



Prairie Bible Institute: Community Covenant

Revision 2012

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Preface

Prairie is a leading centre of higher education for Christians. We equip students to achieve their life, ministry, and career purpose and to fulfill their role within the Body of Christ. Together, our desire is "To Know Christ and Make Him Known". Prairie Bible Institute consists of three schools: Prairie Bible College, Prairie School of Applied Arts & Technology and Prairie School of Mission Aviation (use of the word "College" in this document refers to the collective).

Prairie's mission as a post-secondary educational community is to "serve the Church by discipling Christians through biblically integrated post-secondary education." This requires not merely the transmission of information but the development of whole and effective Christians who will impact the Church and society worldwide. Along with the privileges of membership in such a community come responsibilities that we take seriously.

As a complex Christian community we seek to live according to the biblical standards laid down by Jesus Christ for His body, the Church. The biblical foundation of Christian community is expressed in Jesus' two great commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," and, "Love your neighbor as yourself". (Matt. 22:37-40) Jesus himself perfectly demonstrated the pattern: love for God, acted out in love for others, in obedience to God's Word.

Our Community Covenant

For the sake of fulfilling the community's purposes, its members voluntarily enter into a covenant. We understand this covenant to be a commitment to one another during the time that we are involved in the Prairie community. We desire that the Prairie community be a covenant community of Christians marked by integrity, responsible freedom, and dynamic Christ-like love where we lovingly encourage one another in our spiritual growth, a place where the name of Jesus Christ is honored in all we do.

Acknowledging our dependence on the power and grace of God, the members of the Prairie campus community humbly covenant to live according to this ideal. Personal agreement should be with the full intention of living with integrity.

The purposes of this community covenant are as follows:

- to glorify our great God.
- to cultivate a campus atmosphere that encourages spiritual, moral and intellectual growth.
- to integrate our lives around Christian principles and devotion to Jesus Christ.
- to remove whatever may hinder us from our calling as a Christ-centered community.
- to encourage one another to see that living for Christ involves dependence on God's Spirit, and
- to embrace passionate obedience to his Word.

As a community we are responsible for ourselves and to other members of the community. With this in mind we must be accountable to one another. It is the desire of this community to respond biblically to those who contravene this covenant. A restorative discipline process will be used in such cases.

Affirming Biblical Standards

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." (2 Tim. 3:16) We desire to build this covenant on basic biblical standards for godly Christian character and behavior.

We understand that our calling includes the following:

- The call to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ over all of life and thought. This involves a wholehearted obedience to Jesus and careful stewardship in all dimensions of life: our time, our possessions, our God-given capacities, our opportunities and our relationships (Deut. 6:5-6; 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 1:18; Col. 3:17).
- The call to love God in every aspect of our lives with our whole being, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Christ-like love should be the motive in all decisions, actions, and relationships (Matt. 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10; 1 John 4:7-12).
- The call to live a crucified life through identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection (Gal. 2:20).
- The call to pursue holiness in every aspect of our thought and behavior (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:7; Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet. 1:15-16).
- The call to humbly submit ourselves to one another (1 Pet. 5:5; Eph. 5:21).
- The call to practice loving regard for the needs of others, including exercising our Christian freedom responsibly within the framework of God's Word (Phil. 2:3-11; 1 Thess. 4:9; Rom. 14:1-23).
- The call to treat our own bodies, and those of others, with the honor due the very temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:17-20; Rom. 6:12-14).
- The call to gathering and active responsibility within the local church, which forms the basic biblically-mandated context for Christian living (Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:25; 1 Tim 3:14-15).

Living the Christian Life

We believe these biblical standards will show themselves in a distinctly Christian way of life, an approach to living we expect of ourselves and of one another. This lifestyle involves practicing those attitudes and actions the Bible portrays as virtues and avoiding those the Bible portrays as sinful.

