

2021 EDITION

C O V E N A N T
M E M B E R S H I P
H A N D B O O K

P A R T I

S O J O U R N

INTRODUCTION

This handbook is designed to give you a comprehensive look at Sojourn Houston and your local congregation. Part I covers what every Sojourn congregation has in common, including our shared Confession of Faith, vision statement, authority structure, and multiplication strategy. Part II is specific to your local congregation, intended to demonstrate how your local congregation is taking these shared beliefs and values and expressing them within your unique context.

OUR CORE CONVICTIONS

Sojourn Houston is built upon three essential pillars that shape all that we do together: the Gospel, the Church, and the Mission. Everything we do is founded upon (1) who God is and what He has done, (2) who God has created us to be, and (3) what God has commissioned us to do. These three pillars will function as the basic outline of Part I.

GOSPEL

The gospel is a royal announcement that the crucified and risen Jesus, the Jewish Messiah who died for our sins and rose again according to the Scriptures, has been enthroned as the Lord of the world, the King of Kings. We want this royal announcement to saturate everything we do, from our songs and sermons to our homes and everyday conversations. We believe gospel-saturated churches give shape to gospel-saturated neighborhoods and cities.

CHURCH

The one church is dispersed through time and space; we are both ancient and modern, both local and global. At the same time, the church is a real-world community of real-world men, women, and children. Our life together embodies on earth the eternal communion of the Triune God. We have been adopted by the Father, united as the very Body of the incarnate Son, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, such that all the world should learn to trust and submit to Jesus Christ as the King of Kings.

MISSION

From Genesis 1:26-28 to this very moment, God's people have always been a missionary people. We are a missionary people because God is a missionary God. In John 20, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon His disciples, saying, "As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you." The church has been swept up into the mission of the Triune God. Sent from

the Father in the Spirit, Jesus came as the Light of the world, and the church is calling the nations to that Light. Thus, mission is not merely a program or activity of the church, but the very essence of the church.

Once again, these three pillars sustain everything we do. Each is essential. If we get the gospel but leave out the church and the mission, we are nothing more than a theological seminary. If we get the church but leave out the gospel and the mission, we are nothing more than a country club. If we get the mission but leave out the gospel and the church, we are nothing more than a social activist group.

On the contrary, we are the redeemed people of the crucified and risen King of Kings, and we have been commissioned and sent to call every nation and all of creation to submit to His loving, gracious dominion.

THE GOSPEL

WHO IS GOD?

The question that stands before all others is this: Which God do we worship? God is a mystery. Unless He reveals Himself, we cannot know Him. But because He *has* revealed Himself, we *can* know Him. We cannot exhaust our knowledge of God or understand Him fully, but God desires to be known, and He has made Himself knowable.

In John 17, Jesus prays, "Father... you loved me before the foundation of the world." Before anything else, God was a Father loving His Son. Fatherhood is fundamental to God's identity (Exodus 4:22, Isaiah 1:2, 63:16, 64:8, Jeremiah 3:4, 3:19, 31:9, Hosea 11:1, Deuteronomy 8:5, 32:6, Psalm 103:13, Malachi 1:6, John 20:17, Romans 15:6, 1 Peter 1:3, 1 Corinthians 1:3, Hebrews 12:7). And what is a father? In the biological sense, a father is a life-giving person, one who has begotten a child. God the Father has forever been the eternal Father of the eternal Son; from before the foundation of the world, the Father has loved and given life to the Son by the Holy Spirit.

In the words of the Nicene Creed, the Christian God is one God in three persons: "the Father almighty," the Son, "begotten from the Father before all ages," and the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and giver of life."

Because the Christian God is triune, He is not lonely in His essence. Self-giving, interpersonal love is at the root of God's identity. Again, the Father loves and gives life to the Son, and He does so by the Spirit (1 John 3:24), who is the unseen yet active personal presence of God in the world, particularly within the Church. Just

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

How has the Triune God revealed Himself? He has revealed Himself through human history, as recorded in the Scriptures.

"God has spoken and continues to speak in and through Scripture, the only infallible and sufficiently clear rule and authority for Christian faith, thought, and life. Scripture is God's inspired and illuminating Word in the words of his servants (Psalm 119:105), the prophets and apostles, a gracious self-communication of God's own light and life, a means of grace for growing in knowledge and holiness. The Bible is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it commands, trusted in all that it promises, and revered in all that it reveals (2 Timothy 3:16)."

- From the *Reforming Catholic Confession*

as the Father loves and gives life to the Son by the Spirit, the Father and the Son love and give life to us, the Church, by the Spirit.

WHAT HAS GOD DONE?

The nature and essence of the three-in-one God is chiefly expressed through the manner in which He has dealt with humanity throughout history, as recorded in the Scriptures. God's act of creation was itself a Trinitarian act. The Father's life-giving love for the Son burst out for our sake. The Father spoke the world into existence, and the Word He spoke was the Son (Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:3), and the breath with which He spoke was the Spirit (Job 26:13). Made in the image of a Triune God, human beings are created to experience loving, harmonious relationships with God and with one another.

But the triunity of God is most clearly displayed in the Christian gospel. It did not take long for sinful man to spoil the good and beautiful world created by God. Though we were made for relational harmony, the rebellion of Adam and Eve struck a dark, discordant note that still reverberates throughout the world today.

In response, the Triune God of the Bible took action to bring salvation, and that salvation was itself trinitarian. The Father sent the Son because the Father loved the Son, and He wanted all of creation to know that love and fellowship. The Son, delighting to do the will of the Father, responded obediently to the Father's sending, ultimately laying down His life of His own accord (John 10:18). The Spirit is then sent by the Father and the Son to apply this great work, bearing the fruit of salvation to all the nations. Thus, nobody but God accomplishes the work of salvation.

THE TRINITY AS A MODEL FOR SOCIETY

We live in a fragmented society. Interpersonal relationships are fragmented. Ethnicities are fragmented. Politics are fragmented. Over time, we seem to have lost a shared basis for communal life and/or social cohesion. In many cases, we have failed to integrate our individuality as persons with our plurality as a nation.

Our society needs a clear picture of the Triune God, a God who perfectly integrates individuality with plurality. God's triune nature teaches us that relationship is essential to personhood. As Christians, we are united to one another in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We are interdependent and bound to one another in holy love. We are members of one body. This sort of communal life, a communal life that's founded upon and informed by our doctrine of the Trinity, will be a tangible witness to a world that desperately needs to see individuality and plurality successfully integrated. The Church is called to function as an exemplary society amidst the nations, and we take our cues from the Triune God.

WHAT IS GOD DOING?

In accordance with the will of the Father, the Spirit takes what is true of the Son and makes it true of us. At the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit descended and the Father spoke His approval from the heavens. And because that same Spirit has descended upon the Church, those same words of approval apply to Christian people.

When the Spirit fell upon the Church on the day of Pentecost, the experience was spectacular — rushing wind, tongues of fire, three thousand conversions, etc. But the Spirit also works in the quiet. The work of the Spirit in our midst may not always be spectacular, but it is nonetheless miraculous. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christians are called to live joyful, loving, humble, and obedient lives. We pray, sing, baptize, teach, welcome, give, feast, and serve. In the midst of a dark and broken world, we shed light and bring healing by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is no small thing.

But the work of the Holy Spirit goes far beyond the individual hearts of Christian people, and really, far beyond our immediate Christian community. The Spirit applies the victory and righteousness of Christ to each of us, but the Spirit is also being poured out upon the whole earth, turning the desolate wilderness of this world into a fruitful garden (Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 39:29; Joel 2:29; Zechariah 12:10; Acts 2:17:18, 33; 10:45). The curse of Babel is reversed, and the divided nations are reunited by the Spirit.

World peace is not only possible, it's an eventuality.

Jonathan Edwards wrote: "It was made especially the Holy Spirit's work to bring the world to its beauty and perfection out of chaos; for the beauty of the world is a communication of God's beauty." The same Spirit who once hovered over the waters of creation, bringing "beauty and perfection out of chaos," now superintends the glorification of the new creation inaugurated in King Jesus. The Holy Spirit is renewing and re-creating the earth. The Lord and Giver of life is giving new life to a new world.

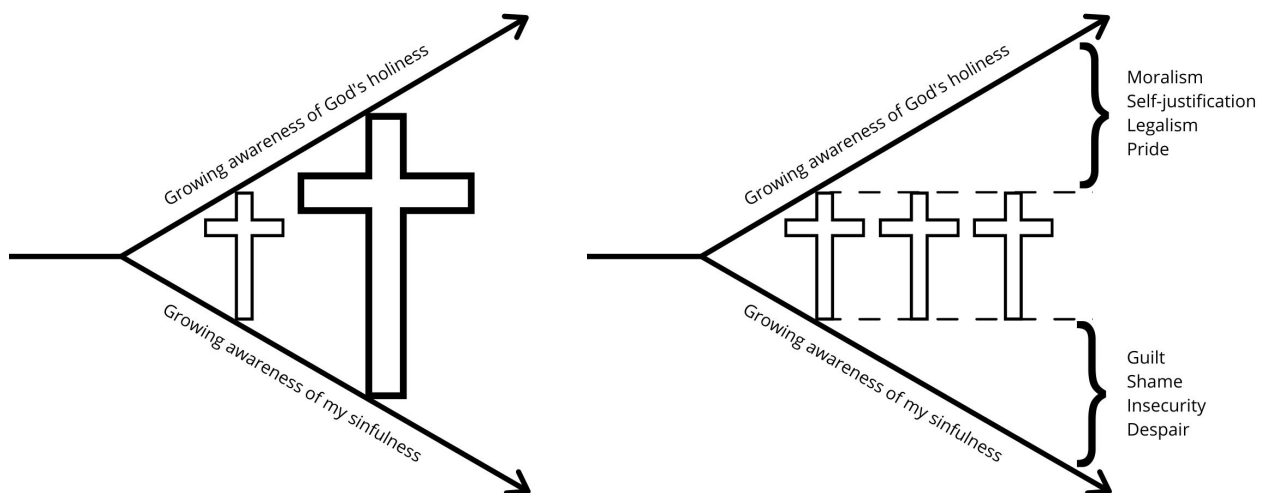
THE TRINITY AS A MODEL FOR THE CHURCH

Sojourn's ecclesiology (our doctrine of the nature and structure of the church) is rooted in the Trinitarian Godhead. Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons yet one God, so we are distinct congregations yet one church. Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are non-autonomous with respect to one another, so we are non-autonomous churches with respect to one another. We have sought to structure Sojourn Houston as a loving communion of neighborhood congregations, distinct yet united, particular yet one. We believe congregations in community most faithfully represent God to our city and ultimately, we believe we can do more together than apart.

APPLYING THE GOSPEL

Everything we do as a church ought to be rooted in what God has done and what God is doing. Christians are the firstfruits of God’s new creation. We are not merely a group of people with similar beliefs and religious practices. We are a new people, a new humanity, created through the work of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Accordingly, we want to rest in, rejoice in, and live our lives out of what God has done for us in Jesus. We never move past the gospel. We never graduate from the gospel. The Christian life is fundamentally about learning how to live in accordance with our new identity in Christ. It’s about *becoming* who we *are*, who God has already made us to be! So as we grow in our understanding of the gospel, we grow increasingly humble and increasingly grateful, because we are increasingly aware of *both* the gravity of our sin *and* magnitude of God’s mercy and grace. This idea is represented graphically below.



We desire for Sojourn Houston congregations to be marked by gospel fluency. Gospel fluency is the boldness and Biblical knowledge required to apply the gospel in every circumstance. The gospel is always relevant for everything in our lives, so we want to be prepared to speak the gospel and its implications to one another in the midst of everyday life — whether during official church events, over coffee, or while doing the dishes. Like Adam and Eve, we are quick to feel, think, believe, and act as though we are gods unto ourselves. We constantly need to be reminded of who God is, what God has done, and what God is doing in us and through us.

