

#### **Part 4: We affirm the church as a fellowship of believers.**

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“One Church... One Family.” Our youth group in recent years has adopted this phrase as our rallying cry. We’ve declared it at sports tournaments as a youth group team, at the close of corporate prayer time, when wrapping up retreats and preparing to return home, and even made it a shirt theme. “One Church... One Family” captures the heartbeat of the Evangelical Covenant Church’s affirmation that the church is a fellowship of believers. In “Living Faith” published by the denomination, Phil Anderson reflecting on the historical roots of this affirmation wrote, “those who have found the Covenant Church to be their spiritual home have consistently responded to the call not only to believe but to belong.”

Our history going back as Mission Friends and meeting in conventicles to the present day diverse growth of the denomination shows the importance and vitality of the local church. From our historical roots to present day, the pressing call remains that we not only go to church, but to be the church as we do life together through all the complexities that accompany it.

*The local congregation is of crucial importance in God’s redemptive work in the world. While God is at work elsewhere, it is particularly in the close personal relationships of the fellowship that people are opened to the healing, convicting, and life-giving ministry of the Holy Spirit. Here, biblical nurture and discipline occur in the context of love and concern. (Living Faith, 105)*

Having roots connected to the Korean immigrant church, I’ve seen how vital youth and young adult ministry can be for second-generation Korean-Americans. With a different heart language, culture, and life-context than our immigrant parents, it can be struggle to find a place of understanding and care.

I personally grew up in a non-Christian home, as an only child-latch key kid since second-grade since my parents at that time worked seven days a week and often ten to twelve hour days. I knew my parents did what they had to do to survive and support our small family. My aunt was the first Christ-follower in my extended family, and through her invitation and my parents approval, I started attending church since childhood.

The local church and God working through the personal relationships with Sunday School teachers and youth pastors has been key to my testimony and call to ministry. Through the local church, I heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, grew to love the Word, and found a spiritual family that went deeper in unique ways than my biological family could.

In doing youth ministry, I’ve seen the importance of the local congregation being used in God’s redemptive work. Through peer ministry and through older people reaching out to the youth, Christ’s love was embodied. For second-generation youth and young adults, the local church provided a place to believe and belong, a family redefined, and a place for discipleship and growth.

*Church is where we discover our most basic, fundamental community. We can say “we” of our family, city or region, ethnic group, or country. Each of these communities may shape who we are. Yet, only one of them shows and shapes our true identity as God’s blessed creatures (Genesis 1:28) and beloved children (Ephesians 5:1; cf. Romans 1:7). (Living Faith, 109)*

*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:9-12)*

The world is hungry for authentic connection and relationship beyond the virtual world, desiring real community, and seeking a true anchor in the midst of life. The church as the fellowship of believers is the means through which God can reach the world. The church is the gathering place of God’s children, God’s love lived out and in motion, and God’s love in mission. One church, one family may we be.

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## **Bible Study**

### **Philippians 1:1-11**

Philippians is an intimate letter written by Paul to a church that he dearly loved. Paul’s prayers, affection, tears, and nearness in his heart reveal that care he had for the church he established in Europe (Acts 16). While the themes of fellowship, Gospel, and joy shine throughout the letter, the context in which Paul was writing from was a prison view in Rome. There were no guarantees if Paul would receive freedom or death. When the Philippian church heard of Paul’s predicament, they sent Epaphroditus to Paul with gifts, support, and encouragement. In light of this correspondence, Paul penned this letter to the Philippian church.

### **Questions:**

1. What do you think about when you hear the word fellowship? What images, activities, and memories come to mind?
2. In verse 3, Paul prays with joy because of the partnership the church had with him in the gospel. The word partnership is connected to the word, fellowship, so that it could read, because of your fellowship in the gospel. Fellowship here is understood and rooted to the gospel. How does that affect our understanding of fellowship and gospel?
3. In verse 7, “all of you share in God’s grace with me” also connects to the word fellowship; all of you are ‘fellowshippers’ in God’s grace with me. What emotions and heart does Paul convey when he thinks about the Philippians?
4. How does Paul pray for the Philippian church? How can we pray for the fellowship of believers in our midst?
5. What missional aspects come to mind with fellowship in this passage? What encouragement comes from fellowship in this passage? What challenges come from fellowship in this passage?