

COVENANT RENEWAL SERVICE

*In 1663 Richard Alleine, a Puritan, published *Vindiciae Pietatis: or, "A Vindication of Godliness in the Greater Strictness and Spirituality of It"*. In 1753, it was again published in John Wesley's *A Christian Library*. Wesley used one chapter, "The Application of the Whole," on Monday, August 11, 1755, in what probably was the first real celebration of the Covenant Service in the Methodist movement.*

*Wesley found the service rich and meaningful, as expressed in his *Journal*: "Many mourned before God, and many were comforted" (April 1756); "It was, as usual, a time of remarkable blessing" (October 1765). "It was an occasion for a variety of spiritual experiences ... I do not know that ever we had a greater blessing. Afterwards many desired to return thanks, either for a sense of pardon, for full salvation, or for a fresh manifestation of His graces, healing all their backslidings" (January 1, 1775). In London these services were usually held on New Year's Day. Around the country the Covenant Service was conducted whenever John Wesley visited the Methodist Societies.*

After the time of Wesley several versions of the Covenant Service were developed, gradually giving Wesley's material less place in the total service. The present service follows our Basic Pattern of worship, enables the congregation to participate more fully, and updates language. Most significant, the liturgy beginning with the Invitation is taken directly from Wesley's service of 1780.

The heart of the service, focused in the Covenant Prayer, requires persons to commit themselves to God. This covenant is serious and assumes adequate preparation for and continual response to the covenant. Leaders of worship must take seriously the need to prepare the congregation for this service, possibly through study sessions and prayer.

The leaders must also assume responsibility to assist persons to be faithful to the covenant, possibly through meetings for spiritual discipline.

The Covenant Service is most commonly held on New Year's Eve or Day and therefore is sometimes called a Watch Night Service. Historically, a Watch Night Service would be three hours or longer, including readings from Scripture and hymn singing. This Covenant Service would also be appropriate on one of the Sundays After the Epiphany, during Lent, on a church anniversary, or during a revival or preaching mission. Ideally, the service should be used only once a year on the same Sunday. Red is an appropriate color for paraments and vestments.

Individual copies of the Covenant Service are recommended for all worshipers so that they may sign and keep them as reminders.

ENTRANCE

GATHERING

GREETING

HYMN *

Come, Let Us Use the Grace Divine (UMH 606)

Charles Wesley wrote this hymn specifically for this service.

OPENING PRAYER*

**O God, Searcher of all our hearts,
you have formed us as a people and claimed us for your own.
As we come to acknowledge your sovereignty and grace,
and to enter anew into covenant with you,
reveal any reluctance or falsehood within us.
Let your Spirit impress your truth on our inmost being,
and receive us in mercy, for the sake of our Mediator, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.**

(DAVID TRIPP, ENGLAND, 20TH CENT.)

LITANY OF THANKSGIVING

The following or another litany of thanksgiving may be used:

Let us give thanks for all of God's mercies.

O God, our Covenant Friend,
you have been gracious to us through all the years of our lives.
We thank you for your loving care,
which has filled our days and brought us to this time and place.
We praise your holy name, O God.

You have given us life and reason,
and set us in a world filled with your glory.
You have comforted us with family and friends,
and ministered to us through the hands of our sisters and brothers. **R**

You have filled our hearts with a hunger after you,
and have given us your peace.
You have redeemed us, and called us to a high calling in Christ Jesus.
You have given us a place in the fellowship of your Spirit
and the witness of your Church. **R**

You have been our light in darkness
and a rock of strength in adversity and temptation.
You have been the very Spirit of joy in our joys
and the all-sufficient reward in all our labors. **R**

You remembered us when we forgot you.
You followed us even when we tried to flee from you.
You met us with forgiveness when we returned to you.
For all your patience and overflowing grace. **R**

PROCLAMATION

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SCRIPTURE LESSON (S)

These lessons may be interspersed with hymns and psalms:

Deuteronomy 31:9 –13	A covenant renewal
2 Kings 23:1 –3	Renewal of covenant
2 Chronicles 34:29 –33	Renewal of covenant
Jeremiah 31:31 –34	A new covenant
Psalms 50 (UMH 783)	Gathering of the faithful
1 Peter 1	Call of holy living
Matthew 25:14 –30	Parable of talents
Matthew 25:31 –46	Judgment of the nations
John 15:1–8	Jesus is the true vine.

SERMON OR HOMILY

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
the Christian life is redeemed from sin and consecrated to God.
Through baptism, we have entered this life
and have been admitted into the new covenant
of which Jesus Christ is the Mediator.
He sealed it with his own blood, that it might last for ever.
On the one side, God promises to give us new life in Christ,
the Source and Perfecter of our faith.
On the other side, we are pledged
to live no more for ourselves but only for Jesus Christ,
who loved us and gave himself for us.

From time to time we renew our covenant with God,
especially when we reaffirm the Baptismal Covenant
and gather at the Lord's table.

Today, however, we meet, as the generations before us have met,
to renew the covenant that binds us to God.
Let us make this covenant of God our own.

WESLEY'S COVENANT SERVICE

INVITATION

Commit yourselves to Christ as his servants.
Give yourselves to him, that you may belong to him.
Christ has many services to be done.
Some are more easy and honorable,
others are more difficult and disgraceful.