This sort of gospel-saturated community requires a growing Biblical literacy. If we are going to tailor our counsel according to each and every circumstance, we need to be so familiar with

the gospel that we can communicate different facets of the gospel from multiple angles. For instance, if a brother or sister is depressed or deeply anxious, saying “Jesus died for your sins” may not be very helpful. It’s absolutely true, but it may not be helpful in that moment. That person may need to hear, “God has proven Himself faithful, and He has promised to be with us always. God knows you, loves you, and cares for you. He is with you in your affliction, and I am with you too.” Such a response is rooted in the promises of God, but it speaks to how the person is actually feeling in the moment. When someone is feeling guilty or ashamed, *that* is when “Jesus died for your sins” may be most helpful.

Bottom line: we cannot reorient the human heart with pat answers and quick fixes. On occasion, a pat answer may be helpful. But repeating pat answers over and over again can actually do harm to the Body. If we want to build up the Body, we have to take the time to truly hear one another, to understand one another, to discern what is most needed, and to lovingly apply whatever is most needed.

Jesus spoke to tax collectors, sick people, Pharisees, rulers, prostitutes, beggars, widows, and children. Every time He taught, He shared the same message of redemption, but He did not use the same “script” every time. He knew enough about the Bible to thoughtfully and meaningfully communicate gospel truth in a way that met people where they were. So remember, as we grow in our knowledge of the Scriptures, we need to be generous with what we learn. Our personal spiritual growth should be of benefit to the whole Body.

And obviously, gospel fluency is a valuable tool for ministering to our non-Christian neighbors as well. If we have the Biblical knowledge required to apply the gospel in every circumstance, then we are well-equipped to evangelize within the natural flow of a conversation.

THE SOJOURN CONFESSION OF FAITH

We believe orthodoxy (historically accepted, essential Christian doctrine) is something that each local church should receive. Thus, we acknowledge certain written confessions to be good and accurate summaries of the Bible's teaching (for instance, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the 1689 London Baptist Confession, and the Belgic Confession, the Reforming Catholic Confession, etc.). Extra-biblical documents are never immune to flaw, but confessions present an opportunity to learn and grow in conversation with previous generations.

Sojourn Houston falls within a broadly Reformed tradition. Our Sojourn Confession of Faith (see the appendix) receives the Nicene Creed, the Gospel Coalition Confessional Statement, and the Acts 29 Theological Distinctives.

THE NICENE CREED

In accord with centuries of faithful Christians, Sojourn has adopted the Nicene Creed as a clear and essential statement of Christian orthodoxy. We ask that every covenant member at Sojourn come to full agreement concerning the following creed:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THREE CLARIFICATIONS

Catholic: This term is not in reference to the Roman Catholic Church in particular. The word “catholic” comes from the Greek *katholikos*, which means “universal.” On the day of Pentecost, the Church was born of the Holy Spirit, and from the very beginning, it was multicultural and radically inclusive. It is God’s express desire that every tribe, nation, and tongue throughout all generations should find their home in the Church.

Apostolic: The Church is to be rooted in the ministry, teachings, and writings of the apostles. According to Ephesians 2, the Church is “the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” In essence, this is a declaration that the Church is founded upon the Scriptures.

The Filioque Controversy: The *filioque* (Latin, “and the Son”) clause represents a theological controversy in relation to the Holy Spirit. On this page, the phrase is set apart by brackets. The Western Church accepted this clause as an addition to the Nicene Creed, but it was subsequently opposed by the Eastern Church. This seemingly minor alteration was an ongoing source of friction between the East and the West, eventually contributing to the Great Schism in 1054 AD. The essential matter in the *filioque* controversy is a desire to protect the deity of the Holy Spirit, a truth upon which both Western Christians and Eastern Christians agree unequivocally. So rather than delving into the finer points of the controversy, we merely wish to clarify that Sojourn Houston accepts covenant members who ascribe to either version of the Nicene Creed.

TGC CONFSSIONAL STATEMENT

We have adopted The Gospel Coalition Confessional Statement as a statement of our foundational doctrines (see the appendix). We ask that every member of Sojourn willingly submit to that summary of beliefs. If at any time your conscience will not permit you to submit to those doctrines, you should remove yourself from membership at Sojourn.

To clarify, we do *not* ask members to agree on every point, but we do ask that members refrain from being contentious or divisive by teaching a contrary doctrinal point of view. Disagreement is to be expected. In fact, we see disagreement as an excellent opportunity to demonstrate meaningful unity. However, any member who cannot disagree lovingly, any member who desires to spread a contrary doctrine, will be asked to remove themselves from Sojourn and find another community of faith.

ACTS 29 THEOLOGICAL DISTINCTIVES

As a member church of the Acts 29 Network, we have joined a global network of churches marked by a few theological distinctives. Because these distinctives will inevitably influence the teaching of Sojourn’s elders, those pursuing membership at Sojourn should be aware of

them. Total agreement is not necessary, but members should be able to submit to these distinctives with a clear conscience and without causing dissension.

I. WE ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT GOSPEL CENTRALITY.

As we have already discussed, the gospel is the foundation for the life of the Church. In all that we do, we want to be centered upon the gospel and saturated with the gospel.

Mark 1:1; Luke 24:46-47; John 3:16-18; Romans 1:16-17; Romans 1:18-25; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:2; 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; 9:13; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 1:7-10; Colossians 1:19-20; 2 Timothy 1:8-14; 2 Peter 3:11-13; Jude 3-4; Revelation 21:1-22:21

2. WE ENTHUSIASTICALLY EMBRACE THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD'S GRACE IN SAVING SINNERS.

We affirm that God chose us in Christ, sovereignly and unconditionally, before the foundation of the world. We believe the Holy Spirit draws us into union with Jesus, graciously overcoming our rebellious hearts. We also depend completely upon the grace of God for perseverance in salvation by grace through faith.

To understand and appreciate this doctrine of election, it is helpful to begin in the Old Testament. In choosing the nation of Israel, God was acting to restore all of creation. Israel's election was not simply an arbitrary privilege; rather, Israel's chosenness was fundamentally a call to serve and sacrifice so that the nations could know God. Israel is elected for mission. It was a privilege, but it was also an enormous responsibility. As the children of Abraham, Israel was called by God to bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:2-3).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"In the beginning, before time and space as we know them, before creation, before there was any reality distinct from God which could be the object of the love of God or the setting for His acts of freedom, God anticipated and determined within Himself . . . that the goal and meaning of all His dealings with the as yet non-existent universe should be the fact that in His Son He would be gracious towards man, uniting Himself with him. In the beginning it was the choice of the Father Himself to establish this covenant with man by giving up His Son for him, that He Himself might become man in fulfillment of His grace. In the beginning it was the choice of the Son to be obedient to grace, and therefore to offer up Himself and to become man in order that this covenant might become a reality. In the beginning it was the resolve of the Holy Spirit that the unity of God, of Father and Son should not be disturbed or rent by this covenant with man, but that it should be made the more glorious, the deity of God, the divinity of His love and freedom, being conformed and demonstrated in this offering of the Father and this self-offering of the Son. This choice was in the beginning. As the subject and object of this choice, Jesus Christ was at the beginning."

-- Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*

In Ephesians 1, Paul emphasizes that salvation depends upon God's sovereign choice and predestination (5). But for Paul, predestination is about more than individual salvation. God's purpose is to "unite all things" in Christ (10). In other words, your salvation, my salvation, the formation of the Church, and the whole course of human history depend entirely on God. Nothing can thwart His purposes.

So we should resist the temptation to think about election in purely individual terms, as though the whole point is individual salvation or damnation. Rather, we are meant to see how our individual stories are swept up into the grand, cosmic narrative of redemption, a narrative centered upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus is the truly "elect" one, the chosen one of God.

One last point of emphasis: God's sovereignty over the plan of salvation does not diminish the responsibility of individual people to respond in faith and obedience to Christ. Nor does God's sovereignty over the plan of salvation marginalize the power and necessity of prayer and evangelism. Again, we have been chosen for mission. God desires to bless all the nations through the Church.

John 1:12-13; 6:37-44; 10:25-30; Acts 13:48; 16:30-31; Romans 3-4; 8:1-17,31-39; 9:1-23; 10:8-10; Ephesians 1:4-5; 2:8-10; Philippians 2:12-13; Titus 3:3-7; 1 John 1:7,9

3. WE RECOGNIZE AND REST UPON THE NECESSITY OF THE EMPOWERING PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR ALL OF LIFE AND MINISTRY.

The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified. Fully divine, the Holy Spirit is the active personal presence of God in the world. He was active in creation, and He has been active in the plan of redemption throughout human history, filling and empowering, speaking through the prophets, and superintending the formation of Scripture. He unites the Church to Christ, incorporating all believers into one Body, and He indwells us and conforms us into the image of Christ.

The Church depends entirely upon the indwelling of the Spirit. By it, we mature in knowledge, wisdom, and love; we are built up into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). The Holy Spirit continually sanctifies and transforms the people of God, prompting us to repentance and faith, distributing spiritual gifts for the common good, directing our witness, and empowering our discipleship. The appropriate response to the

outpouring of the Holy Spirit is to be filled with the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, and to eagerly cooperate with the Spirit as He conforms us into the image of Christ.

Matthew 3:11; 12:28; Luke 4:1, 14; 5:17; 10:21; John 1:12-13; 3:1-15, 34; 14:12; 15:26-27; 16:7-15; Acts 2:14-21; 4:29-30; 10:38; Romans 8:9; 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-13; 12:28-31; 14:1-33; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Galatians 3:1-5; Ephesians 1:13-14; 5:18

4. WE ARE DEEPLY COMMITTED TO THE FUNDAMENTAL SPIRITUAL AND MORAL EQUALITY OF MALE AND FEMALE AND TO MEN AS RESPONSIBLE SERVANT-LEADERS IN THE HOME AND CHURCH.

We believe both men and women were together created in the divine image and are therefore equal before God as persons, possessing the same dignity and value, having equal access to God through faith in Christ.

We also believe that men and women, by God's good design, were created to complement one another. Within the household, husbands and wives are together responsible for the spiritual nurture of the family, yet God calls upon the husband to exercise headship and to serve his bride and household in accordance with the servant-leadership and sacrificial love demonstrated by Christ. Within the local church, the Elders are likewise called to lead and serve the Bride and Household of Christ, and should therefore be men. Emphatically, this principle of male headship should not be confused with domineering control.

In the Western world today, the difference between men and women is considered to be fundamentally biological, perhaps even strictly *limited* to biology. Even among conservative Christians, we are less inclined to consider whether the fundamental difference might be in some sense spiritual. The implication is that a person's sex is a superficial feature having nothing to do with a person's identity. But what if God's purpose in creating differentiated sexes actually runs deeper than reproduction?

When God created mankind, He first created a male, and then a female. The Apostle Paul refers to this sequence in 1 Timothy 2:

I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve...

1 Timothy 2:12-13

This line of argument sounds very strange to modern people, and it's worth pointing out that Paul's command is not absolute. Throughout the Bible, there are a number of prophetesses and women who instruct men (Exodus 15:20, 38:8, Judges 4-5, 11:40, 1 Samuel 2:22, 2 Kings 22:14, Micah 6:4, Luke 2:36). So we should pay close attention to the context of 1 Timothy. The letter was originally written from one pastor to another, and the content is centered around order in the church. The word "teach" in verse 12 is important. It specifically refers to authoritative teaching by someone appointed or recognized as a teacher. From the context of 1 Timothy, it's evident that Paul has in mind the official teaching of official teachers within the context of a gathered assembly.

