I am told that on the Episcopal Seminary campus in Berkeley there is a sign written in Latin. It reads, “Everyone got fed; no one got hurt.” Signs like that serve as good reminders to a community. So do covenants like the one being updated for the Alliance of Baptists. It has served as a spiritual compass at our annual gatherings and was always the first thing on the agenda in our business meetings when I served on the Board. We would get our bearings - remembering who we are and what we are supposed to be doing - and then get started. Not a bad practice.

How appropriate then that we begin the Alliance of Baptists Covenant with our commitment to “make the worship of God central in our life together.” This is our starting point. It is the genesis of our life in community with each other and with God. This is evident in our annual gatherings where some of the most inspiring and creative worship experiences have been shared together. But I would suggest that this commitment is not limited to those wonderful annual gatherings. Wherever we go throughout the year, in our local congregational life and personal ministries, our central starting point begins with the worship of God. And in many ways, through our current networks of encouragement and connection in the Alliance, we can support one another remotely, pray for one another and the world, and “see each other at church.”

This first commitment in our Covenant - to God and to each other - comes then from a recognition that Christian discipleship is not an individual or once-in-a-while spiritual exercise. This already makes it a pretty radical notion in a culture which considers church-going old-fashioned. In an age of self-help and individualism, I believe that the local church community is still the best place to become equipped with what we need in order to partner with God in offering to the world what she needs. Ancient wisdom speaks eternal truths that will always need to be heard and put into action. Scripture is still the living, breathing word of God - fresh as the day is young. Confession is still good for the soul, just as the transformative changing of hearts (metanoia) that changes the world is still possible.
This may sound evangelistic. And I can’t believe I am saying this, but I hope it is. When the Wild Goose of the Holy Spirit is allowed the space to spread her wings freely, there is no telling where she will take us. On this spiritual journey with the Alliance of Baptists, we may be given glimpses of Beloved Community. We may be renewed by the crazy idea that everyone actually can be fed and maybe there will come a time when no one gets hurt - or dehumanized. We may find a way to join hands with others who are different from us but united in Christ, and see these glimpses become reality. We have a lot of work to do before we get to that point, but fortunately we know where to start.

Sarah is pastoralist and theologian at Sister Grove Farm in Van Alstyne, Texas. She and her husband Rodney are members of Alliance congregational partner, Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas.