

THE COVENANT SERVICE

INTRODUCTION

The following hymn (to the tune called 'French' or 'Dundee') or some other suitable hymn or lyric is sung.

Come, let us use the grace divine
And all, with one accord,
In a perpetual covenant join
Ourselves to Christ the Lord.

Give up ourselves through Jesus' power
His name to glorify;
And promise, in this sacred hour,
For God to live and die.

The covenant we this moment make
Be ever kept in mind;
We will no more our God forsake
Or cast his words behind.

We never will throw off his fear
Who hears our solemn vow;
And if you are well pleased to hear,
Come down and meet us now.

To each the covenant blood apply,
Which takes our sins away;
And register our names on high,
And keep us to that day.

The minister says, while the people are still standing:

Let us pray:
Almighty God before whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **AMEN**

Then the congregation may be seated, and the minister says:

Dearly beloved, the Christian life, to which we are called, is a life in Christ, redeemed from sin by him, and through him, consecrated to God. Upon this life we have entered, having been admitted into that New Covenant of which our Lord Jesus Christ is mediator, and which he sealed with his own blood, that it might stand for ever.

On God's part, the covenant is his reconciling of the world to himself in Jesus Christ, and his promise that he will fulfil in and through us all that he declared in him, who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith. That his promise stands, we are sure, for we have known his goodness and proved his grace in our lives day by day.

On our part we have received this covenant through faith, and stand pledged to live no more for ourselves, but for him who loved us and gave himself for us, and has called us to serve him to the praise of his glory.

From time to time we renew our vows of consecration, especially when we gather at the Table of the Lord; and on this day we meet expressly, that we may joyfully and solemnly renew the covenant, which binds us to God.

Let us then, remembering the mercies of God, and the hope of his calling, lift up our hearts to him in adoration.

ADORATION

Let us pray

All kneel

The minister says:

Let us join in adoring the Lord our God.

Let us adore God our father. Out of his love he has created us and all that is. He continually preserves and sustains us.

We praise you, O Lord.

He has revealed to us his glory in the life and death of his only Son; and by raising him from the dead, he promises us life with him for ever.

We praise you, O Lord.

Let us rejoice in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He came to rescue us from our fallen state; though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor.

He was tempted just as we are, but never sinned.

We praise you, O Lord.

He came to bring good news to the poor, to set at liberty those who are oppressed. For us all he became obedient to death, even death on a cross. By his wounds we have been healed.

We praise you, O Lord.

He has opened the kingdom of heaven to all who trust in him. He judges us, only that he may serve us; he is stern, because he loves us perfectly. He never ceases to intercede for us.

We praise you, O Lord.

Let us rejoice in the fellowship which we share in the Holy Spirit. He is the Lord, the giver of all life; by him we are born into God's family, and assured that we are his children.

We praise you, O Lord.

The Holy Spirit is our Helper, who dwells in us. His wisdom guides us; his power enables us. He teaches us how to pray aright. He will do for us far more than we can ask or think.

We praise you, O Lord.

A bhajan, lyric or hymn of adoration is sung.

THANKSGIVING

(The words in brackets are omitted except at an annual covenant service)

The minister says

O God our Father, source of all goodness, you have blessed us (not only during the past year, but) through all the days of our life. We give thanks for your love, for bringing us safely to this day and hour.

We thank you, O Lord.

You set us in a world full of your glory. You give us minds to think, hands to work; and hearts to love. We are stewards of your wonderful creation.

We thank you, O Lord.

You give us family and friends. By them you teach us to receive and give love. You want us to see a sister or a brother in every human being who crosses our path.

We thank you, O Lord.

You cause us to hunger for you above all, for you alone can satisfy our hearts. Your blessed Son Jesus is himself the Way through whom we come to you.

We thank you, O Lord.

Through Christ you enable us to overcome evil and death. In him we already taste life in all its fullness. You bring us into the fellowship of your Church, enriching us with the gifts of your Spirit.

We thank you, O Lord.

You nourish us with your Word and Sacraments, and with all the means of grace; that together we may grow up to maturity in the likeness of Christ.

We thank you, O Lord.

In joy and sorrow your presence sustains us; in darkness you are our light, in trouble and trial our strength and shield.

We thank you, O Lord.

When we forget you, you do not forget us; when we abandon you, you do not abandon us; you meet us with forgiveness, as soon as we turn back to you; for your patient love and abundant grace.

All: **With our whole heart we thank you, O Lord.**

CONFESSION

The minister says:

And now let us examine ourselves, asking God to search our hearts.

Silent confession

Let us humbly confess our sins to God.