Adam was made first, but he was alone, so Eve was made to be a "helper." Now, Eve was not created simply to "help" Adam bear children. (*That would be truly offensive!*) The helper Adam needed was a liturgical helper, someone who could join him for worship in the Garden. A close reading of Genesis 2:15-22 clearly reveals that the prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was given *prior* to the creation of Eve. The implication is that Adam was from the very beginning called to teach Eve and to lead her in right worship and obedience. This reading begins to make sense of Paul's logic in 1 Timothy 2.

This does not mean that Eve was dependent upon Adam for all knowledge, nor does it mean that Eve was prohibited from teaching Adam certain things. It means that, in matters of worship, Adam was expected to teach, to lead, to feed, and to guard. This reading is consistent with how God articulates Adam's failure in Genesis 3:17.

Sojourn Houston actively encourages women to serve the Church as teachers, deaconesses, and even seminary professors. But in the liturgical setting, gathered around the Lord's Table on the Lord's Day, ordained men should teach, lead, feed, and guard. Thus, the office of Pastor/Elder is restricted to men.

Genesis 1:26-27; 2:18; Acts 18:24-26; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 3:1-7; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:1-7

5. WE EMBRACE A MISSIONARY UNDERSTANDING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH AND ITS ROLE AS THE PRIMARY MEANS BY WHICH GOD CHOOSES TO ESTABLISH HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH.

From the very beginning, God has commissioned His people to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it for the glory of God (Genesis 1:28, 9:1, 17:1-8, Matthew 28:18-20). That is the mission of the Church. It would have been disobedient for Adam to simply tend the

Garden he had been given because there was an entire planet waiting to be subdued, cultivated, and glorified. He had a responsibility to tend the Garden, but he also had a responsibility to the wilderness outside the Garden. And the same is true for us. We are called to build up the Church into maturity, but we are also called to expand the Church into new territory. We are called to be fruitful and multiply. We are called to plant churches!

Our world is home to neighborhoods and nations still longing to be subdued and glorified in the name of King Jesus. Local churches have a clear biblical mandate to look beyond themselves for the purpose of Kingdom expansion. In fact, the Church is God's Plan A for redemption, and there is no Plan B. Mission is more than a program or activity; it's an essential element of the church's identity. Church planting is arguably the most effective way to fulfill the divine commission to be fruitful and multiply, which is why Sojourn Houston congregations strive for reproducibility.

Isaiah 52:7; Matthew 10:5-25; 28:18-20; Luke 4:18-19; 24:46-47; Acts 28:31; Romans 10:14-15; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Galatians 2:10; Ephesians 3:10; 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Hebrews 10:23-25; 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10

THE CHURCH

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

"And I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church."

Every Sojourn Houston congregation is a local expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic body of Christ. The Church is "one," united to the one Lord by the one Spirit into one communion (Ephesians 4:4-5). The Church is "holy," sanctified and purified into a suitable dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:25-27). The Church is "catholic," embracing all peoples and cultures through all ages (Acts 2:5-12). And the Church is "apostolic," built upon the ministry of Jesus' earliest disciples (Ephesians 2:20). Each local congregation should seek to give expression to these marks.

In addition, the New Testament employs a number of different metaphors in describing the Church.

THE FAMILY/HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

The earliest Christians regarded one another as brothers and sisters. God promised Abraham that "all the families of the earth" would be blessed in him (Genesis 12:3), and Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise; He has blessed the nations by welcoming every household into His Father's household (Galatians 3:28-29). The New Testament teaches the Church to think and to live this way. We were never meant to live out our spiritual journey in isolation. By adoption, we have joined the family of the Triune God. We are baptized *into* the Triune Name. We are born again into a new family. As family, we depend upon one another for growth, progress, and effectiveness. Each and every member of this household has a role to play in serving the common good.

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

A bride is a woman to whom a man is committed in covenant. The Bible repeatedly uses the marriage relationship as a metaphor for God's loving commitment to His people (Hosea 2:19, Isaiah 54:5, Jeremiah 3:14, 31:34). Ephesians 5 applies the metaphor more specifically to Christ and His Church, and according to the book of Revelation, all of human history is moving

towards a marriage supper (Revelation 19). As the Bride of Christ, Jesus is our first love, the object of our affection. We love Him supremely, and we receive His love through trust and fidelity. We share all of life with Jesus, and we constantly seek to know Him more deeply. There are many God-glorifying organizations deserving of our time, influence, and money. But Jesus laid down His life for the Bride, so as His followers, the Bride is worthy of our primary loyalty.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Jesus was God incarnate, God with a human body, and He used His body to love and serve and grow the Kingdom. With human eyes, He witnessed our brokenness. With human ears, He heard the cries of the oppressed. With human feet, He came to their aid. With human hands, He brought about healing. With a human mouth, He spoke redemptive truth. Following His resurrection, the human body of Christ ascended into the heavens, and His disciples were commissioned to extend His earthly ministry. The Church is the physical embodiment of Jesus on earth; in us and through us, He makes Himself visible to the world. Jesus is the Head, and we are His members. The Head wills and the body obeys. Some parts of the body are more prominent, like the eyes and the mouth, but all parts are necessary (1 Corinthians 12). If one member suffers, every member suffers. If one member flourishes, every member rejoices. This is what it means for the Church to be truly united as one body. As we equip one another, love one another, and speak the truth to one another, the Church grows up into “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4). We mature into the full expression of His bodily ministry on earth.

THE TEMPLE & PRIESTHOOD

In John 2, Jesus stands outside the temple in Jerusalem and says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The resurrection of Jesus Christ was itself the construction of a new temple—the temple of His Body. Jesus was the true temple, the place on earth where God was most present. But the resurrection of Jesus was only the beginning. The Church is now the temple, and through us, the glory of resurrection life is filling the earth (1 Corinthians 3:16). The Church is an ever-expanding temple. We are called to do what the brick-and-mortar temple never could: to multiply ourselves and expand until the earth is filled with God’s glory and presence. And if the Church is the temple of God, then we are priests in that temple (1 Peter 2). Like Old Testament priests, we are called to pray, to make music, to maintain the purity and holiness of the temple, and to make sacrifices so that others can draw near to God.

THE NEW JERUSALEM (CITY OF GOD)

Historically speaking, Jerusalem was the capital city of Israel from the time of David, and the city in which Jesus was crucified. It was destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans. However, we can also trace the city of God through the Bible allegorically. The historical Jerusalem points forward to an allegorical “new Jerusalem,” the Church. Jesus, the Davidic King, has won the victory, and He is now enthroned in our midst. And yet, the Church is still growing up into its final destination. We are the new Jerusalem, yet we long for the Jerusalem that is to come. In the book of Revelation, a new Jerusalem descends from heaven. She is presented as a bride, filled with divine light and honored by the kings and nations of the world (Revelation 21). The Church is an everlasting city, with foundations in heaven, whose builder and maker is God. That is who we are. But that is also where we are headed.

A HOLY NATION

To be “holy” is to be set apart and distinct. The people of Israel were called to be a holy nation under the sovereign rule and reign of God. Thus, their desire for a human king was fundamentally a desire to be like every other nation (1 Samuel 8), which is the opposite of holiness. As a holy nation, Israel would serve the whole world by drawing every other nation to the one true God. Israel’s potency as a light to the nations was proportionate to Israel’s holiness before those nations (Isaiah 49:6). The nations desperately need the people of God to be different. So when Peter calls the Church “a holy nation,” he is indicating that the international Church has been grafted into the same calling and commission as the nation of Israel (1 Peter 2:9). We are God’s people, set apart for good works and holy living, for love and service, for shining light. As we live faithfully under the rule and reign of King Jesus, the King of Kings, the nations of the world will come to the light (Isaiah 60:3).

A GARDEN/VINEYARD

As the book of Revelation draws to a close, the entire cosmos is filled with God’s presence, which fulfills God’s original intention for His people in the Garden of Eden. Adam was commissioned to guard, cultivate, and grow the Garden. God said to him, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion [over everything]” (Genesis 1:28). But Adam failed in this calling, and the commission to cultivate a worldwide Garden was left unfulfilled. Throughout the Old Testament, God’s people were longing to recover what was lost: paradise in the presence of God. But they repeatedly failed, and they were repeatedly cast out of God’s presence. But Jesus comes as the Greater Adam. He restores us to God, and He places us “in Him” (John 17:20-26, Ephesians 1:10). To be “in Christ” is to be in the Garden again, which means that the Church is a new Eden. Like Adam, we are called to be fruitful and

multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, to work the Garden and to keep it, until the world is made over into one global Garden.

MARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

These metaphors paint a beautiful picture for us. They present a compelling vision and helpfully point us toward an ideal. But more practically, how can we recognize a local church? What are the basic elements of a faithful congregation? According to the Belgic Confession (1561), the true church can be recognized by the following three marks: (1) the preaching of the gospel, (2) the administration of the sacraments, and (3) the practice of church discipline. No congregation should be less than these three marks, and every congregation should strive to be more.

I. PREACHING THE GOSPEL

The Church is built upon and nourished by the ministry of the Word (Ephesians 2:19-20, Acts 2:42). The greatest and most distinguishing mark of the true Church is the message it proclaims, the pure and unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ. Every other attribute of the Church is derived from this gospel.

II. ADMINISTERING THE SACRAMENTS

Sacraments are rituals that bind us together as God's family by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Holy Spirit uses sacraments to more fully express and apply God's promises to us in the gospel. Protestants believe Jesus gave two sacraments to the Church: Baptism and the Lord's Supper (also known as Communion or the Eucharist).

BAPTISM

The Bible commands us to wash new Christians in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is a ritual washing that signals our adoption into the family of God, our being united to Jesus and His Body (Romans 6:3-5, Galatians 3:27, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Colossians 2:12), our cleansing from sin (Mark 1:4, Titus 3:5), and our consecration into the priesthood and temple (Hebrews 10:22). In short, baptism welcomes us into the Church. By the Holy Spirit, Jesus is present in baptism, and He is pouring out His grace and building up the faith of His people. Baptized people should remember and contemplate their baptisms regularly, because God wants to remind us continually that we are His cherished children, that we have been united to the death and resurrection of Jesus, that

we live by His Spirit, that we belong to the Church, that we are called to build His Kingdom, and that glory awaits us when Jesus returns to make all things new!

Within the Sojourn Houston family, congregations are free to practice either paedobaptism (baptism for both professing members of the covenant community and their children) or credobaptism (baptism for professing members only). This decision is left up to the local elders.

COMMUNION

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as a ritual meal to be observed in the Church throughout the ages. In the Lord's Supper, we remember and memorialize the sacrificial death of Jesus by feasting upon bread (His body) and wine (His blood). Food has always played a central role in the worship of God. Adam failed in the Garden by eating improperly, and the Old Covenant animal sacrifices would have resembled sacred barbecues. Faithful worship has always involved feasting in the presence of God, and it always will (Revelation 19:9).

For centuries, theologians have debated what exactly takes place when the church partakes of the Lord's Supper, but the most important thing is that we do it. As we partake of the Lord's Supper, we deepen our union with Christ and our unity with one another, we have our faith nourished, we enter into the joy of our Savior, we are given a foretaste of the marriage supper of the Lamb, and we are formed more fully into the one body of Christ, a body prepared for mission and sacrifice.

The Lord's Supper is also known as Communion or the Eucharist. "Communion" helpfully emphasizes the corporate dimension of the ritual. And "Eucharist" (from the Greek word *eucharistia*, thanksgiving) reminds us that we partake as an exercise in gratitude to God.

III. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Every organization has some means of correcting or removing members. Presidents can be impeached, lawyers can be debarred, pilots can be grounded, athletes can be fined, etc. So in that sense, we all have a framework for understanding the necessity of church discipline. The Church bears the Name of the Triune God, and we are called to protect His reputation. In some cases, that means removing unrepentant members from the fellowship.

