

Church

Covenant

New-Canon

N.Y.

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A brief illustration of the Nature and principles on which the Covenant of the Church of the United Society is founded.

When man by transgression lost his relation to God, he then lost the unity of his true interest; both to God and his fellow creatures. Hence he became selfish and partial in all his views and pursuits. Instead of feeling it his interest and happiness to honor and build up the cause of God, and benefit his fellow creatures, his feelings were turned to exalt and build up himself, at the expense of the peace and happiness of his own species, and the loss of his union to his Creator.

The object and design of the consecrated and united interest of the Church, and the covenant relation of Believers, is to regain the unity of that social order and relation to God, which mankind lost at the beginning, and to place it upon that solid foundation which cannot be overthrown; so that its blessings and effects may be felt and enjoyed by all who are willing to build on that foundation. In order for any people to come into the sacred interest and covenant relation of the Church, it is indispensably necessary for them first to receive the one spirit of Christ, and to become so far of one heart and one mind, that they are willing to sacrifice all other relations for this sacred one.

Before this relation can be fully attained, it is of essential importance for Believers to settle all claims, both of creditors and filial heirs; so that whatever property they may possess, may be truly their own. In the settlement of these claims, believing husbands and fathers are required to distribute to their wives and children a just and equitable portion of their estates; so that equal justice may be done to all the parties concerned, whether they are of the same faith or not. When they have done this, they have a just and lawful right to dispose of the remainder according to their own free choice. And if it should then be their deliberate and sincere desire to come into membership with the Church established in the first order of the gospel, and they should be found sufficiently prepared by their faith and understanding for admission into this sacred order, they must consecrate themselves, with all they possess, to the service of God; as it is the faith and invariable practice in the Church established in this order, for all who come into membership therewith, freely to devote and consecrate themselves and all they possess, to his service forever, agreeable to the manifestations of his revealed will, to be used and improved for the mutual benefit of all who stand in that relation, according to the established principles of the Church.

It is a matter of importance that those who are received

into the Church, should not be ignorant of the nature of such an undertaking; that they should know, for themselves, the principles and practice of the Church, and learn by their own experience, what are the requirements of the gospel; what it is to live the life of Christ; and whether it is, in reality, their faith and determination to deny themselves of all ungodliness and every worldly lust, and take up a full & final cross against all sin, and every sinful and selfish propensity, and follow Christ in the regeneration.

In a church relation, one faith must govern all the members. Their interest must also be one, and all their plans and pursuits must be regulated by one head or leading influence, and tend to one general end and purpose, according to that unity of faith manifested in their written Covenant. For, as a body without a head possesses neither life nor power; so a Church without a head or leading power, cannot support its existence, much less maintain the life and power of the gospel.

In the first associations of Believers in America, their first object was, to locate themselves near together, for the benefit of religious worship & protection. And having determined to submit to the government of Christ, and devote themselves to the service of God, and the mutual benefit of each other, they found it most convenient for their purpose, and more con-

formable to the example of the primitive Christians, to bring their property together, and unite it in a common interest, and have "all things common." Agreeable to this plan, the idea of a united interest was introduced, and the property was intrusted to managers in whom they had full confidence, and who were considered faithful, trusty & capable. A gospel government, in things spiritual & temporal, was then established upon its proper foundation.

It is a truth, confirmed by the experience of all ages, that no government, whether human or divine, can be beneficial to those who will not acknowledge its authority, and come under its protection. Therefore, altho the government of Christ in his Church, is a divine government; yet all who justly expect to be benefitted by it, must come within the bounds of its protection, acknowledge its authority, approve & yield obedience to its requirements.

Every Divine institution emanating from the God of order, is necessarily formed according to some consistent principle. The Church of Christ must, therefore, be established upon a foundation which cannot admit of a precarious and uncertain tenure. Divine Providence, for wise purposes, has permitted all earthly governments, in some way or manner, to emanate from the people; but whenever Divine Wisdom has seen fit to establish a spiritual or religious government, for the benef.

of his covenant people, it has invariably originated from Divine appointment, and its continuance has been signally protected and blessed by Divine Providence. This is clear from the records of scripture. God appointed Moses and established him as a leader of the tribes of Israel; and by divine revelation Moses appointed Joshua as his successor.