O God, you have set before us in your Son the true way of life. We confess with shame how little we have learnt from him, and how slow we are to follow him

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

You show us the signs of your goodness in the glory of your creation, in the marvels revealed by science, and in the lives of your faithful servants; but we rarely lift up our eyes to see and praise. You patiently knock to enter into our lives, but we prefer to leave you standing outside.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

Silence for thankful recollection

We confess the poverty of our worship, the weakness of our faith, the selfishness of our prayers, our lack of thankfulness and joy.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

For our cold reception of the means of grace, when you pour out on us your great love. For our neglect of your stern warning, that unless we forgive others, we cannot be forgiven ourselves. For practising so little in our lives of what we profess with our lips.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

You call us to be salt and light in the world. But often in our unfaithfulness we conform to the world's own false ways; in cowardice we stand by, and do nothing when wrongs and evils unfold before our eyes.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

We confess the sins of our society, for which all share the responsibility. You have made this world to be a blessing to us and to future generations; yet we care little for its pollution and wasteful exploitation.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

You have made every human being in your image, and therefore worthy of respect. But without thought we give honour to those who have wealth and power, and despise our sisters and brothers when they are poor and oppressed, deprived of their very humanity. If we do not recognise you in your own children, what shall we plead in the day of judgement?

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

Your Son gave his life to restore peace and harmony on earth, and to gather your scattered children into one, giving his Church to be a first-fruit and sign. But even the Church is divided, and its fellowship is weakened or denied. We give no message of hope to humanity.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

Your only law is to love you and each other. We cannot love you, we confess. Forgive us that so little of your love has reached others through us; that we have been thoughtless in our judgements, hasty in condemnation, grudging in forgiveness, slow to seek reconciliation, unwilling to help our neighbour as we ought.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

All say together:

Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Psalm 51: 1,2,10

The people still kneeling, the minister rises and says:

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. I John 1:5,7-10

AMEN. Thanks be to God

The Lord be with you:

And also with you.

Let us pray

O God, who has appointed our Lord Jesus Christ as mediator of a new covenant, grant us grace, we ask you, to draw near with fullness of faith and join ourselves in a perpetual covenant to you, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. **AMEN**

The following lessons are read, or any other appropriate texts may be used:

Old Testament: Jeremiah 31: 31-33

Epistle: Hebrews 12: 22-25a

Gospel: Matthew 11: 27-30 / John 15: 1-8

A sermon may be preached

THE COVENANT

All remain standing, and the minister says:

And now, beloved, let us with all our hearts and minds renew our part in the covenant that God has made with his people, and take the yoke of Christ upon us. This taking of his yoke means that we are heartily content that he should appoint us our place and work, and that he alone should be our reward. Christ has many services to be done; some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, other bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and temporal interests, others are contrary to both. In some we may please Christ and please ourselves, in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is assuredly given us in Christ, who strengthens us.

Therefore, let us make the covenant of God our own. Let us engage our hearts to the Lord, and resolve in his strength never to go back. Being thus prepared, let us now, in sincere dependence on his grace and trusting in his promises, give ourselves anew to him, meekly kneeling upon our knees.

All kneel

The minister says in the name of all:

O God, our loving Father, since you have called us through Christ our Lord to share in this gracious Covenant, we take upon ourselves with joy the yoke of obedience, and, for love of you, commit ourselves to seek and do your perfect will. We are no longer our own, but yours.

Here all the people join

We are no longer our own, but yours. Put us to what you will, set us with whom you will; put us to doing, put us to suffering, let us be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you; let us be full, let us be empty; let us have all things, let us have nothing; we freely and heartily yield all things to your pleasure and disposal:

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are ours and we are yours. So be it. And let the covenant that we have made on earth be ratified in heaven. AMEN

Silence

A hymn/lyric may be sung

If a celebration of the Lord's Supper is to follow, the minister and people rise, and the minister says:

Jesus said: This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Matthew 26: 28

Praise be to you, O Christ.

Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is, brothers and sisters, to dwell together in unity.

The service of the Lord's Supper continues from this place.

If there is no celebration of the Lord's Supper, the service ends as follows: Silence after the covenant

The Peace is shared

The Lord's Prayer

*A hymn or lyric is sung during which the offerings are collected.
Dedication of offerings.*

ASCRIPTION

Glory be to you, O God the Father, who has loved us and made us accepted in your beloved Son.

Amen. Glory be to you, our Father.

Glory be to you, O God the Son, who has loved us and set us free from our sins by offering yourself on the cross.

Amen. Glory be to you, our Saviour.

Glory be to you, O God the Holy Spirit, who sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts and frees us from the law of sin and death.

Amen. Glory be to you, our Guide and Strengthener.

O one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to you be all love and all glory for time and for eternity.

Amen. Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be to our God for ever and ever. AMEN

THE BENEDICTION

The presbyter gives the benediction:

Go out into the world in peace; have courage; hold onto what is good; return no one evil for evil; strengthen the faint-hearted; support the weak, and help the suffering; honour all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit and may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be amongst you and remain with you always. **AMEN**

OR

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord: and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be amongst you and remain with you always. **AMEN**

OR

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. **AMEN** Numbers 6:24