The Bible offers guidance to church leaders in these matters (Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 2 Corinthians 2:6, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). And yet, no two cases are identical. Church

discipline calls for wisdom, care, and patience. In fact, if you want to know how church leaders ought to exercise discipline, read the New Testament epistles. Much of the New Testament was written to rebuke sin and correct faults within the early Church, and the Apostles demonstrate a grace-filled mixture of boldness, clarity, humility, and deep love.

Simply put, church discipline is the pursuit of corporate holiness. When we hear the word “discipline,” we may picture trials and judgments and punishments. But the biblical word for “discipline” is closely related to the biblical word for “disciple,” one who is learning to follow Jesus (Matthew 10:24, 28:19–20). “The Lord disciplines the one He loves” (Hebrews 12:6). Church discipline is necessary for corporate maturity and fruitfulness.

Again, church discipline is an exercise in love. It’s not an alternative to litigation. It’s a culture of accountability, growth, forgiveness, and grace that permeates the church. It’s a guide for lovingly engaging one another, patiently exhausting lesser steps before moving to greater ones. The goal is not simply conflict resolution, but also restoration and healing. Godly, humble, patient, relentless, and loving church discipline is the gospel acted out. To all who repent and look to Jesus, forgiveness is fully and freely granted.

OUR STRUCTURE

By God’s design, the Church is both organism and organization. It lives, grows, matures, and bears fruit (Ephesians 2:19-21, 1 Corinthians 12:12). But it also has order, institutional norms, doctrinal standards, and prescribed rituals (1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 11:23-26, 14:40, 15:1-2). Just like a vine needs a trellis in order to grow properly and bear healthy fruit, so the church needs some sort of structure to give shape and support to the organism. That said, we want to avoid having more trellis than is necessary to produce a fruitful vine. Simplicity is one of the values shared by all Sojourn Houston congregations. We pursue simple systems and structures for the sake of reproducibility (multiplication), having the budget margin to be generous, and having the margin in our calendars to spend time with neighbors.

Often, the bulk of “ministry work” is placed on the pastors and church staff. But we believe the work of ministry ought to be carried out by the entire congregation, not just the leaders. This is the model we’re given in Ephesians 4. Jesus gives faithful leaders to the church, and their primary function is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” This type of church membership is costly, but it’s also Biblical and essential to our model. We cannot pursue simplicity without the active participation of our members.

THE CHURCH ON A BLOCK: NEIGHBORHOOD PARISHES

Each Sojourn Houston congregation consists of a network of Neighborhood Parishes, which are smaller expressions of the church made up of ordinary people learning to follow Jesus in the context of everyday life -- growing together, loving one another, and blessing their neighbors. In addition, we encourage all Neighborhood Parishes to be on the lookout for potential leaders who can multiply new Parishes. In fact, under our model, church planting is really fueled by Parish multiplying. Parish multiplication is a viral, cost-effective, sustainable, and indigenous method for expanding the redemptive presence of God throughout our city.

THE CHURCH IN A NEIGHBORHOOD: CORPORATE WORSHIP

On Sunday, all the Parishes within each neighborhood gather together to approach the throne of God in worship. The essential elements of weekly corporate worship are the ministry of the Word (liturgy, song, and sermon) and the administration of the Sacraments. The word 'liturgy' refers to the structure and form according to which our corporate worship is conducted. In short, God summons us into His presence in order to revive and restore us for life in His Kingdom. And in response, we speak and sing prayers of confession, thanksgiving, and praise. All Sojourn Houston liturgies include, at minimum, weekly confession and absolution (assurance of pardon), weekly prayer and instruction, and weekly Communion (see *The Sojourn Houston BCO* for more information).

THE CHURCH IN THE CITY: SOJOURN HOUSTON

Sojourn Houston is a multi-congregational church reconciling neighbors and neighborhoods to God and one another. Our structure is rooted in trinitarian theology: just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons yet one God, so we are distinct congregations yet one church. We are distinct yet united, particular yet one. We believe churches in community most faithfully represent God to the world, and ultimately, we believe we can accomplish more together.

First and foremost, this model is meant to support the work of church planting. But we don't just want to plant churches for the sake of church planting; we want to plant *healthy* churches for the sake of the kingdom. So in order to cultivate long-term health and fruitfulness, we have structured ourselves for inter-congregational unity, cooperation, and mutual submission. Each and every congregation submits to and participates in an external authority structure.

When a new congregation is planted, the planting pastor often begins as a lone elder. Thus, in order to protect the plant and the pastor, congregations with fewer than three local elders are considered under the authority of the larger body of elders within Sojourn Houston. The new

congregation is then assigned at least three elders from other Sojourn Houston congregations to provide external oversight, including budgets, budget amendments, benevolence requests, staffing, property/location decisions, and church discipline.

OUR LEADERSHIP

The whole of Sojourn Houston's government rests under the royal authority of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22), who governs by the Spirit and through the Scriptures.

Serving under the authority of Christ, the senior leadership of each congregation is vested in a governing board of elders/pastors comprised of men who meet the qualifications of eldership as outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Elders are appointed to oversee the doctrine, direction, and discipline of the church through teaching, leadership, and shepherding.

In addition, deacons are appointed to serve various needs within the Church under the authority of the Council of Elders. Deacons may be male or female, and must meet the biblical qualifications of a deacon (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Please see Part II of this curriculum for more information regarding the leadership within your particular congregation.

COVENANT MEMBERSHIP

Church membership is participation in a family. We're all united to Christ, which means that we're all united to one another. Therefore, we covenant together as a community of faith on a common mission. In the Bible, we find a number of different covenants, some between God and humans (Genesis 6, 9, 15; Ezekiel 20; Hosea 2; Jeremiah 31; Matthew 26), and some

OUR NAME & LOGO

In 2010, we named our church Sojourn as a reminder that life is transient. The Christian life is a brief pilgrimage toward an eternal home. And for now, we are dual citizens, ambassadors of a "holy nation" joining our King in the redemption of every other nation.

The anchor in our logo is meant to reinforce this idea. In the words of Jeremiah Burroughs, "When you are at sea, though you have not as many things as you have at home, you are not troubled at it; you are contented. Why? Because you are at sea. You are not troubled when storms arise, and though many things are otherwise than you would have them at home you are still quieted with the fact that you are at sea." This is the mindset of a hope-filled sojourner. We are not yet home, so we do not think to satisfy ourselves here and now. We are a people at sea, yet we hold fast to hope in a future home, and that hope is "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Hebrews 6:19). Even as we sojourn, we are anchored in Christ.

between two or more humans (1 Samuel 18; 2 Samuel 5). Simply put, a covenant is a relationship bound by oath.

Western society is highly individualistic, which places a strain on committed relationships. But the Church is nothing apart from committed relationships, whether God's relationship with us or our relationships with one another. So in order to foster the sort of church family we envision, we ask Sojourn Houston members to sign a membership covenant. Sojourn Houston covenants to guard, serve, teach, affirm, and oversee each member (1 Peter 5:2-12), and each member covenants to love the Body and submit to the leadership (Hebrews 13:17).

When a local congregation is characterized by committed relationships, members are given ample opportunities to love and be loved by others, to serve and be served by others. We are exposed to diverse giftings and strengths (and weaknesses). We are built up through prayer and fellowship. We are kept accountable, protected, and spurred on in the faith. In short, we have a community within which we can obey God's communal commands.

Thus, should you decide to covenant with us, we ask that you pray for the Church, serve your local congregation according to your gifting, give generously of your resources, genuinely care for your brothers and sisters, fight for unity, be present and available, get equipped for greater faithfulness, and live boldly and hospitably for the good of your non-Christian neighbors.

See the Appendix for the *Sojourn Houston Membership Covenant*.

THE MISSION

THE CITY OF HOUSTON

Greater Houston is home to over 7 million people. It's the 4th largest city in the United States, and of the top 4, it's the only city with a growing population. Its land area is nearly equal to the state of Massachusetts, and it's adding around 1.3 million residents per decade, which means the population is growing by more than one megachurch (2000+) worth of new residents every week. As a nationwide jobs leader and global leader in refugee resettlement, people are moving to Houston from all around the world. As a result, Houston is the most ethnically diverse city in the United States. Over 145 languages are spoken here, and 1 in 4 Houstonians (23.3%) were foreign born. We are a majority-minority city, meaning that most of our residents are ethnic minorities. According to the Kinder Institute for Urban Research, Houston is a "prophetic city," meaning that the problems and opportunities we face in Houston give us a glimpse into the future of the United States.

Yet despite its diversity, Houston is largely segregated along ethnic and socioeconomic lines. Under the shadow of global commerce, a quarter of the urban population lives below the poverty line. We are facing human trafficking, a foster care crisis, homelessness, and educational challenges. But the city's challenges are the church's opportunities. Christians share in a rich heritage of selfless service, ingenuity, and societal reform. And because Houston is a gateway to the nations, it's a strategic city for the spread of the gospel into unreached people groups. A spiritual revival in Houston would undoubtedly send foreign-born missionaries back home with the gospel of Jesus. So it's our joy and privilege to work toward saturating our city with thriving and multiplying Neighborhood Parishes and congregations such that the presence of the living Christ cannot be ignored!

SOJOURN HOUSTON

Sojourn Houston is a family of neighborhood congregations. The nature and structure of our fellowship is rooted in Trinitarian theology. Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons yet one God, so we are distinct congregations yet one church. Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are non-autonomous with respect to one another, so we are non-autonomous

churches with respect to one another. We are interdependent congregations, mutually submissive, distinct yet united, particular yet one. There are many reasons for this, but chief among them is this: congregations in community most faithfully represent the Triune God to the world.

In addition, congregations in community are able to achieve more by working together, whether shepherding the flock, planting new churches, caring for the poor, or bringing about systemic change within a sprawling city. Thus, our mission statement is:

Sojourn Houston is a multi-congregational church reconciling
neighbors and neighborhoods to God and one another.

We have structured our multi-congregational church for both city-wide unity and neighborhood diversity. We want inter-congregational unity and a shared authority structure, but we also want easily reproducible and contextualized congregations led by local pastors and staff. Thus, each Sojourn Houston congregation ordains local pastors to provide local shepherding, but each of these pastors also participates in a broader structure of accountability designed to give oversight to other Sojourn Houston congregations (for more on how this works, see the *Sojourn Houston Book of Church Order* in the appendix).

WHY PLANT CHURCHES?

The closing chapters of the Bible bring to fulfillment the mission inaugurated in the opening chapters of the Bible: the dwelling place of God expands to fill the entire new creation. The story of Scripture concludes having achieved God's original intent for His people in the Garden of Eden. Adam was called to garden the Garden, "to work it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). God commissioned mankind: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion [over everything]" (Genesis 1:28). In short, God's image-bearers were to cultivate and cultivate until the earth was glorified into one big Garden.

But rather than giving life to all the earth, the Garden became the source of death. Adam failed "to keep" (guard) the Garden; he failed in his calling as a gardener. So the ground brought forth thorns and thistles, and God's gardeners were exiled from the Garden. Even so, Adam's commission to grow the Garden is passed down to his descendants, and we can trace that calling all throughout the Bible.

But the sons of Adam defile every garden they're given. Until Jesus, the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). The victory of Christ puts us back in the Garden with God, the Church. The Church is called to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, to work the Garden and keep it, until the world is made over into a global Garden. And we accomplish this by planting churches! When we plant new churches in new locations, we step more deeply into God's global plan of redemption and into our calling as God's gardeners. We cultivate and cultivate until the earth is filled with glory. We cultivate until the Garden of God multiplies into every dark corner of the earth.

This is precisely how the Apostles interpreted the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). They immediately began planting churches! And we believe church planting is still the most effective and sustainable way to make and teach and grow disciples. Thus, Sojourn Houston is working to saturate the landscape of our city with new congregations.

