

SYCBaps

Congregational Discernment Gathering

19 May 2019

1. Attendance

Cameron Cutts, Dom Filippi, Eliz Cook, Ian Cook, John Fowler, Liesl Filippi, Lior Filippi, Merryl Gahan, Nathan Nettleton, Paul Gahan, Samara Pitt, Shelley Taylor, Sylvia Sandeman, and Tara Filippi.

Apologies

Daniel Stott, Danielle Stott, Dennis Fisher, Eric Lam, John Sampson, Glennys Williams, and Suzanne Peart.

2. Consideration of a New Style of Church Covenant

Background

Last year we began some discussions about church membership - what does it mean to be a member? How is that expressed? What are the pathways to membership? etc.

It became apparent that a key question in this discussion is the nature of our Church Covenant and how it relates to membership. As described in an earlier report, the challenge we are grappling with is to find a pathway that satisfies the seemingly contradictory desires for both:

- a more inclusive structure that more fully and clearly affirms the belonging of children and other people who connect with us but are unable to commit to much more; and*
- a more rigorous covenant that sets out some clear challenges to be more prayerful, responsible, involved, connected and caring in our interactions with one another.*

From that discussion, the pastor tentatively proposed consideration of a model in which the covenant would be separated from membership. Membership would be open to, and almost automatic for, anyone who is participating in our church life. Membership would enable full and valued participation in the shared life, prayer and ministry of the congregation.

Covenanting would be an optional pathway for those who would find it a helpful way to deepen their commitment to and engagement with this shared congregational life.

Some people helpfully suggested that covenanting too could be more accessible if we allow people to write their own personal covenant. The challenge with that idea though is to ensure that what people are writing is not their own personal development plan, but their commitment to engaging with the congregation in its communal life, prayer and ministry; to making church happen. However, the idea has continued to percolate, and we think we may have come up with a workable proposal.

The proposed draft of this optional covenant (appended to this report) retains all the structure and wording of the existing covenant, but it then invites those who wish to covenant to express their own personal contributions to each aspect of our covenanted life. It would not be expected that people would have something in every section.

The hope is that this can be more rigorous, by challenging covenanters to think seriously about the sorts of contributions we can reasonably and realistically be expected to make. But the hope is that it will also be more inclusive and accessible by avoiding any one-size-

fits-all approach and allowing people to identify contributions that match their own passions, energies, abilities and availability.

Discussion

A “talking circle” was used to allow everybody present multiple opportunities to share their thoughts, reactions and questions. There was widespread support for the worth of the proposal. There was appreciation of the importance of retaining the overall covenant, and the feeling that the proposal was adding to it in ways which might be helpful to us and more inclusive. There was also recognition of people’s differing circumstances and life stages, and that as a result, how each person expresses their individual commitment to the Covenant will be different, and can change over time.

As with every discussion about the Covenant we’ve had in this church, some people can feel daunted or think that they are not able to commit or contribute. It was felt that maybe talking it over with someone else might be helpful as they might be able to see past any blind spots. Several people who described having felt daunted by it also said that on reflection, it felt doable and worthwhile.

The main unresolved questions were around the means by, and extent to which people would be making their individual commitments known to others. It was noted that for this year, any use of the proposed new covenant could only be a trial, since more than that would require constitutional change, and so sharing the content would be entirely voluntary and optional this year.

Proposal: That we encourage the use of the new style of covenant on a trial basis this year, noting that people will continue to be able to renew their covenanting by simply affirming the existing generic covenant as in the past, and that next year we review the trial before considering whether to adopt it more fully.

Outcome: The proposal was unanimously affirmed.

3. The gathering was closed with concluding prayers.