

WHY SIGN THE COVENANT?

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Mother of God Prayer Meeting
May 6, 2001

What Is a Covenant?

A covenant is bond of love by which God forms a people united to himself, in order to protect, sustain and bring to completion the salvation he has accomplished in their lives. On God's part, it's an infinitely binding commitment to share his life with us forever. On our part, it's voluntarily entering into that commitment with God, in which we promise to live according to His mind, wisdom and plan, where He is the source and sustainer of our life.

The fulfillment of the Old Testament covenants is the New Covenant in the blood of Christ, the universal and eternal covenant by which we have been made partakers in the divine nature and brought into eternal fellowship with the three Persons of the Trinity.

The essence of the covenant is communal: "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." God never says, "I will be your God, and you shall be my *person*." By its very nature, life with God is not an individual, private life. You can't live it alone, any more than you can sing in harmony alone. It is only in communal life that the splendor of divine love can shine forth. God so desires that we learn to live in deep unity and harmony with one another, respecting, valuing and cherishing in one another, needing and depending on each other, building up one another, reflecting the inner life of the Trinity. "We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" ([Eph 4:15f](#)).

Our rich diversity is what makes our unity possible. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" ([1 Cor 12:4-7](#)).

The Mother of God Community Covenant

Our covenant is a local instantiation or concretization, so to speak, of the New Covenant. It is a special bond between God and us as members of MOG to live out a life based on God's calling and intention for MOG.

What is the heart of the Mother of God covenant? *Life in the Spirit in fellowship with one another*. Through the cross of Jesus we've been forgiven, given access to the throne of grace, to a whole new life as God's sons and daughters through the grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit. His desire is that we experience this new life *as a body*.

Everything else in MOG flows from that. Our ministries and activities, the school, the Good News Cafe, Bible studies, friendships, the buildings, etc., are secondary and peripheral. Our life as a Community has to be based on the inner life, the new life in the Spirit. The center is within, and yet we face outward - if we cease to share with others in the Church and the world the riches of grace we have received, we will begin to atrophy. An analogy: the circulation of blood.

God as the Initiator and Focal Point

All we have and do is founded on God's previous work. God is the initiator, and the covenant is a response to him. This is true of the universal covenant in Christ, and of our little covenant here in MOG. The covenant exists because God desired it and called us to it. It is not a nice idea dreamed up by the founders of MOG. We have given it a form as we think God is leading us, but it comes from him.

God is the center and focal point of our covenant. Without God, the covenant has no value or meaning; it wouldn't stand the test of time. Could we produce a whole new life in relationship with God and one another? The modern idea of marriage - it's a work of man, a contract. We change our minds and it's void. If the covenant is based on a human foundation, it will break down.

Freedom and Commitment

Why make the commitment in the first place? Why not just live our community life with no strings attached? A commitment doesn't restrict freedom, it fulfills it. It brings our freedom to maturity. You can make an analogy with the marriage covenant (which has an objectively higher status and priority for those who are married). Why commit yourself to someone for the rest of your life? So that your love is free to develop and flourish. You are no longer under the tyranny of your whims - "I'll live with this guy as long as I feel like it." Instead, "I'll live with him whether I feel like it or not. I'll love him on good days and bad days." This is freedom.

Without freedom, we'll start to view the covenant as an imposition on my rights, a burden not a privilege, a list of rules and regulations. You don't go into a marriage saying, "What the minimal requirement?" It is the same with covenant community - it has to come from within, from a love for what God has done for us here and an enthusiastic desire to protect and further it.

A commitment to each other is a reflection of God himself, who is infinitely committed to himself and to us. It forms a solid foundation on which we can build our life. I can rely on my brothers and sisters because they care enough about me to bind themselves to me in covenant. This is how God intended for us to live in the family of God. We may have our hard times, but we tough it out. Our commitment to all the baptized can be very abstract and open-ended. But our commitment to others in MOG is real and concrete, it bumps up against our flesh every day. As concrete as the challenges are, even more so are the blessings.