OUR CHURCH PLANTING STRATEGY

Sojourn Houston: Recruit, Develop, Send, Support, Collaborate

As a family of congregations, we work together to recruit and develop church planters. Our church planting residency is designed to equip church planters through content, relationship, and experience, especially preaching and pastoral experience. Once Sojourn Houston is ready to ordain and commission a church planter, we collectively commit to sending the church planter with a core team of Sojourn members, ongoing financial support, and a team of Sojourn Houston elders to provide external oversight. In order to ensure the shepherding and protection of everyone involved, congregations with fewer than three elders (one of which must be non-staff) are considered under the oversight of the Sojourn Houston elders.

Local Congregations: Make Disciples, Multiply Parishes, Plant Churches

Long before Sojourn Houston commissions a church planter, each local congregation is laying the groundwork for church planting. We all share a commitment to making disciples and multiplying parishes.

MAKING DISCIPLES

Sojourn congregations make disciples by (1) building relationships, (2) exposing those relationships to the Christian community, and (3) sharing the gospel. This is a long-term, low-key, and relational form of ministry, and we pursue it within the context of ordinary, everyday

life. We see this form of ministry demonstrated by Jesus in the Gospels and by the early Church in the book of Acts. Jesus and His disciples did not live a life marked by busyness; they lived a life marked by purpose.

MULTIPLYING PARISHES

As we already discussed, our Neighborhood Parishes are smaller expressions of the church made up of ordinary people learning to follow Jesus and live on mission together in the context of everyday life. Through these smaller expressions of the church, our non-Christian neighbors get to experience the loving, redeeming, reconciling presence of God in the midst of His people. They get to see the implications of the gospel lived out. Thus, we desire to multiply our Parishes until the loving, redeeming, reconciling presence of God saturates every Houston neighborhood (see our “Saturation” value below). Under this model, church planting is the natural fruit of Neighborhood Parish multiplication. Thus, every individual member of the various Sojourn Houston congregations can know that their faithful, self-sacrificial service is ultimately contributing to a citywide multiplying movement with global implications!

OUR SHARED VALUES

As previously discussed, the Belgic Confession identifies 3 marks of a true church, but we also believe faithful churches should aspire to much more. Sojourn Houston congregations share the following core values:

FAMILY

We are the beloved children of a Heavenly Father, and the Bible clearly teaches us to regard one another as brothers and sisters, as members of one family. But this familial oneness is more than merely theological. We are actually called to give tangible expression to our unity (John 17:21), and we fulfill this calling in community with one another. But our commitment to communal living extends beyond the Neighborhood Parish; we want unity and family to mark the manner in which Sojourn Houston congregations relate to one another. Accordingly, Sojourn congregations agree to support one another in accordance with the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), giving time, sharing resources, and sending members, even when the cost of doing so is uncomfortably high.

SIMPLICITY

Simplicity for the sake of generosity is a biblical imperative. (The Greek word *haplotēs*, which is often translated “generosity,” actually means “simplicity.”) We should all live simply enough to share with others. This is true for individuals, but it’s also true for churches. Sojourn Houston

congregations strive to keep our systems, structures, and programming relatively simple so that we can build margin into our budgets (for the sake of generosity) and margin into our calendars (for the sake of hospitality and neighborhood engagement). In addition, simplicity is a key part of our strategy to reproduce and multiply congregations. This means that we rely heavily upon lay leaders and the mobilization of lay gifting. We are not opposed to hiring pastors and staff, but in the spirit of Ephesians 4:11-12, we prioritize empowering our members to do the work of ministry.

LOCAL MINISTRY

The Sojourn Houston model of ministry is intensely local. We are a family of neighborhood congregations with defined geographies, led by local leaders and comprised of local members who are meeting local needs, whether spiritual or material. This means that although Sojourn Houston congregations share a common vision and ministry philosophy, each congregation will ultimately particularize for effectiveness in accordance with their ministry context. In addition, each congregation is shepherded by local leaders (we recommend at least 1 pastor/elder for every 100 congregants), while Sojourn Houston provides broad oversight and accountability.

COMPASSION

The word “compassion” is derived from a Latin word meaning “to suffer with.” In terms of loving the marginalized in our neighborhoods, mere sympathy falls short; we are called to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). Like Jesus, Christians enter into the pain and suffering of this world in order to care for the orphans and widows, to set the captives free, to bring healing and redemption to all that is broken. This is a costly, self-sacrificial type of love, but it’s characteristic of the kingdom of God. Our King is a just and merciful King, and we have the joy and honor of manifesting His character for the sake of those in need. We are committed to addressing the toughest social issues facing the city of Houston, and we are committed to planting new congregations in under-resourced neighborhoods.

SATURATION

The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus has promised to be with us always (Matthew 28:20). In other words, wherever the Church goes, so go the love and presence of God. When we make disciples of our neighbors, when we multiply our Neighborhood Parishes, when we plant new congregations, we are saturating the city of Houston with redemptive, kingdom presence. God’s people have always been called to fill the earth with His glory by way of multiplication, such that the love of God would be increasingly accessible to the men, women, and children around us. We want every Neighborhood Parish and every

congregation actively praying and preparing for multiplication. Each Sojourn Houston congregation is working towards multiplying at least 1 Neighborhood Parish for every 1,000 residents of the neighborhood.

SOJOURN HOUSTON VISION STATEMENT

We believe the city of Houston will one day be a place where disconnected neighbors love one another like family, where the lonely and outcast have a place to belong, where segregated neighborhoods are united in mutual care and concern, where the poor and vulnerable are lifted and dignified through compassionate action, and where the diverse peoples of the world live and flourish together in joy and harmony.

To that end, Sojourn Houston aims to multiply local congregations who lead the way in hospitality and neighborly living, take radical action on behalf of the marginalized, and pursue the unity of diverse peoples. As one Church comprised of many congregations, we are working together to see Houston saturated with redemptive presence.

We seek the *shalom* [peace, wholeness, and flourishing] of our city and of all creation. In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we will go where the kingdom is not, and together, we will stay there. Where there is darkness, where there is brokenness, where there is sin, poverty, corruption, or violence, we will abide. We will pray, sing, baptize, teach, welcome, give, feast, and serve until the kingdom comes in Houston as it is in Heaven.

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THE GOSPEL COALITION CONFSSIONAL STATEMENT

THE TRI-UNE GOD

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in his love and in his holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, he perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his glorious grace.

REVELATION

God has graciously disclosed his existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of his Son, the incarnate Word. Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by his Spirit has graciously disclosed himself in human words: we believe that God has inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of his saving work in the world. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of his will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks. We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God's truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God's revealed truth truly. The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel.

CREATION OF HUMANITY

We believe that God created human beings, male and female, in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles, which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed

to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

THE FALL

We believe that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by falling into sin through Satan’s temptation. As a result, all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God’s own gracious intervention. The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself.

THE PLAN OF GOD

We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them. We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that he will one day glorify them—all to the praise of his glorious grace. In love God commands and implores all people to repent and believe, having set his saving love on those he has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer.

THE GOSPEL

We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God’s very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if his death and resurrection are not central (the message is that Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised”). This good news is biblical (his death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved).

THE REDEMPTION OF CHRIST

We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to his Father, the eternal Son became human: the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. As the mediatorial King, he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God’s sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted

as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross he canceled sin, propitiated God, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe. By his resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by his Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all his people; by his ascension he has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with him. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before him—Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF SINNERS

We believe that Christ, by his obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By his sacrifice, he bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on our behalf. By his perfect obedience he satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Inasmuch as Christ was given by the Father for us, and his obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of free grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. We believe that a zeal for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the other person, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by his powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, baptizing them into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We believe that those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation that awakens a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to be revealed. Good works constitute indispensable evidence of saving grace. Living as salt in a world that is decaying and light in a world that is dark, believers should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world, nor become indistinguishable from it: rather, we are to do good to the city, for all the glory and honor of the nations is to be offered up to the living God. Recognizing whose created order this is, and because we are citizens of God's kingdom, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, doing good to all, especially to those who belong to the

household of God. The kingdom of God, already present but not fully realized, is the exercise of God's sovereignty in the world toward the eventual redemption of all creation. The kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan's dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of individuals rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new community of human life together under God.

GOD'S NEW PEOPLE

We believe that God's new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This universal church is manifest in local churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each local church" is, in fact, the church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth. The church is the body of Christ, the apple of his eye, graven on his hands, and he has pledged himself to her forever. The church is distinguished by her gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, and by her members' love for one another and for the world. Crucially, this gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked. Christ Jesus is our peace: he has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. The church serves as a sign of God's future new world when its members live for the service of one another and their neighbors, rather than for self-focus. The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world.

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus himself. The former is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, the latter with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of his return and of the consummation of all things.

THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS

We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with his holy angels, when he will exercise his role as final Judge, and his kingdom will be consummated. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust—the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. On that day the church will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all and his people will be enthralled by the immediacy of his ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of his glorious grace.

SOJOURN HOUSTON MULTI- CONGREGATIONAL COVENANT

This covenant is birthed out of our love for Jesus, the Church, and our common mission to join the Father, Son, and Spirit in the historic work of redemption. The purpose of this document is to foster unity and clarity throughout our extended family of congregations by defining the nature and scope of our commitment to one another.

OUR ECCLESIOLOGY

Sojourn's ecclesiology is rooted in trinitarian theology. Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons yet one God, so we are distinct congregations yet one church. Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are interdependent and non-autonomous with respect to one another, so we are interdependent and non-autonomous congregations with respect to one another. We believe congregations in community most faithfully represent God to the world, and we believe we can be more and do more together than apart.

Thus, our ecclesiological model is meant to encourage:

1. The planting of contextualized congregations marked by the preaching of a pure gospel, the faithful administration of the sacraments, and church discipline as exercised under the authority of local elders, and
2. A true family of neighborhood congregations marked by inter-congregational unity and collaboration and governed by an administrative body comprised of local Sojourn elders throughout Houston.

In other words, each Sojourn congregation appoints local elders to give oversight and pastoral care to their local congregation, but some (or all) of these elders shall serve the greater body of elders to give oversight to the larger family of Sojourn congregations in a given city.

When a new Sojourn congregation is planted, the church planter may begin as a lone elder under the oversight of the larger body of elders. In order to protect each congregation and its leader, congregations with fewer than three local elders (one of which must be unpaid by the church) shall be considered under the authority of the larger body of elders. Our goal is to provide high accountability and low control.

THE NATURE OF THIS COVENANT

Within Scripture, we find a number of examples of covenants, some between God and man (Genesis 6, 9, 15; Ezekiel 20; Hosea 2; Jeremiah 31; Matthew 26), while others are solely between men (1 Samuel 18; 2 Samuel 5). In some covenants, one party binds his or herself to fulfill the obligations of both sides of the agreement. In others, the parties are reciprocally

bound to adhere to the obligations. While God's covenant with the Church is an example of the former, this church covenant represents the latter.

Membership within Sojourn Houston is participation in a family, a microcosm of the universal household of God. We value connectionalism. We covenant together for a common mission. We covenant as a multi-congregational church to mutually care for one another and to collaborate in saturating our city with the gospel of Jesus Christ for the glory of God and the good of our neighbors. We freely enter into a relationship marked by mutual submission, wherein the elders of each local congregation seek to edify one another in the gospel, to grow in knowing one another more deeply, to speak hard things graciously, to identify and develop our respective roles and giftings, to extend grace and understanding to one another when in tension, and to seek reconciliation when we find ourselves in conflict.

If at any time a local council of elders determines that membership within the Sojourn Houston family is no longer in the best interest of its congregation, such a church is free to break fellowship. Even so, each congregation freely and eagerly enters into this covenant in part for the benefit of other member congregations. We have chosen the word "covenant" intentionally, and we desire to demonstrate costly, sacrificial unity in the spirit of John 17 for the edification of our members and the salvation of our non-Christian neighbors.