A. According to the Scriptures, followers of Jesus Christ will:

- show evidence of the Holy Spirit who lives within them, such as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).
- "put on" compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and supremely, love (Col 3:12-14).
- seek righteousness, mercy and justice, particularly for the helpless and oppressed (Prov. 21:3; Prov. 31:8-9; Micah 6:8; Matt. 23:23; Gal. 6:10).
- love and side with what is good in God's eyes, and abhor what is evil in God's eyes (Amos 5:15; Rom. 12:9; Rom. 16:19).
- uphold the God-given worth of human beings, from conception to death, as the unique image-bearers of God (Gen. 1:27; Psalm 8:3-8; Psalm 139:13-16).
- uphold chastity among the unmarried (1 Cor. 6:18).
- uphold the sanctity of marriage between a man and woman (Heb. 13:4; Gen. 2:24).
- be people of integrity whose word can be fully trusted (Psalm 15:1, 4; Matt. 5:33-37).
- give faithful witness to the Gospel (Acts 1:8; 1 Pet. 3:15).
- demonstrate respect and appropriate submission to those in authority (Heb. 13:17; Rom. 13:1-5; Rom. 12:10; 1 Pet. 2:17).
- be ministers of reconciliation and forgiveness. (Matt. 5:23-25; 6:15; Mark 11:25; Luke 11:2-4; 17:3-4; Rom. 4:7; 5:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:11-21; Eph. 2:14-18; Col. 1:15-21.)
- practice good works toward all (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:10; Heb. 10:24; 1 Pet. 2:11).
- be faithful stewards of life and resources (Gen.1:26-28; 2 Thess. 3:6-9).
- and live lives of prayer and thanksgiving (1 Thess. 5:17-18; James 5:16; Titus 2:7-8; Eph. 6:18).

By contrast, Scripture condemns the following:

- Sinful attitudes and practices such as pride, dishonesty, injustice, prejudice, immodesty in dress or behavior, slander, harassment, gossip, vulgar or obscene language, blasphemy, greed and materialism, covetousness, the taking of innocent life, and illegal activities (Prov. 16:18; 1 Cor. 6:10; Ex. 20:7; Rom. 13:9; Col. 3:8-9; James 2:1-13; Gal. 3:26-29; Rom. 13:1-2; 1 Tim. 2:8-10; Heb. 13:5-6; Gal. 5:19-21).
- hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and legalism (Acts 15:5-11; Matt. 23:13-36; Col. 2:20-23).
- pre-marital sex, adultery, lust, homosexual behavior, all sexual relations outside the bounds of marriage between a man and woman, and other forms of sexual immorality such as the use of pornography (Rom. 1:21-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31; Matt. 5:27-28).

Exercising Christian Freedom

Beyond these explicit biblical issues, the Prairie community seeks to foster the practice of responsible Christian freedom (Gal. 5:13-14; 1 Pet. 2:16-17). Christian freedom is not the right to do whatever one pleases, but rather the power and capacity both to will and to do as one ought. The freedom of Christian liberty is the freedom from sin in order to be like Jesus Christ. Christian liberty is never freedom from responsibility.

Because we have personal freedom to do something does not mean we have the Christian freedom to do so. We seek God's help in abstaining from all choices which bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardize our own or another's faith. Responsibility for choices on issues that are not explicitly biblical should be based on at least the following principles:

- *Love* – Will exercising my freedom build the Body of Christ? Will it cause someone to use my actions as license for the misuse of liberty? Am I causing division in the Body of Christ? Liberty should not cause another person to stumble, be made weak, or turn from Christ. This principle of love applies to both the weaker and the stronger brother in faith. The stronger need to consider the sensitivity of the weaker; likewise the weaker must consider the freedom of the stronger (Rom. 14-15; 1 Cor. 8; 10:23-33).
- *Conscience* – Will these offend my own conscience? (Rom. 14:22-23)
- *Edification* – Is it profitable to my spiritual life, to God's goals for me, to my health, to my testimony to the lost and my life as an example to other believers? (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23)
- *Control* – Will it enslave me? Has it enslaved me? Will this choice be evidence of or does it contribute to my enslavement? (1 Cor. 6:12b)
- *Temple* – Will this choice help or hinder my body as an instrument of serving God? The New Testament teaches us that the body is the temple, the very dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and should be cared for accordingly. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)
- *Exaltation* – Will it glorify or exalt the Lord and His glory? (1 Cor. 10:31)
- *Constraint* – Is this choice for building the kingdom of God or simply my selfishness? (2 Cor. 5:14-15)

While there are dangers with having a wrong view of Christian freedom, there are also dangers with the opposite extreme of "legalism." There are three problems that typically fall under the name "legalism" which have been condemned by Scripture and the Church through its history:

- Holding to a merit-based approach to salvation, that one must do good deeds to accrue merit before God in order to attain or maintain salvation.
- Adding regulations to clear biblical teaching and elevating these additional regulations to the status of authority held by Scripture.
- Emphasizing outward conduct as the measure of genuine Christian maturity without regard to inward thoughts and motivations.

