



## **What are the vows or Declarations of New Life?**

The New Life Community has adopted the 6 questions and answers given below as the basis for belonging for all commissioned members of the church. No matter what your membership before coming to New Life, no matter your age, theological bias or experience, this set of vows forms the core of our common relationship to God in Christ and to one another. Please consider them carefully:

**Q: Who is your Lord and Savior?**

**A. Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.**

*We have confessed Christ before our brothers and sisters in Christ. That is the essential matter. As we enter this fellowship of Christ's people, we also consider and answer the following questions regarding our commitment to the Community of New Life.*

**Q: Do you see in the total Christ-event, as recorded in the Scriptures, a guide to the meaning, purpose, and style of your own life, and do you commit yourself to this guide as the pattern of your own faith and lifestyle?**

**A: I do.**

**Q: Do you covenant with these surrounding brothers and sisters in Christ to assume both the risks and responsibilities of being part of a plural religious community?**

**A: I do.**

**Q: Will you seek out the ministry of the New Life Community, a function that will receive your personal participation and involvement?**

**A: I will.**

**Q: Will you support the program and the ministry of New Life each year?**

**A: I will.**

**Q: Will you periodically evaluate your commitment to God through New Life and determine whether New Life continues to be the community through which you can best study, experience and serve God?**

**A: I will.**

## **Why Public Vows?**

Such as it may be, the wisdom of New Life is to require public declaration of the preceding vows. By “public” we mean before the congregation, in regular Sunday morning worship. Moreover, as indicated in one of the vows, these declarations are made by all members once a year, in a Pentecost celebration in early summer.

It must be clearly understood that these vows are not taken as “the law” but rather they are to serve as guidelines for our own Christian growth and commitment to Christ’s Church.

We think membership is very important and carries important responsibilities. Among those obligations is a willingness publicly to express the core of one’s personhood, the center of one’s value system, as resting in Christ and being significantly worked out among His peculiar people. We believe we do no one any favors—God or ourselves—by encouraging membership by persons who are other than publicly committed. If one cannot bring him or herself to a witness for Christ among the supportive, loving fellowship of His people, then where in the world will one ever speak or act for Him? Thus, we ask for a public declaration of dependence.

### **What is the meaning of “Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior”? (First Declaration)**

Today it hardly seems necessary to demonstrate that there is something wrong with humanity. On every hand it is acknowledged that there is a serious dislocation in human affairs, and in the human spirit. Nowhere is this more manifest than in the contemporary dilemma of people longing for peace yet armed to the teeth with weapons of mutual annihilation.

The Christian story of humanity’s deliverance starts out from a radical diagnosis of this situation. The salvation it claims is salvation from sin. No other word can be used to express what is meant. “Sin” is the Biblical word to signify humankind’s plight; no synonym can be found to convey its full meaning. By sin, Christians mean our state of alienation (or separation) from God and from one another, a fundamental dislocation in the relationship we are meant to have as children of God and brothers and sisters to one another. The Christ Event (the life, death, and resurrection) announces a “deliverance” or “salvation” from sin which carries with it a promise of power for the overcoming of sins.

This disclosure of God carries with it the picture of a family of men and women living in a mutually enriching harmony with God. The simplest illustration of what sin does to this relationship is that of a symphony orchestra in which each instrumentalist loses sight of the conductor and begins to perform independently. The entire New Testament echoes with the conviction that in Christ a new era has dawned for the human race, and this new era is one in which God has opened the way to harmony with Himself. It is variously described as “the Kingdom of God,” “forgiveness of sins,” “victory over death,” “everlasting life,” “redemption,” “salvation,” or other terms denoting the solution of problems created by sin. There are many forces and powers that work to keep all from the fullness of life God intends for us. Faithlessly, we accede to the destructive urges that seem to be the accepted currents of the culture and the times. We reject openness. We avoid complexity and ambiguity. We oversimplify and blind ourselves to personal differences and diversity. We fear personal insight and growth. We become dependent upon authorities other than God alone, in living out our one life on earth. We fail to become, through constant evolution, the unique persons God wants us to be. Christ overcomes those forces and powers—within us, and abroad in the world. He is the Savior. In some sense of the term, do you believe it?