OUR BINDING COMMITMENTS

As member congregations of the Sojourn Houston family, we agree:

1. **To abide by the doctrinal standards contained within the Sojourn Confession of Faith.** We are bound by the headship of Jesus Christ, our common doctrinal confession, and the grace we extend toward one another in holding that confession with humility. We agree to diligently preserve unity and peace, spurning divisive language and actions with regard to the theological positions outlined within Sojourn's Confession of Faith (Appendix A). Prior to their ordination, all elders/pastors must to come to full agreement with the Sojourn Confession of Faith.
2. **To abstain from denominational affiliation.** In order to minimize conflicting interests and maximize meaningful connectionalism, we agree to renounce and/or abstain from denominational affiliation. We understand that our primary relational commitment is to other Sojourn congregations, and our secondary relational commitment is to the Acts 29 Network.¹

¹ We partner with Acts 29 as a 3rd party assessor of all prospective church planters. If the Acts 29 assessment team delays a Sojourn planter, the elders shall reevaluate and devise a plan for moving forward. The church planter shall be delayed by a minimum of 3 months.

3. **To pursue unity with respect to the Sojourn name and branding.** As a family of congregations pursuing meaningful and visible connectionalism (John 17:20-23), we agree to abide by the Sojourn Houston branding guidelines (Appendix C). We will together make adjustments to the Sojourn logo and website themes, such that the Sojourn brand should transcend every context as a visible expression of our ecclesiastical unity.
4. **To share a centralized Covenant Membership Curriculum.** Sojourn's Membership Curriculum is a document designed to foster unity and clarity of purpose throughout our family of congregations. Thus, we agree to teach from the same Membership Curriculum as written by the Doctrinal Team (Appendix B) and approved by the Sojourn Houston body of elders. Addenda and other handouts are encouraged for the articulation of neighborhood contextualization.
5. **To submit to the authority and oversight of the Sojourn Houston body of elders.** Sojourn Houston defines elder/pastor plurality as no fewer than three local elders, one of which must be lay (unpaid). When a congregation attains a plurality, it has *particularized*. Particularized congregations remain interdependent and non-autonomous with respect to the other Sojourn Houston congregations, yet they are regarded as sufficiently organized for increased self-government pursuant to this multi-congregational covenant. Until a congregation has attained this plurality, the Sojourn Houston body of elders shall oversee preaching/teaching, church discipline cases, and annual budget and salary approvals. In the event that an elder is disqualified from eldership, the Sojourn Houston body of elders shall oversee the discipline and care process. If the congregation in question has yet to particularize, a team of Sojourn Houston elders shall be appointed to temporarily fulfill the pastoral responsibilities.
6. **To contribute to Sojourn Houston financially.** Each congregation shall give to Sojourn Houston no less than 5% of what is contributed from within its membership toward the general operating budget. Increasing this percentage is highly encouraged but not required. Under the oversight of the Sojourn Houston body of elders, the Directional Team (Appendix B) shall approve annual budgets for all non-particularized congregations.

In addition, we understand and agree to the following:

1. **Transfer of Membership within Sojourn Houston:** Covenant Members who wish to transfer their membership to another Sojourn congregation shall meet with at least one elder from the sending congregation and one elder from the receiving congregation. Each Covenant Member shall re-sign his/her membership covenant under the oversight of the receiving congregation.

2. **Receiving Existing Churches into the Sojourn Houston Family:** In most cases, existing churches who wish to join Sojourn Houston will be asked to re-plant. All incoming congregations shall agree to this covenant. Sojourn Houston shall not adopt an existing congregation in order to solve that congregation's crisis. For a minimum of one year, Sojourn Houston will court prospective churches in an effort to foster and facilitate mutual discernment. This courtship period shall include a comprehensive inculcation of Sojourn values.²
3. **Leaving Sojourn Houston:** Congregations who wish to leave Sojourn Houston shall be prohibited from using Sojourn's name, branding, website, etc. Sojourn Houston's elders also reserve the right to pursue those Covenant Members from the departing congregation who have covenanted into the Sojourn family. In order to foster trust and encourage long-term commitment, congregations who decide to leave within five (5) years of public Sunday launch shall repay 75% of the financial support disbursed to the church plant by Sojourn Houston. Should the Sojourn Houston body of elders vote to remove a congregation pursuant to the governing procedures (Appendix B), these same stipulations shall apply.
4. **Dissolution of Member Churches:** When a member congregation dissolves, all assets of the dissolving member congregation shall be transferred to Sojourn Houston, and the members of the dissolving congregation shall be encouraged to transfer their membership (1) to other Sojourn congregations or (2) to faithful, likeminded partner churches nearer to their neighborhood.

² This courtship period may include: elder candidacy, Acts 29 assessment, Sojourn Houston work days, leader trainings, membership classes, etc.

This Covenant constitutes the Sojourn Houston charter, which supersedes all previous oral or written agreements, memoranda, correspondence or other communications relating to the subject matter hereof, including each congregation's respective bylaws.

I, an elder or elder candidate of the congregation listed below, have read this Covenant in its entirety, and I agree to the terms outlined herein. In addition, I am in full agreement with the Sojourn Confession of Faith (Appendix A).

Signature

Printed Name

Date

Congregation

BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER SOJOURN HOUSTON

ADOPTED APRIL 2019

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1. Preamble

1.1 Jesus Christ has been given all authority in heaven and earth, and He reigns as Head over His Church, which He purchased with His own blood (Matthew 28:18, Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 1:22, Acts 20:28, Hebrews 13:12). All authority in the Church derives from Jesus and is exercised on His behalf.

1.2 The Scriptures are always the ultimate and inerrant court of appeal (Psalm 18:30, 119:89, John 16:13-15, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:20-21). In matters of doctrine, an appeal to Scripture will always be the first resort. In accordance with our creedal and confessional standards, we acknowledge the preeminence of Scripture.

1.3 We submit to all those principles regarding church order which are clearly required by Scripture, or required by deductions from Scripture understood through good and necessary consequence. For the rest, we desire to operate in terms of a sanctified Christian prudence, with all things done in good order and biblical decency. At all times, we seek to reflect the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Psalm 133; Ephesians 4:3, 13).

1.4 Wherever a body of baptized Christians are associated for worship and carrying out Christ's commission to disciple the nations, a local church exists. The elders of each local church have primary responsibility to govern its affairs under the Lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture. Local elders are accountable for their life and doctrine, not only to the Lord and to their own local congregations, but also to the broader ecclesiastical Body, known particularly as Sojourn Houston.

1.5 Christ is the Head of one Body, the Church universal, consisting of the elect saints of all ages who share the one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Sojourn Houston congregations covenant together to give visible expression to our unity in Christ, benefit from the gifts and wisdom of others within the Body, increase our effectiveness in fulfilling the mission of the Church, and grow the Church up into maturity, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4).

1.6 This *Sojourn Houston Book of Church Order (BCO)* defines the binding structure and key values of our partnership together as a multi-congregational church. As of its first ratification, this BCO does not provide detailed procedures for every foreseeable action. Rather, it outlines values that guide us and procedural direction for crucial points of decision.

2. Corporate Worship

2.1 Corporate worship is not merely a gathering of God's children with each other, but before all else, a meeting of the triune God with His chosen people. God is present in corporate worship not only by virtue of the Divine omnipresence but, much more intimately, as the faithful covenant Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ said: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Corporate worship has

as its aim the building of Christ's Church by the perfecting of the saints and the addition to its membership of such as are being saved, all to the glory of God. The essential elements of weekly corporate worship are the ministry of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments.

2.2 The ministry of the Word through preaching and liturgy is essential to the life and health of the church. Preaching should always be Christ-centered, calling all in attendance to repentance and faith under the Lordship of Christ. The pulpit shall be reserved for pastors and pastors in training.

2.3 Baptism is a sacrament ordained for the admission of a person into the Church. Sojourn Houston grants freedom to the elders of each congregation to discern who to baptize, when to baptize, and how to baptize. Sojourn congregations may practice either paedo-baptism or credo-baptism.

2.4 The Lord's Supper (or Communion, or the Eucharist) was ordained by Christ as a ritual of covenant remembrance unto God and His Church, for the sealing and communication of covenant benefits, and for the spiritual nourishment of the Body. Through bread and wine (or juice), common means of sustenance and enjoyment, the Church eats and drinks of the sustaining work of Christ by faith.

2.5 Sojourn Houston congregations are required to meet minimum liturgical standards for Lord's Day worship. We believe corporate worship is an act of covenant renewal initiated by God, and the process of covenant renewal is a sacrificial process (Genesis 8:20-9:17; Genesis 15:8-18a; Exodus 24:4-11; 34:15; Leviticus 2:13; 24:1-8; Numbers 18:19; 1 Kings 3;15; Psalm 50:5; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15, 18; 9:20; 12:24; 13:20). Under the New Covenant, God draws us into His presence by way of the sacrifice of Christ. Thus, our liturgy is ordered and sequenced like a covenant renewal ceremony. The three elements of cleansing, consecration, and communion correspond to three types of sacrifices under the Old Covenant (purification, ascension, and fellowship offerings). Accordingly, Sojourn Houston liturgies shall include, at minimum, weekly confession and absolution, weekly prayer and instruction, and weekly Communion.

2.6 Sojourn Houston congregations are free to contextualize their liturgy. We encourage each congregation to thoughtfully and prayerfully determine a sermon length, communication style, and liturgy appropriate for their context. In discerning a contextually appropriate liturgy, congregations may submit a request to the Strategic Team for an exception to the minimum liturgical standards as outlined in §2.5.

3. Elder Candidacy & Ordination

3.1 Candidates for eldership shall be nominated by the sitting elders of their local congregation and vetted by the Sojourn Houston elders at large. The candidacy process shall be administered by the local elders.

3.2 The minimum standards are as follows: (1) Candidates must have undergone a season of proven qualification in accordance with 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. (2) Candidates are required to attend 80% of Sojourn Houston elder meetings during their candidacy. (3) The candidacy process must be at least six months in duration from the date of their first introduction as a candidate to the Sojourn Houston elders. (4) Candidates shall complete a common curriculum, to include theological exams. Local congregations may add content to the common curriculum, but they are not permitted to remove content. (5) Candidates shall be presented to the congregation at a meeting of the members. Members are to be given no less than six weeks following the presentation of the candidates to bring forward charges or accusations regarding each candidate's qualification.

3.3 Elder candidates shall take theological exams as part of the common curriculum. These exams may be administered locally, but the results must be submitted to the Sojourn Houston Doctrinal Team for review no less than six weeks prior to the proposed date of ordination.

3.4 All candidates shall sign the Sojourn Houston Multi-Congregational Church Covenant. Signed covenants should be submitted to the Directional Team prior to ordination.

3.5 If there are no disqualifying charges or accusations, the candidate shall be ordained before the congregation. If the local congregation is non-particularized, at least one other Sojourn Houston elder will be in attendance for the laying on of hands.

4. Particularization

4.1 "Particularized" Sojourn Houston congregations have three or more elders, which must include at least one lay elder, unpaid by the congregation.

4.2 "Non-particularized" Sojourn Houston congregations have fewer than three elders and/or fewer than one lay elder.

4.3 Sojourn Houston church plants (as defined above) shall be assigned no fewer than three elders from amongst the Sojourn Houston eldership at large, which must include at least one lay elder, unpaid by Sojourn Houston or any congregation therein. The appointed elders shall represent multiple Sojourn Houston congregations, and they shall give oversight to the church plant, alongside its elders, until the date of its particularization. All major decisions shall be subject to approval by the appointed elders, including budgets, budget amendments, benevolence requests, staffing, property/location decisions, and church discipline.

4.4 In the event that a Sojourn Houston congregation loses its particularized status, the congregation will again be appointed elders in keeping with §4.3.