Altho these things were done under the law, they evidently pointed to a gospel government, which was more clearly pointed out under the ministration of Jesus Christ, and confirmed by his words and works. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you.—"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."* Jesus Christ appointed his apostles as the visible head and leaders of the Church; and the apostles appointed ^{their} successors and "ordained elders in every Church."† And while the government of the Church ^{was kept} and acknowledged on this foundation, its purity was preserved; but when, through the influence of human wisdom, the rulers of the Church were elected by the suffrages of the people, then were produced those unhappy divisions by which the true union of the Church was broken, and its order destroyed, "and the power of the holy people was scattered."‡ But when the second manifestation of the Spirit of Christ came forth in the revival of the true faith and principles

* John xv. 16, 19. John xx. 23. † Acts xiv. 23.

of the gospel, for the restoration and establishment of the true nature and order of the Church, then the same divine order of spiritual government was again revived.

Hence the ministerial institution must be considered as originating from Divine authority: of course, the appointment of the Ministry is, in reality, a Divine appointment, given through the preceding Ministry; and their authority is confirmed and established by the general union and approbation of the Church. And when duly established, the necessary powers of government are confided to them, with authority to appoint elders, trustees and deacons, with other needful assistants in the care, management & direction of the affairs of the Church, both spiritual and temporal. The executive authority of the Society is therefore properly vested in the Ministry. To them appertains the first lead in spiritual concerns, and a general superintendence in all important matters: of course, all final appeals must be made to them.

The duty appertaining to the elders is, to teach and instruct the members under their charge; to counsel, admonish and reprove, as occasion may require; to lead the worship, and see that the orders and regulations which pertain to their respective families or departments

are properly kept. They have, in short, the general oversight and control of the family concerns; but have no authority to admit nor remove members without the union & concurrence of the Ministry: and in the discharge of all their duties they are responsible to the Ministry, by whom they are appointed and authorized to act.

To the deacons of the domestic order of the Church, is intrusted the stewardship of their respective departments. It is their duty to provide for the family; to make proper arrangements in the temporal business and concerns of the family; to maintain good order; to watch over, counsel and direct the members in their various occupations; to make application to the superintending deacons or Trustees for whatever supplies are needed in their respective departments; and to make report to the elders of the state of matters which fall under their cognizance and observation. But their power is domestic, being restricted to the concerns of their respective families or departments; it does not extend to any immediate or direct correspondence with those without the bounds of the Church. They have no immediate concern with trade and commerce; it is not their business to buy and sell; nor can they even vend the articles of sale produced in their own families,

except in union or with the approbation of the superintending deacons.

The superintending deacons, who are the acting trustees of the Church, are the constitutional repositories of the temporal property which forms the consecrated and united interest of the Church, and the proper agents for the transaction of business with those without. And the appointed place of deposit is in the building or buildings connected with their office. Hence all property brought into the Church or carried out, as articles of traffick or interest of value, must pass under the cognizance of the trustees; otherwise disorder and confusion would ensue, which is utterly inconsistent with those principles of order and regularity pertaining to the Church of Christ.

Agreeable to the principles established in the Church, perfect honesty and integrity is required in all its transactions. Hence it becomes the duty of the trustees to examine and inspect all articles intended for market, that nothing of inferior quality, or defective in workmanship, nor any thing superfluous or improper in its nature, should be exposed to sale, or imposed upon the buyer. And it is also their duty to see that no article is brought into the united interest which cannot be sanctioned by the leading authority of the Church.

and be justly appropriated to the use of a consecrated people, or to the purposes of Christian charity and benevolence.

As good order and regulation are the strength & support of every civil institution; so they are essentially necessary in all the concerns of the Church. And as the governing power is vested in the Ministry, and supported by the Elders and the general union of the Church, it is very important that the Trustees, in all their concerns, ~~the~~ should maintain a proper union and understanding with the Ministry and Elders.