Spiritual Formation

At the core of our educational community is a passionate pursuit to know and love God. Together, we are learning to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

While this pursuit is a profound manifestation of God's gracious action, it is simultaneously a human responsibility to follow after God (Phil. 2:12-13). We are dependent on God for divine enablement, but we are responsible and not passive in this process of spiritual formation. Christians are called to deliberate involvement in this pursuit.

With a sincere desire to be a community that pursues God with passion Prairie has designed intentional spiritual formation activities and exercises. These are noted below.

Worship

Humanity is created to magnify God's glory! In the truest sense, all of our lives should be a worship experience in that all of life is to intentionally be lived for His glory. At the same time as all of life is a worship experience; it is also true that the community of Christ gathers to intentionally express worship in specific services. This practice of worshipping corporately has been a component of the historical community of Christ (Heb. 10:25) and it is a heritage of Prairie Bible Institute. It is a present commitment to worship and to seek God. Chapel is not a replacement of or substitute for either personal worship or the worship service of the local church. Students are required to participate in daily chapel. Employees are required to participate in the weekly Community Chapel.

Service

We deem it both a privilege and responsibility to serve God in this educational community. We delight in our pursuits of thinking, listening, study, teaching, research, writing, practice, performance, field education, manual labour, and witness as a worship offering to God. We engage these commitments with integrity, humility, diligence, and excellence in order to submit our best to God (Col. 3:17).

Community

The Triune God has existed eternally in perfect community. Created in His image, humanity is designed to live and work in community with Him and others. We are called to grow together as His Body. Christian maturity is not nurtured in a life of isolation. Prairie employees are expected to pursue relationships that foster and encourage their spiritual growth. Prairie students are required to participate in tangible face to face community within the organized small group ministry.

Prayer

Prayer is intimate conversation with God. Prairie students/staff are learning to practice prayer daily. There are a variety of organized events and initiatives that have been developed to foster this, including the House of Prayer, Action Groups, staff prayer times, and Days of Prayer. While the majority of these are optional, students/employees are required to participate in the designated Days of Prayer.

Bible

The Bible is foundational to growth in Christ. We are learning to practice daily devotional reading of the Word.

Spiritual Disciplines

In our journey of faith we are learning to practice habits of godliness to help us focus on God. Some of these specific disciplines can include prayer, spiritual retreat, confession, journaling, and Bible reading. As a corporate spiritual discipline, Prairie students/employees are required to participate in the Conferences designed for the Prairie community (e.g. Christian Life Week, Global Connections Conference).

Accountability

We need one another to assist in keeping our commitments to God and each other. We accept that we are dependant on others to keep us accountable; and we also accept our responsibility, according to the principles of Matthew 18 and Galatians 6:1, to restore those caught in sin.

Discipling

Discipling is the relational process of life to life influence. This concept is firmly rooted in the Scripture (2 tim. 2:2; Titus 2:3-5; Heb. 10:24). We practice both discipling and being disciplined toward maturity in Christ.

Embracing College Standards

Christian freedom requires a wise stewardship of mind, body, time, abilities and resources on the part of every member of the community. Responsible freedom also requires thoughtful, biblically-guided choices in matters such as behavior, entertainment and interpersonal relationships. Standards prescribed in this section reflect the needs and commitment of our unique Prairie community. These are not viewed as "codes" of deeper spirituality nor as to capitulations to legalism; rather, we follow these standards to help us achieve our Prairie community goals. Our intent is that the understanding and application of the standards within this context will equip us to work within diverse communities.

To foster the kind of campus atmosphere most conducive to becoming the Christian community of living, learning, and serving that Prairie aspires to be, the College has adopted the following institutional standards. These standards embody such foundational principles as self-control, avoidance of harmful practices, the responsible use of freedom, sensitivity to the heritage and practices of other Christians, and honoring the name of Jesus Christ in all we do.