5. Church Discipline

5.1 In addition to Word and Sacrament, we believe church discipline is a mark of a true church. The principles and practices outlined below reflect Sojourn Houston's ecclesiological standards, which are separate from civil laws. Our ecclesiological standards are in no way intended to supersede or nullify the laws of relevant civil authorities.

5.2 The Word of God must be properly taught, but it must also be obeyed (Romans 2:13, James 1:22). Holiness is a priority within the Church because the Church represents God to the world. The Church is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God's] own possession" (1 Peter 2:9-10). Thus, church discipline is an exercise in love. Closely related to the biblical word for "disciple," church discipline is a culture of accountability, growth, forgiveness, and grace that ought to permeate the Church. The end sought is restoration and healing. When members of the Church respond to rebuke with sustained and characteristic unrepentance, church discipline becomes increasingly formal, involving the elders of the congregation. Ultimately, this process may culminate in the formal removal of a unrepentant member of the congregation.

5.3 The local elders of each Sojourn Houston congregation have jurisdiction over the members of their respective congregations. Members are subject to the discipline procedures outlined in Matthew 18:15-22 and 1 Corinthians 5, and the elders are expected to take reasonable measures to protect the privacy/anonymity of the member(s) under discipline. Sins requiring excommunication are behavioral, serious, and unrepentant. These include but are not limited to: gross sexual misconduct, teaching doctrine contrary to biblical orthodoxy, divisiveness, and financial impropriety.

5.4 Understanding that every discipline case is unique, requiring prayer, wisdom, discernment, and discretion on the part of the elders, Sojourn Houston congregations shall nonetheless observe the following procedural guidelines for church discipline:

- 1) The elders shall involve the member's immediate community (i.e. the Neighborhood Parish or some equivalent structure) in the ongoing call to repentance.
- 2) Throughout the duration of the discipline case, the depth of elder involvement and the pace of the discipline process shall be subject to change as deemed appropriate by the local elders.
- 3) Should the elders determine that the member under discipline exhibits characteristic unrepentance, he/she shall be informed in writing of the following steps:

- a) The congregation shall be notified that the member in question is under church discipline, and a general explanation as to the nature of the sin will be given. The congregation shall be instructed to join the elders in a call for repentance.
- b) Six weeks after the congregation is notified, if the member under discipline persists in unrepentance, he/she shall be excommunicated.

5.5 The local elders of each Sojourn Houston congregation shall determine when and how to readmit an excommunicated member into the fellowship of the church (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). The congregation shall be called to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm their love for such a member (2 Corinthians 2:7-8). When one Sojourn Houston congregation determines to excommunicate a member, the member shall be excommunicated from all Sojourn Houston congregations.

5.6 Should a church discipline case arise within a church plant (a non-particularized congregation), the temporarily appointed team of elders (see §4.3) shall assist the elder(s) of the church plant in observing the procedural guidelines outlined in §5.4.

5.7 The discipline of an elder shall follow the same procedural guidelines outlined in §5.4, with the following exceptions:

- 1) A charge or accusation against an elder shall not be publicly admitted without at least two witnesses to the sin in question (1 Timothy 2:19-21). Cases may be discreetly investigated on the basis of the testimony of one witness.
- 2) As a member of the congregation, the elder under discipline shall be given the opportunity to repent. However, the local elders and/or Sojourn Houston elders at large may nonetheless deem it necessary to revoke his status as an elder. If the elder under discipline is a vocational elder (paid by Sojourn Houston or a Sojourn Houston congregation), his employment may also be terminated.
- 3) An elder guilty of sin that is not immediately disqualifying shall be given a six month probationary period for investigation and repentance.
- 4) An elder accused of teaching doctrine contrary to Sojourn Houston's *Confession of Faith* shall be subject to a six month probationary period for investigation and correction. Should the elder persist in holding to doctrine(s) contrary to our shared *Confession of Faith*, he shall be removed as an elder.

5.8 The discipline of an elder within a church plant (non-particularized congregation) shall follow the same procedural guidelines outlined in §5.4 and §5.7. However, the discipline process shall be administered and overseen by the local and appointed elders (see §4.3).

6. Financial Practices

6.1 Sojourn Houston congregations shall pursue financial transparency with one another. There should be nothing hidden from the Sojourn Houston elders at large. At minimum, each

congregation shall stand ready to share annual budgets and balance sheets with the Sojourn Houston elders.

6.2 Sojourn Houston congregations shall pursue financial transparency with their respective members. Under certain circumstances, it may be prudent to withhold specific financial information, if only for a time, but this should be the exception to the rule. The local church budget is a tool for discipleship, and exposing our members to the budget requires financial transparency.

6.3 Each Sojourn Houston congregation shall form a Financial Stewardship Team (FST), responsible for giving guidance to the congregation's finances. All FST proposals are subject to elder approval. For particularized congregations, the FST shall be comprised of no less than five members and no more than two elders.

6.4 For church plants (non-particularized congregations), the FST shall be initially comprised of the local and appointed elders (see §4.3) until a team of no less than three lay members is assembled. This team of lay members must be assembled prior to the congregation's first official Sunday Gathering, though major decisions remain subject to elder approval.

6.5 Sojourn Houston shall form an FST to oversee its centralized budget. This team shall be comprised of at least one Strategic Team elder and no less than three lay members, men or women, representing no less than two congregations, and each member shall have FST experience, whether past or present, in service of their local congregation.

7. Leadership Structure

7.1 In accordance with gifting and availability, certain men shall be invited to assist the Sojourn Houston body of elders by serving on the Strategic Team. Any elder may nominate a Strategic Team member, but invitees shall be selected by the current Strategic Team. In order to serve on the Strategic Team, members must have served as an elder for no less than three years. Strategic Team decisions and initiatives shall be subject to the Sojourn Houston body of elders (subject to §7.2). The Strategic Team shall be divided into two primary subcommittees: the Directional Team and the Doctrinal Team.

7.2 Strategic Team members shall serve three year terms and may be appointed to any number of successive terms. Each year, the Strategic Team shall conduct an internal review of members approaching their term limits. During this review, local elders may veto by unanimous vote the reappointment of a local elder to the Strategic Team. In that event, the Strategic Team shall hold a meeting with the local elders to discuss. Thereafter, a unanimous vote of the local elders shall be required to block the reappointment. The decision to reappoint or remove a Strategic Team member shall not be subject to the Sojourn Houston body of elders.

7.3 The Directional Team shall be responsible for implementing Sojourn's mission, vision, and culture, to include strategic planning, church planting, Sojourn Houston staffing, etc. The

Directional Team may create additional committees as deemed necessary (e.g., a Shepherding Team).

7.4 The Doctrinal Team shall oversee and guard Sojourn’s doctrine and teaching. This may include developing a centralized preaching calendar, writing position papers, updating membership material, and producing curricula, etc.

7.5 Sojourn Houston staff members shall report to the Strategic Team, and from within the Strategic Team, a direct supervisor shall be appointed. The Strategic Team shall have the authority to hire and fire centralized staff, though all budget implications shall remain subject to the approval of the Sojourn Houston FST and body of elders. This authority shall include final approval on the acceptance or rejection of incoming church planting residents and final approval on the ordination and commissioning of Sojourn Houston church plants.

7.6 The Strategic Team shall oversee the administration of Sojourn Houston meetings. Meeting administration includes the following duties:

- 1) Scheduling meetings,
- 2) Assemble the meeting agenda,
- 3) Keep detailed minutes and ensure their filing,
- 4) Moderate discussions,
- 5) Call for and count the vote.

8. Doctrinal Changes

8.1 *The Sojourn Houston Confession of Faith* is comprised of the Nicene Creed, The Gospel Coalition Confession of Faith, and the Acts 29 Doctrinal Distinctives.

8.2 With regard to doctrinal decisions affecting Sojourn Houston at large, non-particularized congregations are permitted one vote per local elder. Particularized congregations are permitted up to four votes, representing the opinion of the local council of elders. If a local council consisting of more than four elders reaches a split decision, the minority opinion shall be overrepresented according to the following percentage thresholds:

≥15%	1 vote
≥35%	2 votes
≥65%	3 votes
≥85%	4 votes

For example, a 9-1 vote ($\geq 85\%$) shall be considered unanimous, an 2-8 vote ($\geq 15\%$) shall be represented as a 3-1 congregation vote, and a 6-4 vote ($\leq 65\%$) shall be represented as a 2-2 congregation vote.

8.3 The vote shall be called for by the appointed administrator (see §7.6). When the debate appears to have closed, the administrator shall ask, "Are we ready for the question?" If no one objects, he shall put the question and take a vote, first calling for the affirmative and then for the negative vote. In putting the question the administrator should make perfectly clear what the question is that the elders are to decide. The vote shall be taken by verbal declaration and a show of hand, and thereafter, the administrator shall announce the result.

8.4 If a member of the Sojourn Houston body of elders believes that the *Sojourn Houston Confession of Faith* (hereafter COF) misrepresents Scripture or fails to adequately articulate our doctrinal convictions, an amendment may be proposed to the Sojourn Houston body of elders. This process shall be as follows:

1. An active elder or group of elders shall articulate the need for amendment in writing, demonstrating how the COF ought to be amended.
2. Request a hearing by submitting the proposal in PDF format to the Sojourn Houston Doctrinal Team. The Doctrinal Team may:
 1. Offer feedback and request an amended proposal.
 2. Approve the proposal and set a date to present to the body of elders. The written proposal must be sent to all Sojourn Houston elders no less than 60 days prior to the scheduled meeting.
 3. Reject the proposal, stating in writing the theological or practical reasoning. This written statement shall be presented to the Sojourn Houston body of elders. If by majority vote the Sojourn Houston body of elders decides to hear the proposal, a date shall be set for a formal presentation. This date shall be no less than 60 days from the previous meeting.
3. At the hearing, the elder(s) proposing an amendment shall be given no less than 30 minutes to present his argument. The body of elders will have no more than 60 minutes to deliberate. Thereafter, a vote will be taken on the worthiness of the issue for further study. If a majority of elders believe this proposal to be worthy of consideration and significant study, the Doctrinal Team and presenting elder(s) shall be given one year to study before bringing a written a proposal to the elders for consideration.
4. Following the year of study, the Doctrinal Team and presenting elder(s) will submit a final proposal to the Sojourn Houston elders no less than 60 days prior to the scheduled meeting. In order to pass, the proposal must obtain a 2/3 vote of the Sojourn Houston elders. Voting on doctrinal matters will be done in person with a verbal or physical assent. Abstaining from doctrinal votes is not permitted. If an elder is unable to attend the meeting, he may write in his vote by submitting it to the Doctrinal Team.

1. If the proposal succeeds, the amendment is adopted. The Sojourn Houston Doctrinal Team shall draft and integrate the amendment into the COF within a reasonable amount of time.
2. If the proposal fails, the proposed amendment may not be resubmitted to the Doctrinal Team by any elder for an additional 18 months.

