

# **A COVID-19 Preparation Guide for Pastors and Congregations**

## **By Rev. Rebecca Naber and Rev. Jessica Glaser**

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**Please Note: The information contained in this guide is current as of March 12, 2020. However, information and guidance from public health officials changes daily, sometimes even hourly. At this time, New York State is asking that all gatherings greater than 500 people be cancelled until further notice. Please consult local media, your county health department, and your state department for the most up to date guidelines for your local area.**

The advent of the COVID-19 virus, known as the coronavirus, has been the cause of a great deal of stress, fear, and anxiety among people around the world. Many are wondering if the fear is overblown, or if we are not doing enough to prepare for it. The goal of this guide is to help you to prepare your congregations, protect them and yourselves for the possible spread of this illness, and to help us understand how to fulfill our call to love our neighbors in difficult and frightening times.

Christians have a long and storied history of putting themselves at risk to care for people who have been afflicted by infectious diseases when those people were abandoned by others. Historically, Christians did so because they were moved by the teachings of Christ to love their neighbors, and to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, visit the prisoners, and care for the sick (Matthew 25:31-46). During the coronavirus epidemic today, most of us are not asked to take these risks, unless we work in specific fields. However, the historical example of Christian love toward our neighbors in a time of epidemic is something we should seek to emulate by engaging in simple preparations and precautions.

Jesus Christ calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). What does this look like during a possible pandemic? It means taking care of ourselves so that we don't become ill. It means limiting our contact with others and following public health protocols if we do become ill. It means taking different precautions in our worship services and our ministries in order to protect one another. It means reaching out to our vulnerable members to see if they need help. It means not hoarding supplies that are needed for medical professionals to properly care for sick people. It means not spreading rumors, engaging in scapegoating, or discriminating against others because we are afraid and looking for someone to blame. It means following guidelines put forth by medical public health officials when they are issued.

### The contents of this guide are as follows:

#### Personal Precautions

- Personal Hygiene

- What to do if you're sick (general)

- What to do if you're showing COVID-19 symptoms

- What to do if you're taking care of someone under quarantine for and/or infected with COVID-19

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The majority of this information is coming directly from the COVID-19 website set up by the Centers for Disease Control in the United States. For more information, please visit this main page: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

## **Personal Precautions**

### **Personal Hygiene**

The most important thing you can do to keep from getting or spreading coronavirus is to wash your hands with soap and water. Wash them thoroughly for at least 20 seconds. A frequent suggestion is to sing Happy Birthday twice, as that is about 20 seconds long. The internet is full of funny options if people are tired of singing Happy Birthday. Singing the first verse and refrain of Jesus Loves Me lasts about 30 seconds, if you're looking for a different option.

Likewise, if you cough or sneeze, please cover your mouth with your elbow. If you blow your nose or sneeze/cough in your hands, please wash them after. Try to avoid touching your face with unwashed hands, and wash/sanitize your hands after touching your face.

If you don't have access to soap and water, please use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Clean commonly used surfaces in your house, such as tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks, with household cleaners on a frequent basis. Remember to clean your cell phone!

Do not buy or take any product, medicine, or supplement that someone claims will protect people from COVID-19. The best thing you can do to protect yourself is to practice good personal hygiene. These products and supplements will not work because they are not vaccines or antivirals that are designed to combat viruses. The best that can happen to you is that you will have wasted your money. At worst, these supplements may harm or kill you.

### **What to do if you're sick (general)**

If you show signs of illness of any kind, please stay home as much as possible and isolate yourself from others. Consult with a physician if your symptoms are severe and follow all instructions. It is better for you to stay home and not infect anyone else with even a cold or the flu, as some of the symptoms of cold and flu mimic those of COVID-19 and could send people into a panic if they contract an illness from you. It's also generally a nice thing to not infect others with a cold, flu, stomach virus, etc.

### **What to do if you're showing COVID-19 symptoms**

The tricky part about COVID-19 is that its symptoms DO mimic some of those as colds and flus, and some people may have mild symptoms or none at all. This is why isolation and quarantine are such important tools in preventing the spread of this illness. If you know for sure that you

have been exposed to COVID-19 by contact with someone who has it, or have traveled from an area that has been known to have many cases of COVID-19, please call a doctor immediately. You may be directed to be tested at your doctor's office or to a testing site set up by your local department of health. Please follow all of their guidelines, and notify them if you have any limitations or needs (transportation, food, mobility, medications, etc.) so they can be sure to have resources in place if you need to be quarantined.

The primary symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. They can appear 2-14 days after exposure. If you are experiencing these symptoms but are not sure if you have had contact with someone with COVID-19, please call your physician for advice. They may advise you to be tested. You can also contact your local county's health department or the health department of your state.

The CDC also asks that you limit contact with your pets if you are sick. Because COVID-19 was transmitted to humans via animals, it is possible that a human can transmit the virus to an animal, but unknown at this time if this is possible.

### **What to do if you're taking care of someone under quarantine for and/or infected with COVID-19**

The instructions for how to do this have been detailed by the CDC at the following website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html#precautions>

These instructions are numerous and complex, but boil down to having to isolate the infected person within the living space, minimizing contact with outside visitors, using personal protective equipment like masks and gloves, and following all public health guidelines. If a person you live with and/or are caring for is diagnosed, please speak with public health officials in order to ensure that you have all the support and supplies that you need to protect yourself and care for your loved one.

