

COVENANTING AT ASSEMBLY

Assembly Mennonite Church is one expression of God's people, the body of Christ. We invite everyone who affirms our *Covenant* and commits to our *Practices* to become a member.

Why join the congregation?

We encourage people to publicly join this congregation because:

- Covenanting is an outward sign of an inward recognition that I am not a visitor or occasional participant here; it is my public statement that my faith journey is happening in this place, with these people.
- Committing to an Anabaptist faith community isn't a privatized decision. In an age of individualism and shallow connection, we seek to live counter-culturally by taking seriously our commitment to our faith community;
- Covenanting publicly to a group is a tangible step of being known – an important element of a healthy community;
- When one publicly joins a congregation and affirms its vision, it is a joyful and encouraging event for the entire community;
- There is power in the public testimony of how God is acting in our lives.

In encouraging people to make this public commitment, we also want to be clear about what we are *not* seeking to do. Our covenanting process is not about assessing one's doctrinal or spiritual worthiness, nor is it about regulating who is in and who is out. Most of Assembly's communal life is open to all who find their involvement here meaningful.

How to Join. Joining Assembly generally involves the following steps:

1. Join a small group, and become known to your group members. Small groups are a primary component of how we do church at Assembly. A small group is the place to tell your faith journey, review the Covenant and Practices, discern the gifts you have to share with the Assembly, and ask questions about Assembly life and practice.
2. Set up a time with one of the pastors (of your choosing) to share important aspects of your faith journey and to talk further about the congregation.
3. Find a suitable date (working with your small group and the worship committee) to publicly covenant with the congregation. Your small group should announce this in the AssemblyLine at least two weeks ahead of time so that the congregation can anticipate this joyful event.
4. The Covenanting usually includes the following:
 - a. an introduction by a member of your small group;
 - b. you briefly sharing (around 250 words/person) a part of your journey, and what brings you to this commitment [if this feels overly daunting, talk to a pastor about alternatives];
 - c. an affirmation that you have been received as a member of the congregation;
 - d. a congregational reading of the Assembly covenant; and
 - e. prayer.
5. Request a letter of membership transfer from your previous congregation (if applicable).

MEMBERSHIP IN ASSEMBLY

Assembly Mennonite is one expression of God's people, the body of Christ. We believe that church membership with a group of believers in the location where one resides is important. This "close" relationship is crucial for the individual's spiritual health and for the body's corporate life. Membership is indicated through believer's baptism and by affirming the Assembly Covenant and Practices.

Members of the congregation have agreed to review annually the Covenant and Practices. Following the review the Covenant is reaffirmed in a congregational celebration (see RECOVENANTING below).

There may be occasions when an individual chooses not to renew the Covenant or when the congregation needs to make a decision to that effect. Discipling is done in the spirit of love with the goal of winning the brother or sister.

When the member is resident, the small group and a pastor will work with the member. When the member is non-resident, the Leadership Group will work with the member, utilizing the resources of the pastoral team and the small group.

The process may result in the individual's renewal of Covenant or in the discernment of the individual, congregation, or both that the individual is not a member of Assembly Mennonite Church.

Assembly members who move away from the Goshen area are encouraged to place their membership with another Mennonite congregation within two years of departing the Goshen area. In cases where this is not possible, Associate Membership may be obtained.

Members who plan to return within a year will relate to Assembly through the small group (see Membership for Temporary Residents and Associate Members).

MEMBERSHIP FOR SOJOURNING RESIDENTS AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Since formation as a congregation, Assembly has been able to "send forth" members to other locations and to welcome new members into the community. This very mobility has sometimes resulted in some lack of clarity about membership status in Assembly. This document attempts to bring such clarity.

Basic assumptions:

1. We believe that church membership with a group of believers is important in the location where one resides. This close relationship is crucial for the individual's spiritual health and for the body's corporate life.
2. For this reason we expect that covenanted Assembly members who move to another location will directly place their membership with a group of believers with whom they identify and regularly worship.
3. Similarly we want to expect that persons who live temporarily in the Goshen area and who identify and worship with Assembly will desire membership.

MEMBERSHIP FOR SOJOURNING RESIDENTS

Some persons who reside "temporarily" in the Goshen area may wish to become sojourning members of Assembly while maintaining membership with their sending congregation. These persons are welcome to become covenanted members of Assembly. However, such dual membership will be viewed in several unique ways:

- a. These persons will be full members of Assembly while resident in the Goshen area.
- b. Upon departure from Assembly, the membership will terminate unless arrangements are made.
- c. Associate membership will not be available later to persons who have dual membership.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP FOR NONRESIDENTS

Assembly members who move elsewhere are encouraged to place their membership with another Mennonite congregation within two years of departing from the Goshen area. However, some persons will be unable to find a Mennonite group with which to affiliate. For these cases we suggest Associate Membership.

An annual conversation, initiated by the Leadership Group, may take place in February. When a member has been non-resident for two years, she/he will be encouraged to end membership. If the member wishes to retain membership beyond two years, she/he should make a request to the Leadership Group to be considered for continued Associate Membership. A pastor may initiate an exit interview for the purpose of hearing counsel and affirmation for the congregation, and giving counsel and support of the member leaving.

Associate Membership

This membership status will be granted to covenanted non-resident members of Assembly who:

- a. Are members of a non-Mennonite congregation and want to maintain an identification with Mennonites or
- b. Are members in a place of service (MCC, VS, mission assignment) at a distance or overseas and want to remain related to Assembly.

Conditions of Associate Membership

Associate Members will:

- a. Agree to the Covenant and Practices on an annual basis, similar to congregational process to reaffirm the Covenant.
- b. Maintain regular contact and accountability with a small group. This should occur at least semi-annually.
- c. Contribute financially either where they reside or through Assembly.
- d. If the annual reaffirmation of the Covenant is not done, Associate Membership status may be terminated after one final contact by telephone or letter.

MEMBERS NON-RESIDENT FOR LESS THAN ONE YEAR

Assembly members absent for a time but intending to return in less than one year may continue to identify with Assembly as members and may function as much as they can from a distance by:

- Maintaining regular communication with Assembly through the small group.
- Sharing in prayer concerns with and for the Assembly and the larger work in the world.
- Continuing financial stewardship and giving through Assembly channels if possible or on location if not possible through Assembly.
- Participating as fully as possible in a group of believers in the new location.
- Keeping informed, as much as possible, of congregational decisions made in the member's absence. Such decisions are naturally applicable to the members when they return. Returned members may question such decisions, however, and their small group or groups may request re-examination of a decision should the small group or groups deem it necessary and desirable.
- Members on leave normally return to the small group from which they left.

RECOVENANTING

Faith is not static. Our beliefs and commitments unfold in different ways over time. That is why each year on Pentecost we celebrate and provide opportunity to renew our commitment to the congregation. We can choose to identify again with Assembly as our place to worship and discern together. We are all invited to prepare for this ritual by reflecting on our Covenant and Practices, and who we are as the body of Christ in *this* time and place. Most of us will likely find our commitment has not changed significantly. However, we do not want to assume this for everyone. Some may be ready to move toward membership; others may feel a need to step back. You may want to consider the following questions in small group as you consider reconvenanting:

What in your participation at Assembly is life-giving? What brings you joy? What is troublesome? What are your hopes for the coming year? What stands out to you in the Covenant this year? To which Practices do you want to give more focus?

In preparation for reconvenanting, we ask you individually and in small groups to inform the pastors of your intent re: membership for the coming year.

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