8.5 Any elder may request that the Doctrinal Team draft a statement or position paper on a theological topic. This process shall be as follows:

1. An active elder or group of elders shall articulate the need for a statement or position paper in writing.
2. Request a hearing by submitting the proposal in PDF format to the Sojourn Houston Doctrinal Team. The Doctrinal Team may:
 1. Offer feedback and request an amended proposal.
 2. Approve the proposal and set a date to present to the body of elders. The written proposal must be sent to all Sojourn Houston elders no less than 60 days prior to the scheduled meeting.
 3. Reject the proposal, stating in writing the theological or practical reasoning. This written statement shall be presented to the Sojourn Houston body of elders. If by majority vote the Sojourn Houston body of elders decides to hear the proposal, a date shall be set for a formal presentation. This date shall be no less than 60 days from the previous meeting.
 4. In the event that a proposed statement is urgent and/or time-sensitive, the Sojourn Houston elders may agree to expedite the process by majority vote.
3. At the hearing, the elder(s) proposing an amendment shall be given no more than 30 minutes to make his proposal. The body of elders will have no more than 60 minutes to deliberate. Thereafter, a vote will be taken on the worthiness of the issue for further study. If by majority vote, the elders accept the proposal as worthy of consideration and significant study, the Doctrinal Team and presenting elder(s) shall be given no more than one year to study before submitting a draft to the elders for consideration.
4. The Doctrinal Team may draft the paper, select a team of people to write the initial draft, or accept an initial draft from the presenting elder(s). Following no more than one year of study, the Doctrinal Team will submit a final draft to the Sojourn Houston elders no less than 60 days prior to the scheduled meeting. At the meeting of the Sojourn Houston elders during which the position paper final draft is on the docket, the Doctrinal Team shall facilitate a discussion not to exceed 75 minutes. Thereafter, a vote will be taken. In order to pass, the final draft must obtain a 2/3 vote of the Sojourn Houston elders. Voting on doctrinal matters will be done in person with a verbal or physical assent. Abstaining from doctrinal votes is not permitted. If an elder is unable to attend the meeting, he may write in his vote by submitting it to the Doctrinal Team.
 1. If the final draft is approved, the Doctrinal Team shall append the statement or position paper to the COF Appendix.

2. If the final draft is rejected, the Doctrinal Team shall take 3 months to amend the final draft. The amended draft shall be submitted to the Sojourn Houston elders no less than 60 days prior to the scheduled meeting. At the meeting of the Sojourn Houston elders during which the final draft is on the docket, the Doctrinal Team shall facilitate a discussion not to exceed 30 minutes. Thereafter, a vote will be taken. In order to pass, the final draft must obtain a 2/3 vote.
3. If the final draft is again rejected, no statement or position paper shall be adopted. The proposal may not be resubmitted to the Doctrinal Team by any elder for an additional 18 months. If the Sojourn Houston elders decline to approve a position paper, any congregation is permitted to use the position paper as a resource and teaching document, but such a paper shall not be presented as official Sojourn Houston doctrine.

8.6 Approved Sojourn Houston statements and position papers shall supersede all local congregation statements and position papers. Where there is conflict, local congregations shall be expected to amend their statements and/or position papers accordingly.

8.7 In response to a backlog of requested statements and/or position papers, timelines may be adjusted. The adjusted timeline shall be determined at the beginning of the process, and the Sojourn Houston elders shall be given progress reports quarterly.

9. Directional Changes

9.1 The Sojourn Houston Multi-Congregational Church Covenant, the Sojourn Houston Membership Curriculum, and the Sojourn Houston Book of Church Order shall be under the oversight of the Directional Team.

9.2 With regard to directional decisions affecting Sojourn Houston at large, non-particularized congregations are permitted one vote per local elder. Particularized congregations are permitted up to four votes, representing the opinion of the local council of elders. If a local council consisting of more than four elders reaches a split decision, the minority opinion shall be overrepresented according to the following percentage thresholds:

≥15%	1 vote
≥35%	2 votes
≥65%	3 votes
≥85%	4 votes

For example, a 9-1 vote ($\geq 85\%$) shall be considered unanimous, an 2-8 vote ($\geq 15\%$) shall be represented as a 3-1 congregation vote, and a 6-4 vote ($\leq 65\%$) shall be represented as a 2-2 congregation vote.

9.3 The vote shall be called for by the meeting administrator (see §7.6). When the debate appears to have closed, the administrator shall ask, "Are we ready for the question?" If no one objects, he shall put the question and take a vote, first calling for the affirmative and then for the negative vote. In putting the question the administrator should make perfectly clear what the question is that the elders are to decide. The vote shall be taken by verbal declaration and a show of hand, and thereafter, the administrator shall announce the result.

9.4 Strategic decisions impacting Sojourn Houston and its congregations shall not be made without the approval of the Directional Team and the input/involvement of the Sojourn Houston body of elders. If a member of the Sojourn Houston body of elders wishes to advocate for a modification to one of the documents listed in §9.1, an amendment may be proposed to the Sojourn Houston body of elders. This process shall be as follows:

1. An active elder or group of elders shall articulate their proposal in writing, demonstrating why the proposed change is necessary and/or prudent.
2. Request a hearing by submitting the proposal in PDF format to the Sojourn Houston Directional Team. The Directional Team may:
 1. Offer feedback and request an amended proposal.
 2. Approve the proposal and set a date to present to the body of elders. The written proposal must be sent to all Sojourn Houston elders no less than 60 days prior to the scheduled meeting.
 3. Reject the proposal, stating in writing the philosophical or practical reasoning. This written statement shall be presented to the Sojourn Houston body of elders. If by majority vote the Sojourn Houston body of elders decides to hear the proposal, a date shall be set for a formal presentation. This date shall be no less than 60 days from the previous meeting.
3. At the hearing, the elder(s) proposing an amendment shall be given no less than 30 minutes to present his argument. The body of elders will have no more than 60 minutes to deliberate. Thereafter, a vote will be taken.
 1. If a majority of elders believe this proposal to be worthy of consideration and significant study, the Directional Team and presenting elder(s) will be given 3-6 months to research and deliberate prior to bringing a written proposal to the elders for consideration.
 2. Following the period for research and deliberation, the presenting elder(s) and the Directional Team will present a final proposal to the Sojourn Houston elders. In order to pass, the proposal must obtain a 2/3 vote of the Sojourn Houston elders. Voting on directional matters will be done in person with a verbal or physical assent. Abstaining from directional votes is not permitted, but if an

elder is not able to attend the meeting he may write in his vote by submitting it to the Directional Team.

3. If the proposal succeeds, the amendment is adopted. The Sojourn Houston Directional Team shall draft and integrate the amendment into the document in question within a reasonable amount of time.
4. If the proposal fails, the proposed amendment may not be resubmitted to the Directional Team by any elder for an additional 18 months.

9.5 Any elder may request that the Directional Team draft a proposal on a philosophical, strategic, and/or ecclesiological topic. The Directional Team shall then oversee the process of drafting a proposal. The Directional Team may draft the proposal, select a team of people to write the initial draft, or accept an initial draft from the elder requesting the proposal.

9.6 The Directional Team shall submit the proposal to the Sojourn Houston elders no less than 60 days prior to the next meeting. During this period of review, the elders shall be encouraged to submit feedback electronically.

9.7 At the meeting of the Sojourn Houston elders during which the proposal draft is on the docket, the Directional Team shall facilitate a discussion not to exceed 75 minutes. Thereafter, a vote will be taken. Proposal approval shall require a 2/3 vote. Abstention is not permitted, though any elder may submit his vote to the Doctrinal Team in writing.

9.8 Approved proposals shall be published as official Sojourn Houston documents.

MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

SOJOURN HOUSTON

The purpose of this membership covenant is to clarify and solidify what Sojourn's members can expect from her leaders, what Sojourn's leaders and expect from her members, and what Sojourn's members can expect from one another. We pray it also serves as a tool for reflection and growth toward holiness.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The Church is the means through which God is fulfilling His redemptive purposes in the earth (Matthew 28:16-20; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20). Thus, joining a local congregation is about much more than consistent attendance, service, and support; it is a sacred call to join God in pushing back the darkness and establishing His Kingdom by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In addition, church membership is participation in a family. We're all united to Christ, which means that we're all united to one another. Western society is highly individualistic, which places a strain on committed relationships, but the Church is nothing apart from communion and committed relationship (what the Bible calls a *covenant*). In order to foster the sort of family the Bible envisions, we ask our members to sign membership covenants.

When a local congregation is characterized by committed relationships, members are given ample opportunities to love and be loved by others, to serve and be served by others. We are exposed to diverse giftings and strengths. We are built up through prayer and fellowship, held accountable, protected, and spurred on in the faith. In short, we have a committed community within which to obey God's communal commands.

FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENTS

In signing this membership covenant, you indicate that you: (1) are in full agreement with orthodox Christian doctrine as outlined in the Nicene Creed, (2) have read the Sojourn Houston Confession of Faith and can willingly submit to the doctrines contained therein, and (3) agree to diligently preserve unity and peace in submission to church leadership and teaching, spurning divisive language and actions with regard to these doctrinal positions.

In addition, you indicate that you have received the Sojourn Houston Multi-Congregational Church Covenant, the Sojourn Houston Book of Church Order, and your local congregation's bylaws.

YOUR LOCAL ELDERS AGREE TO:

- appoint elders and deacons according to biblical qualifications (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-4).
- prayerfully pursue God's will for the congregation (Acts 13:1-3).
- faithfully steward property and financial resources (Titus 1:7a; 1 Cor 4:2)
- shepherd and care for the church (Acts 20:28; Col 1:28; Jas 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1-4).
- teach and give counsel from the whole of Scripture (Acts 20:27-28; Col 1:28; 1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 4:1-5).
- equip congregation members for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11-16).
- guard against false teaching (Matt 7:15; Acts 20:28-31; 1 Tim 1:3-7).
- exercise loving discipline for the glory of God and the health of the congregation (Matt 18:15-20; I Cor 5; Gal 6:1; Jas 5:19-20).
- set a godly example for the flock (Phil 3:17; Titus 2:7-8; 1 Pet 5:3).
- submit to the Sojourn Houston Multi-Congregational Church Covenant, the Sojourn Houston Book of Church Order, and our congregational bylaws.

YOU / YOUR HOUSEHOLD AGREES TO:

- submit to the Bible as the final arbiter (Ps 119; 2 Tim 3:14-17).
- pursue communion with God through corporate worship, prayer, Bible reading, fellowship, etc. (1 Cor 9:24-27; Eph 5:15-21; 1 Thess 5:14-22).
- be baptized in accordance with your congregation's convictions (Acts 2:38) and to regularly participate in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34).
- regularly attend Sunday Gatherings and actively love and serve your Neighborhood Parish in accordance with your gifting (Acts 2:42-47; Heb 10:23-25).
- faithfully steward the resources God has given, including time, talents, spiritual gifts, and finances. This includes cheerful, sacrificial, and consistent financial giving, service, and participation in community (Matt 25:14-30; Rom 12:1-2; 2 Cor 8-9; 1 Pet 4:10-11).
- pursue holiness and obedience to Christ (Rom 12; 1 Pet 1:13-16; 4:1-3).
- assist others in the pursuit of holiness and obedience, gladly setting aside Christian freedoms rather than to cause others to stumble (1 Cor 8:1-13).
- submit to the discipline of the Holy Spirit by: (1) lovingly following the biblical procedures for church discipline where sin is evident in another, praying sincerely for repentance and restoration, and (2) receiving loving discipline when approached by others (Ps 141:5; Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:9-13; Heb 12:5-11).
- strive for unity and peace within the church, submitting to the leadership and honoring them with our speech (Eph 4:1-3; Heb 13:17).
- notify the elders in writing if/when leaving the congregation and seek another church in which to live as a faithful follower of Christ.
- any other obligations specific to your local congregation (attached hereto).

MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

I have received the Sojourn Houston Confession of Faith, the Sojourn Houston Multi-Congregational Church Covenant, the Sojourn Houston Book of Church Order, and my local congregation's bylaws. I understand that this covenant obligates me to the members of Sojourn and declares my submission to those in authority. I agree to notify the elders if at any time I can no longer fulfill these obligations, if I intend to find another church, or if I have any questions or concerns regarding any of the obligations delineated herein.

Printed Name _____ **DOB** _____

Signature _____ **Baptized?** Y / N

Email _____

Printed Name _____ **DOB** _____

Signature _____ **Baptized?** Y / N

Email _____

Address _____

Child _____ **Baptized?** Y / N

Child _____ **Baptized?** Y / N

Child _____ **Baptized?** Y / N

Child _____ **Baptized?** Y / N

Child _____ **Baptized?** Y / N

Parish Leader _____ **Date** _____
Signature

Printed Name _____

Parish Leader _____ **Date** _____
Signature

Printed Name _____