The present order of the Church was first established at New Lebanon in the year 1792, under the ministration of Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright, who were considered as the founders and spiritual leaders of Church order in this day of Christ's second appearance. Under their ministration Ministers and Elders were appointed, to whom were intrusted the more immediate charge and protection of Believers in the different Societies. Deacons were also appointed as trustees of the temporal concerns of the Believers who were then collecting into families, and gathering to the order of the gospel. Accordingly David Meacham and Jonathan Walker were appointed as the first Deacons in temporal trust, and took the charge of superintending and regulating

the consecrated interest and property of the Church; and by their labors and union its temporal affairs were brought into proper order.

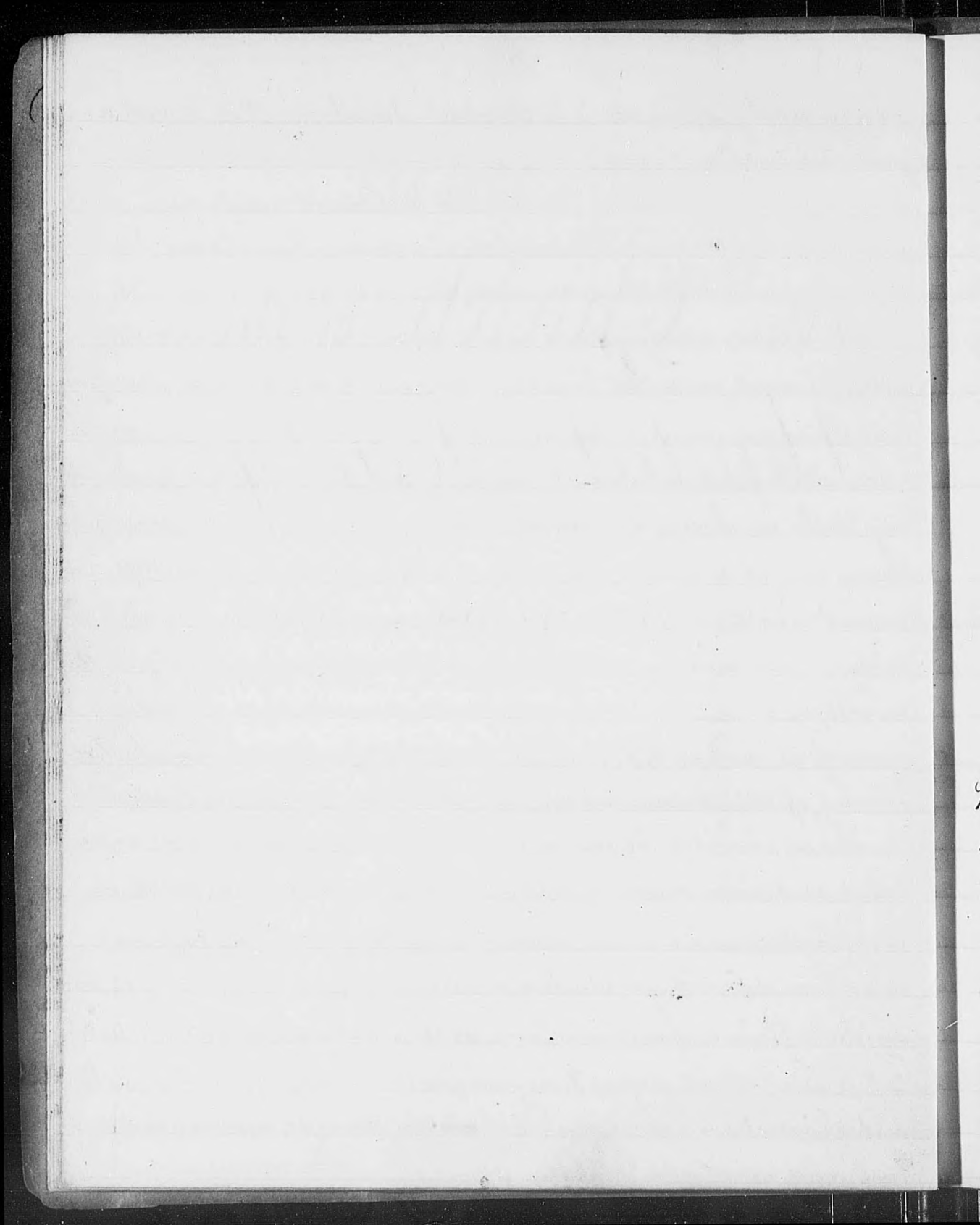
As a preliminary to the establishment of gospel order in the Church, the members thereof entered into a solemn covenant with each other, to stand as a united community and keep the way of God in Church relation, for the mutual support and protection of each other, in their christian travel, both in things spiritual and temporal. In this Covenant they freely gave themselves and services, with all their temporal interest, to the service of God, for the support and benefit of each other, and for such other pious and charitable uses as the gospel might require. As the light of the gospel increased in the Church, and the necessity of further improvements opened to view, it was found expedient to renew this Covenant, in order to amend its written form.