Of concern in a collegiate environment are those issues related to alcohol, illegal drugs, and tobacco. Use of illegal drugs is by definition illicit, and the use of tobacco in any form has been proven to be seriously addictive and prolonged use is injurious to health. Therefore, all members of the Prairie community will refrain from the use of either. The situation regarding beverage alcohol is more complex.

The Bible prohibits the misuse and abuse of fermented drinks – and requires total abstinence in certain situations by mandate and example, particularly by spiritual leaders. Although a total abstinence policy may secure a common practice, a policy can not guarantee a pure people who live according to the Spirit. The question of alcohol consumption requires a responsibility for Christians to exercise their freedom carefully and in Christ-like love.

We acknowledge the potential for alcohol to cloud the mind and spirit to the extent that effective spiritual direction may be seriously inhibited. The New Testament offers being filled with the Spirit of God as a serious contrast to overindulgence of alcohol. We seek to abstain from *all* drugs, food, drink, and practices which bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardize our own or another's faith.

Prairie's campus will be alcohol free - the possession or consumption of alcohol is prohibited on campus. The same prohibition applies to all members of the College Community when involved in any Prairie-sponsored off campus events or program.

The Prairie community also expects responsible freedom in matters of entertainment, including the places where members of the College community may seek it, such as television, movies, video, theater, clubs, pubs, concerts, dances, games and the Internet. If our community is to grow together in grace and knowledge each individual member must be guided in entertainment choices by the godly wisdom of Philippians 4:8: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things."

It is acknowledged that there are differing views related to the issue of dancing. Prairie is a diverse community and we desire to maintain unity on campus. Instructional, cultural, liturgical, and performance-

based dance is permitted on campus with college permission, which can be obtained through the Spiritual Formation Division. All members of the Prairie community should demonstrate discretion.

As God-created beings we are to respect ourselves and others in our relationships. To avoid exclusivity and discomfort amongst others, we are expected to be discrete, modest and polite in our expression of physical contact with others. Members of the College community are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with scriptural principles and in harmony with the spirit of the Community Covenant. "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or greed, for these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving" (Eph. 5:3-4). For our benefit God has provided boundaries for the expression of our sexuality, reserving sexual activities for the marriage relationship between a man and a woman. While some individuals may struggle with gender identity, Prairie maintains that homosexual behaviour is contrary to scripture.

Dress and fashion are constantly changing. We recognize that within a College community there is a broad range of values and opinion with respect to fashion and appearance. It is impossible to issue a detailed dress code that is binding for all times and for all places. As individual Christians, as students of a Christian institution and as members of the Christian church at large, we are often subject to the standards and expectations of others. While dress is largely a matter of taste and custom, we should be willing to forgo our liberties if the well-being of others will be served. We are to "be like-minded . . . in humility considering others better than ourselves. Each of us should look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:2-4). Our appearance should not be immodest or draw inappropriate attention to ourselves. Our appearance should accentuate rather than distract from the inner qualities and character essential to a consistent testimony. This includes developing cultural sensitivity to appearance and the humility to give up personal preference in order to prevent barriers to ministry.

Confirming our Covenant

We recognize our constant, deep need for grace to participate in community, as we confess our failures and sins, accept His forgiveness, are restored to His fellowship and live in a godly way.

The issue of keeping one's word is for a Christian an important one. Being faithful to one's word is a matter of integrity and godliness. "Lord, who may live on your holy hill?" asks the Psalmist. "He who keeps his oath, even when it hurts" (Psa. 15:4), comes the reply. Christian integrity dictates that if we have voluntarily placed ourselves under Prairie's community covenant, we must make every effort to fulfill our commitment by living accordingly.

Keeping our covenant may also on occasion require that we take steps to hold one another accountable, confronting one another in love as we work together to live in faithfulness both to God's Word and to our own word. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (Gal 6:1). Such loving acts of confrontation are at times difficult, but when performed in the right spirit, they serve to build godly character for both the individuals involved and the community as a whole. Only in this way, as we are willing to speak the truth in love, will we "grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Eph. 4:15).