Some are suitable to our inclinations and interests,
others are contrary to both.
In some we may please Christ and please ourselves.
But then there are other works where we cannot please Christ
except by denying ourselves.
It is necessary, therefore,
that we consider what it means to be a servant of Christ.

Let us, therefore, go to Christ, and pray:

**Let me be your servant, under your command.
I will no longer be my own.
I will give up myself to your will in all things.**

Be satisfied that Christ shall give you your place and work.

**Lord, make me what you will.
I put myself fully into your hands:
put me to doing, put me to suffering,
let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and with a willing heart
give it all to your pleasure and disposal.**

Christ will be the Savior of none but his servants.
He is the source of all salvation to those who obey.
Christ will have no servants except by consent;
Christ will not accept anything except full consent
to all that he requires.
Christ will be all in all, or he will be nothing.

Confirm this by a holy covenant.

To make this covenant a reality in your life, listen to these admonitions:

First, set apart some time, more than once,
to be spent alone before the Lord;
in seeking earnestly God's special assistance
and gracious acceptance of you;
in carefully thinking through all the conditions of the covenant;
in searching your hearts
whether you have already freely given your life to Christ.
Consider what your sins are.
Consider the laws of Christ, how holy, strict, and spiritual they are,
and whether you, after having carefully considered them,
are willing to choose them all.
Be sure you are clear in these matters, see that you do not lie to God.

Second, be serious and in a spirit of holy awe and reverence.

Third, claim God's covenant,
rely upon God's promise of giving grace and strength,
so you can keep your promise.
Trust not your own strength and power.

Fourth, resolve to be faithful.
You have given to the Lord your hearts,
you have opened your mouths to the Lord,
and you have dedicated yourself to God.
With God's power, never go back.

And last, be then prepared to renew your covenant with the Lord.
Fall down on your knees, lift your hands toward heaven,
open your hearts to the Lord, as we pray:

COVENANT PRAYER

The people kneel or bow.

**O righteous God, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
see me as I fall down before you.
Forgive my unfaithfulness in not having done your will,
for you have promised mercy to me
if I turn to you with my whole heart.**

God requires that you shall put away all your idols.

**I here from the bottom of my heart renounce them all,
covenanting with you that no known sin shall be allowed in my life.
Against your will, I have turned my love toward the world.
In your power
I will watch all temptations that will lead me away from you.
For my own righteousness is riddled with sin,
unable to stand before you.**

Through Christ, God has offered to be your God again
if you would let him.

**Before all heaven and earth,
I here acknowledge you as my Lord and God.
I take you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for my portion,
and vow to give up myself, body and soul, as your servant,
to serve you in holiness and righteousness all the days of my life.**

God has given the Lord Jesus Christ
as the only way and means of coming to God.

**Jesus, I do here on bended knees accept Christ
as the only new and living Way,
and sincerely join myself in a covenant with him.**

**O blessed Jesus, I come to you,
hungry, sinful, miserable, blind, and naked,
unworthy even to wash the feet of your servants.
I do here, with all my power, accept you as my Lord and Head.
I renounce my own worthiness,
and vow that you are the Lord, my righteousness.
I renounce my own wisdom, and take you for my only guide.
I renounce my own will, and take your will as my law.**

Christ has told you that you must suffer with him.

**I do here covenant with you, O Christ,
to take my lot with you as it may fall.
Through your grace I promise
that neither life nor death shall part me from you.**

God has given holy laws as the rule of your life.

**I do here willingly put my neck under your yoke, to carry your burden.
All your laws are holy, just, and good.
I therefore take them as the rule for my words, thoughts, and actions,
promising that I will strive
to order my whole life according to your direction,
and not allow myself to neglect anything I know to be my duty.**

The almighty God searches and knows your heart.

**O God, you know that I make this covenant with you today
without guile or reservation.
If any falsehood should be in it, guide me and help me to set it aright.
And now, glory be to you, O God the Father,
whom I from this day forward shall look upon as my God and Father.
Glory be to you, O God the Son,
who have loved me and washed me from my sins in your own blood,
and now is my Savior and Redeemer.
Glory be to you, O God the Holy Spirit,
who by your almighty power have turned my heart from sin to God.**

**O mighty God, the Lord Omnipotent, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
you have now become my Covenant Friend.
And I, through your infinite grace, have become your covenant servant.
So be it.
And let the covenant I have made on earth be ratified in heaven.
Amen.**

You are advised to make this covenant not only in your heart, but in word; not only in word, but in writing. Therefore, with all reverence, lay the service before the Lord as your act and deed. And when you have done this, sign it. Then keep it as a reminder of the holy agreement between God and you that you may remember it during doubts and temptations.

See also A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition (UMH 607).

The pastor may now celebrate Holy Communion, the people using A Service of Word and Table III (UMH) or one of the musical settings (UMH) and the pastor using “The Great Thanksgiving for New Year, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord or Covenant Renewal” (UMBOW 58-59). Otherwise, the service continues as follows:

HYMN **Suggested from UMH:*

563/564 Father, We Thank you
698 God of The Ages
561 Jesus, United by Thy Grace

117 O God, Our Help in Ages Past
501 O Thou Who Camest from Above

DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING *

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