It may be proper to remark here, that the first Covenant which the members of the Church unanimously entered into, was verbal; yet it was made in good faith, and being considered by them as a sacred contract, which was religiously binding upon them, it was conscientiously kept. In the year 1795, it was committed to writing and signed by all the members; and in 1801, it was renewed with some amendments that

were found by experience to be essential. In March 1814 it was again renewed with further amendments, and its written form considerably improved. But in all its amendments and improvements, the main object of the Covenant has always been kept in view, and the substance of it preserved entire.

It is now nearly fifteen years since the last Covenant was adopted and executed. During this period the Church has passed through many trying ^{scenes;} gained much valuable experience, and found a great increase of light and understanding, both in things spiritual and temporal. Hence some further amendments are found necessary to make the written Covenant more complete in its provisions, and better calculated to protect the Church and its members in their natural rights & privileges, and give to all concerned a more clear & explicit view of its nature & principles. It is therefore agreed that the Covenant of 1814 be renewed, and its written form revised & amended.

Tho we consider the law of Christ planted in our souls as more valid, and more binding upon us than written laws, creeds or covenants; because on our obedience to this law, all our hopes of salvation depend; yet while our temporal property remains under the influence of human laws, written instruments serve to protect it against all unjust & unlawful claims of those without, and against the infringement of ~~the~~ the lawless invaders of our just and equitable rights.



Covenant
of the Church of the
United Society
In the Town of New Lebanon.

We the Brethren and Sisters of the United Society of Believers, of New Lebanon, in the County of Columbia and State of New York, being members of that part of said Society known and distinguished by the title of, "The Church of the United Society in the Town of New Lebanon;" (which, for many years, has been established, and in successful operation, under the charge of each successive Ministry and Eldership thereof, and of which John Farrington is the present leading Elder, and Stephen Munson the superintending Deacon and principal

cipal Trustee;) feeling the importance, not only of often re-
 newing and confirming our spiritual covenant, with God
 and each other; but also of renewing and improving our
 social contract, and amending the written form thereof.
 Therefore, **We do make, ordain and declare** the following
Articles of agreement, to be kept and maintained by us, both in
 our collective and individual capacities, as a **Covenant and**
Constitution, which shall stand as a lawful testimony of our
 religious association before all men, and in all cases, relating to the
 improvement of our consecrated ^{interest,} property and estate.

