has shaped you? What might it look like for you to focus on or grow in the one that was deemphasized?

Conversation

4. What stood out to you in the conversation between Pastor Maurice and Pastor Jon? How did it help you reflect on the Affirmation of the Necessity of the New Birth?
5. Did you see ways that Pastor Maurice and Pastor Jon connected across their differences on a personal level? Does this inspire you to think about how we can relate to one another and be more welcoming as a faith community across – not in spite of – our differences? What might this look like for you?
6. After viewing this conversation, reflect on what it means to be in committed relationships with one another in a faith community. How can this help us navigate our differences and be faithful to the larger (whole) mission of the church? What limitations or challenges do you foresee? How will you navigate challenges like conflict and disagreement well?

Session 4:
The Church as a Fellowship of Believers
with Liz Mosbo VerHage and Dieula Previlon

A. YouTube Link: [Session 4](#)

B. Session Materials:

- Scripture Reading: [Galatians 3:28](#)
- Affirmation 4: [The Church as a Fellowship of Believers](#)

C. Discussion Questions:

Teaching

1. What did you learn about this Affirmation about the Church as a Fellowship of Believers?
2. What comes to mind when you hear the word “church”? What has faith community meant (or not meant) to you?
3. Pastor Liz talks about us all being necessary to one another: every person in the faith community contributes something and is valuable. Where in your life and community is this truth emphasized? Where is it ignored?
4. Pastor Liz reflects on how our denomination, the Covenant, has made space for different theological views on baptism and communion. How might these examples encourage us to *be church* today?

Conversation

5. What stood out to you in this conversation? How did it help you reflect on the Affirmation of the Church as a Fellowship of Believers?
6. Did the conversation between Pastors Liz and Dieula generate any ideas or helpful practices for you around processing hurt in and from the church, having honest conversations, self-care, or how Christ can show up in unexpected ways?
7. What’s one way this Affirmation encourages you to pursue healthier, deeper relationships in and with a church community?

Session 5:
A Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit
with Greg Hsu and LeLe Hsu

A. YouTube Link: [Session 5](#)

B. Session Materials:

- Scripture Reading: [Acts 2:1-11](#)
- Affirmation 5: [A Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit](#)

C. Discussion Questions:

Teaching

1. What did you learn about this Affirmation regarding a Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit?
2. Is talking about or relating to the Holy Spirit new for you? How would you describe your understanding of, or relationship to, the Holy Spirit?

Conversation

3. What stood out to you in this conversation? How did it help you reflect on the Affirmation of a Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit?
4. What role do you see community playing in discerning the Spirit's voice in our lives and churches?
5. Pastors LeLe and Greg talked about how they relate to the Spirit differently. Do you resonate with either of them? Have you learned (or are you learning) from someone else how to relate to the Spirit in a new way? How so?
6. The Spirit offers us different gifts and brings us together in our differences. Where do you hope to see the Spirit at work more in your own life and in our churches today?

Session 6:
The Reality of Freedom in Christ
with Meghan DeJong and Scott Rice

A. YouTube Link: [Session 6](#)

B. Session Materials:

- Scripture Reading: [Galatians 5:1](#)
- Affirmation 6: [The Reality of Freedom in Christ](#)

C. Discussion Questions:

Teaching

1. What did you learn about this Affirmation about the Reality of Freedom in Christ? How does this idea compare to other ideas or images that you have of freedom (or liberty)?
2. How can this Affirmation help us build better relationships with one another?
3. Freedom in Christ has a lot to do with recognizing faith as a journey or a process with different stages. Is this concept helpful as you think about *being church* with others?

Conversation

4. What stood out to you in this conversation? How did it help you reflect on the Affirmation of the Reality of Freedom in Christ?
5. Pastor Meghan talks about how we each need to do our own work in order to use our freedom in Christ wisely. Consider some of the inner work you're currently doing or want to do. How do you see this work contributing or benefiting yourself and others in your community?
6. What are your hopes for the church? How can you pray for these things? Where do you think God is leading you to participate in *being church* today?