



Covenant Writing for Intergenerational Mission Activities

A covenant, we know through scripture, is when God and people make promises to one another with holy intent to create God's "kin-dom" and love for all through life in community. Scripture is full of covenants between people and God, and people with one another. For mission partnerships, and in preparation within our own community before we work with partners, it is especially important to say how we expect to be in community, how we hope to proceed in our mutual work, what our responsibilities are and even how our attitudes and words make for holy community. Writing a covenant together can be a great way to start the work of creating an intergenerational community to do mission partnerships well.

Planning your covenant writing event

With intergenerational teams, it can be useful to have an adult meeting prior to the community gathering with everyone. Adults who are not parents or educators often engage in intergenerational activities with some fears or anxieties about how to interact with children or youth. Some topics that may help with group dynamics are:

- Leaders or parents will manage behavior and reinforcement with children and youth.
- While keeping confidentiality, discuss potential mental health or physical ability needs within the group and how those will be addressed.

When you gather the group, you will want to have a way for everyone to get to know each other. Nametags can divide people into groups that are diverse by age, interest or existing communities within the church. Consider having colored stickers that each person chooses based on their generation, favorite snack, favorite hobby or some other choice that will roughly divide the group into 4 to 6 categories. If you have a smaller group, do this activity in pairs or threes and switch a few times.

Prepare questions in advance to be placed on each table for everyone to answer. This is a good way to begin conversation in mixed groups. Use questions like: What is your favorite story? How do you like to spend your free time? Or other open-ended questions are also good.

It is always appropriate to give children tools to help them engage at an age-appropriate level. Things like pages to color with a clipboard: blank pages to draw what they think a covenant looks like or coloring sheets that match the story you choose. Play dough or blocks to build the story are great ways to include younger folks who may not be engaged by conversational Bible study or reading-heavy activities. Be sure to include them fully in the conversation and ask about what they build or draw.

Elements of the gathering

Time for gathering, making nametags, eating a meal (optional) and answering questions may take anywhere from 15 to 45 minutes.

Writing a covenant together can be a great way to start the work of creating an intergenerational community to do mission partnerships well.



It is helpful to start by defining covenant within our faith tradition.

- This could be a study of the Bible's covenants by table groups:
 - Covenants between God and humanity
 - Noah Genesis 8:20–9:17
 - Abraham Genesis 17:1–22,
 - The people of Israel Exodus 19:1–8; 20:1–21
 - David 2 Samuel 7
 - If these stories are used, children could have a set of four stickers or some sort of images: a rainbow, a person or family, the Ten Commandments or a checklist, and a path/tent/sheep, and children can add them to the stories.
 - Or if there are four groups and each group does a different story, all the children could be given the shapes. Once a story has been presented to the whole group, the children could be asked which sticker/shape goes with that story and could put it on the table of the group that studied that story.
 - Some covenants people make with each other in Scripture include: Genesis 26:25–32, 1 Samuel 23:13–18, 1 Chronicles 11:1–3 and 1 Kings 5:10–12.
 - Jesus and Covenant
 - Matthew 28:16–20
 - Luke 22:14–20
 - Luke 24:44–49
 - Particularly with the Luke 22 story, but with all these Jesus stories, it could be great to have groups act out the story, playing all the parts together.
 - It could be a leader reading a covenant story and then a children's book that defines covenant in simple terms for everyone. Some ideas for books are:
 - "God's Rainbow," by Allia Zobel Nolan
 - "Lola's Rules for Friendship," by Jenna McCarthy
 - "Don't Let the Pigeon Drive The Bus!" by Mo Willems
 - "This Moose Belongs to Me," by Oliver Jeffers
 - If your congregation has a strong mission/vision/identity statement that everyone knows, it could be a discussion of this other story of covenant you already have as a community.

Once we know what a covenant is, it's good to work together to write one for this particular community group and activity.

Begin with brainstorming ideas.

- This might be good to start in smaller groups if you have more than 10 people. Each group could choose a scribe and write some ideas at their table for what rules will be in a covenant. Perhaps ask younger children first; they are often most familiar with community rules as they are learning them at school and other places for the first time and can often offer clarity.
- Or perhaps provide paper and markers throughout the room and have people move around in pairs or trios and add ideas for rules to the sheets.

The following questions might help in getting to your covenant rules:

- How should we treat each other?
- What should our attitude be when we gather?
- How can we be like Christ for each other?
- How should we treat visitors to our community?
- How should we treat the spaces, property and possessions we encounter together?



- How can we show God's love to one another?
- How will we respect God's time and our time when we gather?
- How will we help someone who is having a hard time?
- How should we behave toward those who lead us or the leaders we meet with our mission partners?
- How should we as a community behave or speak to one another or with our partners in ministry?
- Is there anything we should not do when we are together?

When multiple answers have been brainstormed, you should narrow down the list to the ones that are important to your community to have in your covenant.

- You could give everyone a marker or small circle stickers and have them choose five rules from all the brainstormed ideas and put their stickers with their choices, and from there gather the 5 to 10 ideas that are most important to your community. This might include combining some different ones that are similar into a single guideline for your covenant. Be sure to pair pre-readers with readers who can read them the options and help them decide which ones are most important to them.
- If there are a few ideas that are common to all the answers, perhaps have a leader suggest wording while someone writes out your guidelines.

After you have figured out your covenant, give everyone a chance to sign it.

After you have figured out your covenant, give everyone a chance to sign it. It belongs to everyone, and everyone should commit to following it as best they can while you work with your partners. For children and youth unfamiliar with signing documents, assist them with what this means; and with pre-readers, assist in writing their names or even drawing a simple symbol like a check mark or heart on the page. Offer a prayer or blessing for the covenant, the community and the time you will spend together.

Writer: Jessica Dixon

Office of Christian Formation: <https://pcusa.org/formation>

July 2021