Therefore,
Article I. We solemnly declare to each other and to all people, **That**
 we do hereby acknowledge our full belief in the faith & principles
 of the gospel of Christ's second appearance, by his Spirit, as deliver-
 ed unto us by the testimony of the first founders of our Society, and
 now established in the Church of our community, as ^{the basis & principles of our} the found-
 ation of our religious faith and order: And we also acknowledge, agree-
 able to the examples recorded in the scriptures of the Old and New Testa-
 ments, and continued by the said first founders of this Society, that
 the right of appointing successors in the Ministry, to act as the ex-
 ecutive and leading authority of this Church and Society, is vested
 in the leading character of the preceding Ministry; and such ap-
 pointments being communicated by the Elders, and receiving

The general approbation of the Church, is confirmed in the Society:
 And we further acknowledge, that the Ministry appointed and established as aforesaid, together with the Elders of the Church, who shall act in union with them, ^{constituted the leading authority & are} invested with ^{power} authority to guide, teach and direct in the great concerns of our spiritual travel, and to make and establish such orders, rules and regulations as may be found necessary for the government and protection of the Church and Society: and also to advise and counsel in all matters of importance, whether spiritual or temporal. Therefore;

To the said Ministry and Elders appertains the power to ~~re~~ nominate and appoint to office, ministers, elders, ~~and~~ deacons and trustees, and to assign offices of care and trust to such brethren and sisters as they, the said Ministry and Elders shall judge to be best qualified for the several offices to which they may be assigned. Such nominations and appointments being communicated to those concerned, and receiving the general approbation of the Church, shall thenceforth be established and confirmed until altered or revoked by the same authority, either in the said Ministry and Elders, or their regular successors in said office.

3 Article III. We covenant and agree, That, as we have hitherto done, so we will continue, to receive and acknowledge each other

other, together with all who are of the same faith, and who stand in gospel union, as our beloved brethren & sisters in the gospel of Christ's second appearing, so long as they shall continue to maintain the like union and testimony, and no longer.

4 Article III. We further covenant and agree, as aforesaid, that we will receive and acknowledge ^{as} our Elders in the gospel, ^{those members} who have been, or who shall hereafter be chosen ^{and} appointed to that office and calling by the authority aforesaid; and we solemnly promise, in the presence of God and each other, that we will, as faithful brethren and sisters in Christ, conform and subject ourselves to the known and established faith and principles of our community, and to ^{the} our said Elders, ^{who act in union as aforesaid} and also to all the orders, rules and regulations which ^{the} now are, or which may hereafter be given and established in the Church, ^{according to the principles of} by the authority aforesaid. ^{States in the proceedings, Articles.}

5 Article IV. We further covenant and agree, according to the faith taught us from the beginning, to dedicate, devote, consecrate and give up; and we do by this Covenant, solemnly and conscientiously, dedicate, devote, consecrate and give up ourselves and services, together with all our temporal interest, to the service of God and his Church, to be under the care and direction of such

Elders, Deacons and Trustees as now are, or may hereafter be appointed and established as aforesaid.

6 Article V. We further covenant and agree, That ^{it is} and shall be the special duty of the superintending Deacons, who are the acting Trustees of the temporalities of the Church, ^{we shall be invested with authority} to ^{take} have the general charge and oversight of all the property, estate and interest, dedicated, devoted, consecrated and given up, as aforesaid, together with all gifts, grants and donations which have been, or which may hereafter be dedicated, devoted, consecrated and given up, as aforesaid; and the said property, estate, interest, gifts, grants and donations, shall constitute the united interest of the Church, and shall be held as such by the said Deacons, as acting Trustees, in their official capacity, and by their successors in said office and trust forever. ¶ And it shall be the duty of the said Deacons or acting Trustees, or their successors in said office and trust, to improve, use and appropriate the said interest for the benefit of the Church, and for such other charitable and religious purposes as the gospel may require, and the said Deacons or acting Trustees, in their wisdom shall see fit; also to make all just and equitable defense in law, ^{may be} (so far as is consistent with the faith and principles of the Church,) for the protection and security of the united and consecrated interest and

10 with the knowledge &
and it shall be the special duty of the ^{to act in union with the leading authority}
privileges of the Church; and also to give information to the
of the ^{of our said state}
leading authority of the Church, (to which they are, and shall
be held responsible,) of all losses sustained in the united inter-
^{in all their transactions}
est of the Church, which shall come under their cognizance,
^{whenever such loss or loss shall}
to the amount of ten dollars ^{to the value} in value: Provided nevertheless, that
all the transactions of the said Deacons or acting Trustees, in
the use, management and disposal of the aforesaid interest,
shall be for the benefit and privilege, and in behalf of the
Church, and not for any private interest object or purpose
whatever, and also, that no transactions done