We commit ourselves to what we know we can't carry out on our own. It's a step in faith - I commit myself to relying on God to carry this out in me. If we allow God, he will uphold the covenant in us. He will more than make up for our weakness. What happens if you miss reading scripture for a day? You repent and go on. There is great fear of commitment in our day, which keeps many people from enjoying the happiness of marriage, from developing fully as persons, from deep and enduring relationships. We shouldn't let this stop us - we have a much firmer basis than our own reliability.

The covenant includes a sense of ownership, that we wouldn't leave it to others to build up the body and enjoy the fruit when we feel like it. E.g. the prayer meeting - we should pray for it, have it at heart that clear words from the Lord would be shared, that new people would be welcomed, that all who come would be lifted up into God's presence. Be aware of

what would block me or others from coming into God's presence, do spiritual warfare. Come ready to give, not just receive. Bring into your own prayer what the Lord is teaching us as a body (e.g. putting out into the deep, the covenant), meditate on it, receive revelation that can build up others.

Discerning the Covenant

In the next month, we should all be praying about the covenant. Entering into the covenant is in no sense an obligation; it is a vocation in which God freely chooses to call us, and we freely respond to him. It is a great privilege. We can be confident that if we are sincerely seeking God's will, he will show us what his intention is for us in relation to the Community. You might also find it helpful to talk to a Council member, to help you clarify your perspective.

Who is eligible to sign the covenant? Those who are eligible include all who have completed the initiation process (past or recent), which currently consists of the Growing in Faith course.

If you are excited about signing the Mother of God Community Covenant, that is a great blessing and we can thank the Lord for the joy he has given us in binding us together in a shared life. It is still important to pray and come to a deeper understanding of how God is calling you to live it out. What God shows you can be greatly edifying to others.

If the MOG Covenant seems a burden to you, there are three possible reasons:

1. God is not calling you; it may not accord with the demands of family or other responsibilities in your life. We should be free to acknowledge that if it is the case. It's always better to do what God is calling us to than what might seem holier or more demanding.
2. God is calling you, but there are obstacles in you that need to be overcome - fears, memories, self-centeredness, acedia, discouragement, a worldly idea of freedom that says, "I want to participate only when I feel like it." If you let him, God will deliver you and give you freedom and peace.
3. You might be misunderstanding the nature of the covenant. If you think, "If I miss a prayer meeting because of my grandma's birthday party I'll be breaking the covenant," you're thinking too legalistically. On the other hand, if you show up just every now and then, you should evaluate whether you are taking the covenant commitment seriously enough.

Memory

4. If you find memories of past experiences an obstacle to the covenant, pray on this word of Pope John Paul II (spoken in Greece, Friday, May 4, 2001):
5. JP II: "If historical events in the past, events linked to ways of thinking and acting typical of their times, have been a source of conflict and division, Christians must consider memory above all the sanctuary where the living witness of the Risen Lord is preserved.... For Christians, memory is too lofty and noble a sanctuary to be defiled by human sin. Certainly, sin can painfully damage the fabric of memory, but it cannot tear it asunder: that fabric is like the seamless garment of the Lord Jesus, which no one dared to divide. Dear

Brothers, let us spare no effort in making it possible for memory once again to illuminate the great things which God has done for us. Let us lift our gaze from human pettiness and sin, and let us contemplate in heaven the throne of the Lamb, where the eternal liturgy of praise is chanted by men and women of every people and race, clothed in white robes. There they contemplate the face of God, no longer "in a glass darkly," but as it is in reality. There, on high, memory gives way to fullness, and there are no more tears, nor death, because the former things have passed away."

6. Let the Lord suffuse your memory with his presence and light. No human weakness or unfaithfulness can nullify God's faithfulness. His infinitely binding commitment to give us life is not defeated by the sins or failures of others, or even our own. "If we are faithless, he remains faithful-for he cannot deny himself" ([2 Tim 2:13](#)).

Questions for Personal Study and Small Group Discussion

1. What are the greatest blessings you have received as a covenanted member of Mother of God Community, or by participating as a non-covenanted member?
2. Do you see any tendencies in yourself to an individualistic Christianity?