### **What is the Christ-Event Pattern? (Second Declaration)**

Essentially, this second vow is a restatement of the first one, but with some implications for our personal behavior or ethics. The question asks whether or not you find in the scriptures any clues as to how our life might be lived. We understand Scripture to contain the story of the Messiah, prepared for in the ways recorded in the Old Testament and alive-with-us, affecting us, in the ways recorded in the New Testament. The Confession of 1967 puts it this way: "...the church universal is entrusted with God's message of reconciliation and shares His labor of healing the enmities which separate people from God and each other. Christ has called the church to this mission and given it the gift of the Holy Spirit. The church maintains continuity with the apostles and with Israel by faithful obedience to his call." (Paragraph 9.31) Christ calls us *to be reconciled and to reconcile* (reconcile: to restore to friendship or harmony, to make consistent or congruous). The question for each of us is: Do you see in the record of that total Christ-Event reasons for hopeful living and a way of measuring yourself as to how fully you are making evident the reconciling style of Christ? This vow intends to implant us all deeply and solidly in the Scriptures—both testaments—that we may there find the guides and measurements for personal growth as reconcilers nourished by Christ.

### **What is a plural religious community? (Third Declaration)**

The Roman Catholic Church is an example, since it covers all continents, many cultures, and all races. What we are trying to test out at New Life is the possibility of such pluralism in one local church. We see this as the heart of reconciling ministry—to learn about and celebrate our differences as sisters and brothers under God. If we can do it in the church, with all the risks and responsibilities involved, then perhaps we can carry it out in our fractured, divisive, suspicious world. The risks are many; the responsibilities are heavy. "Hanging in there" can be painful, especially when differences can cause hurt. We believe that growth can occur through such love in conflict; and growth is good. We expect that we all will "be ourselves." We do, however, strive to relate in a human and accepting manner toward one another since being honest is in tune with God's ultimate reality for us which is love.

### **How should I understand "Participation and Involvement"? (Fourth Declaration)**

So many church members these days, it seems, participate very little and involve themselves only minimally in the life of Christ's community. Statistics on worship and church school attendance, financial support, etc. tend to bear this out. We would like to believe this is because many people do not realize how much they are personally needed by God. We are God's only hands, feet, mouth—God's primary means of encouraging justice, mercy, and love in the world. And basically, the church is a volunteer outfit comprised of those who are grateful for God's love. We volunteers teach and pray and worship and study and minister and hope and grow. If we don't do that within and for our church family, we will lose each other. If we cannot challenge each other's talents and energies, we will stifle. At New Life we are asked to pick our niche and walk into it. If we don't, we will slowly slip away. We don't want that to happen to anyone. BE THIS AT IT MAY, WE REALIZE THAT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN AN INDIVIDUAL CANNOT FULFILL HIS OR HER OWN EXPECTATIONS IN BEING INVOLVED IN GIVING SERVICE TO OUR COMMUNITY OR EVEN THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE. This may be a time when that individual is in need for others to give to him or her. For most Christians it is easier to give than receive. That is very noble. But there are times when we just plain need help. Being a member of Christ's community recognizes that we can't always make it on our own. Let each other know of your hard times; allow us to help. Christ allowed Mary to wash his feet and so did not deny her need to give. He also recognized his own need to receive. So seek and you will find—new life involvement and participation.

### **Does support mean money? (Fifth Declaration)**

Of course it does! God has a claim on all of our talents. It is our life that we dedicate to God. God gave it to us, for whatever we may be doing with it. Just as God expressed care in flesh-and-blood terms through Jesus, just as God made love tangible and real, so God prefers that our love be more than just words. We might dedicate wheat, or cattle or shoes, if those were our trades. We might dedicate any of our talents. We express our lifeblood in our work for which we are paid, most of us, in money. We make our love and support concrete in whatever coinage is appropriate. Remember that there is a resurrection on the other side of giving—a freedom to grow and live.

### **Can I resign from New Life? (Sixth Declaration)**

Under certain circumstances we would prefer that you do resign from active membership in New Life. We certainly need more membership in New Life. We certainly need more members in order to accomplish our ministry. However, we want ministers. We want those who are committed to Christ, thoughtful about their actions, reconcilers who live in both the church and the world to assist God in the creation of God's Kingdom on Earth. Just as important, we seek to be a fellowship of integrity. In an earlier declaration you said you would be yourself. And in a plural community there should be room for the self you are becoming today, tomorrow, and ten years from now. Still, there is a chance you may outrun us and find that we are not or cannot become what you want and need at deep levels of your being. If that happens, tell us what you feel and go where you must—openly and honestly. If the time should come when your heart, mind, and will are no longer with us, then take your search for meaning to what ever pasture you need to graze. Let us mourn your absence. Let us be challenged by your growth. And love us enough to tell us clearly that you must go. It's a matter of integrity—yours and ours. And may the grace, mercy, and peace of God be upon you and upon all of whom you are coming to love.