Article VII. We further covenant and agree, That, as the united
interest of the Church has been formed and established by the
free-will offerings of the members respectively, in the manner a-
foresaid, it shall be held and possessed by the Church, in its uni-
ted capacity, as a sacred and religious right; That is, all and every
member thereof, while standing in gospel union, and maintain-
ing the principles of this Covenant, shall enjoy equal rights,
benefits and privileges, in the use of all things pertaining to
the Church, according to his or her needs and circumstances;
and no difference shall be made on account of what any
one has brought in, or may hereafter bring into the said united
interest of the Church: Provided nevertheless, that the rights, benefits

and privileges secured by this Covenant to the members thereof, shall not be considered as extending to any person who shall ^{willingly refuse to} not maintain the principles and comply with the obligations of said Covenant, of which the leading authority acknowledged in the first Article, shall be the proper and constitutional judges. And we further covenant and agree, that it shall be the duty of all the members of the Church, unitedly and individually, to occupy and improve their time and talents to support and maintain the aforesaid united interest, according to their several abilities & callings, as members in union; so that the various gifts and talents of all may be jointly improved for the mutual benefit of the Church.

Article VIII. We further covenant and agree, That as the sole object, purpose and design of our uniting in covenant relation as a Church, or body of people in gospel order, was from the beginning, and still is, faithfully and honestly to improve and diffuse the various gifts & talents, both of a spiritual and temporal nature, with which we are endowed by our beneficent Creator, for the mutual protection, support, comfort and happiness of each other, as brethren & sisters in the gospel, and for such other pious and charitable purposes as the gospel may require; therefore, we do, by virtue of this Covenant, solemnly and conscientiously, unitedly and individually,

for ourselves, our heirs and assigns, promise and declare, in the presence of God and each other, that we will never hereafter, neither directly, ^{nor indirectly,} under any circumstances whatever, make nor require any account of any interest, property, labor or service, which has been devoted, or which may hereafter be devoted by us, or any of us, to the purposes aforesaid; nor bring any charge of debt or damage, nor hold any demand whatever, against the Church or Society, nor against any member thereof, on account of any property or service, given, rendered, devoted or consecrated to the aforesaid sacred and charitable purposes.

10 Article VIII. We further covenant and agree, That youth & children, being under age, cannot be received as members of the Church, possessing in its united capacity a consecrated interest; but they may be received under the immediate care and government of the Church by the desire or consent of such person or persons as have a lawful right to such youth or children, together with their own consent.

11 Article IX. We further covenant and agree, That ^{each and} every person who shall, at any time after the date and execution of this Covenant, be admitted into the Church, as a member there

of, shall previously, in the presence of two of the Deacons or acting Trustees ^{so that they shall have an opportunity to advise} of the Church, read, or hear distinctly read, to his or her full understanding, this Covenant, and shall be able, fully, freely and conscientiously to acquiesce in, and acknowledge his or her full approbation and acceptance of the same in all its parts; then he, she or they, as the case may be, may have full liberty to sign the same; and having signed it, shall thenceforth be entitled to ^{all} the benefits and privileges hereunto appertaining; and shall also be subject to all the obligations required of the former signers whose names are attached to this Covenant; and the signature or signatures thus added, shall be certified by the said Deacons or acting Trustees, together with the date thereof. Henry De Witt

12 Article X. We further covenant and agree, That it shall be the duty of the Deacons or acting Trustees to keep or cause to be kept, in a book or books provided for the purpose, a true and correct copy of this Covenant, together with all other records and transactions of a public nature which are necessary to be recorded for the benefit of the Church, and for the preservation and security of the documents, papers and written instruments pertaining to the united interest and concerns of the Church committed to their charge; and such records

shall be considered as sufficient authority for the correctness of the facts and matters so recorded.

In confirmation of all the aforesaid statements, covenants, promises and articles of agreement, we have here

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