### **Congregational Preparations**

Many members of our congregations are in groups that are considered at high risk of negative outcomes for COVID-19. Please prayerfully consider taking these steps to protect them. Even if the epidemic ends up having a minimal impact and we overprepared for it, it is better to do so than to underprepare and experience a worse scenario.

**Regarding members who are over 60:** It is possible that members of your congregation may want to consider staying home from church gatherings and activities if they are over the age of 60 and have underlying conditions that put them at high risk for illness. Public health officials in New York State are already beginning to make these recommendations. Please be considerate of the health and feelings of your congregation members who are in this age group. Speak with them about their plans and how to stay in touch with the congregation. Find ways of conducting ministry with them through visitation if possible (see section below), video calls, emails, or phone calls.

### **Encourage Church Members to Practice Good Personal Hygiene and Stay Home If They or Their Family Members (such as children) Are Sick**

This part is pretty straightforward and common sense. Have them follow the information outlined above, or share the CDC website about COVID-19 prevention.

Likewise, PASTORS need to remember to do this. Pastors must also take care of themselves and stay home if they are sick. If the pastor is unavailable, the laity of the church should

designate which members will take over certain roles until the pastor is well enough to return to work.

### **Church Cleanliness**

Depending on how frequently the church building is used, pastors, staff, and church members should clean commonly used surfaces in your church, such as tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks, with household cleaners on at least a weekly basis. Specific church locations and items, such as Sunday School rooms, nurseries, drinking fountains, the backs of pews, lecterns and pulpits, microphones, acolyte equipment, collection plates, organ/piano keyboards, choir folders, hymnals, and other sundry locations and items should also be considered for regular cleaning.

Please have plenty of hand soap available in kitchens and bathrooms, and hand sanitizer available in fellowship halls, nurseries, Sunday School rooms, and sanctuaries (if possible, hand sanitizer availability may be limited at this time).

More information on cleaning can be found here:

[https://health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/docs/cleaning\\_guidance\\_general\\_building.pdf](https://health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/docs/cleaning_guidance_general_building.pdf)

### **Worship**

Prior to, during, and after worship, it is a common practice for church members to hug and shake hands, especially during the passing of the peace and coffee hour. It seems like a repudiation of our Christian fellowship to refrain from caring physical contact; indeed, for some of our members, church may be the only time they experience positive physical contact all week. However, part of Christian fellowship is also lovingly setting certain traditions aside for a short period of time in order to ensure that everyone remains healthy. As Ecclesiastes 3:5 reminds us, there is sometimes a time to refrain from embracing. Encourage church members to express their love and fellowship with non-hand touch alternatives, such as elbow bumps or prayer hands with a bow.

Please prayerfully consider extra precautions in food preparation and distribution at coffee hour, or cancelling it entirely. Have food or coffee distributed by one or two people rather than buffet style, where the chance of spreading germs increases. Encourage the use of disposable vinyl gloves in food preparation and distribution. Likewise, please encourage church members to wash/sanitize their hands prior to partaking of coffee hour. The communion section below offers additional information as to why.

### **Communion**

Another difficult question that pastors and congregations are facing is the question of whether or not to continue offering the sacrament of communion, and how to do so safely. As of the writing of this guide, it is Lent, a time of spiritual reflection in preparation for Easter, the most holy day in the Christian calendar. Communion is deeply tied to this time of reflection, repentance, and celebration, so choosing to forgo it, even temporarily, feels painful and difficult. If you wish to continue offering communion, please do the following in preparation:

- 1) All preparation of the bread and cup should be handled with clean, gloved hands.
- 2) Communion servers should openly wash or sanitize their hands in front of the congregation.
- 3) Communion servers should prayerfully consider wearing disposable gloves during distribution of the bread and cup.

- 4) Offer hand sanitizer to members of the congregation prior to them receiving the sacrament.
- 5) Wash any and all sacramental plates, cups, and linens each time they are used. Disposable communion cups should be thrown out, not reused. Clean altar or table surfaces. Dispose of any plastic used to cover communion elements each time it is used.
- 6) Discontinue the practice of common cup drinking or intinction until the epidemic is past.

Here are some options for distribution of the bread and cup:

- 1) Switch to individual cups for serving the juice/wine. Keep the cups on a table at the front of the church, if possible. Keep the cups covered with plastic until it is time for distribution. Servers should hand the cups to the church members by the rim, and the members should take the cup by the bottom. Cups should be thrown out after use.
- 2) Have servers tear off a piece of bread and dip it into the cup before handing it to the church member.
- 3) Use individually wrapped bread and cup sets, which are available online.

While our Catholic brothers and sisters are theologically able to receive the bread without the cup, and have already switched to this practice, our Methodist theology does not allow the bread to be offered without the cup. (If you are reading this and from another denomination, please utilize your own discretion based on your sacramental or ordinance theology.)

The safest option is to discontinue distribution of the sacrament until the epidemic is past. Each congregation has to prayerfully consider whether or not to do this based on the prevalence of COVID-19 in their region and the risk factors of their church members. If your congregation chooses not to continue the practice, a Wesleyan covenant service might be an appropriate substitute for communion to help the congregation feel connected in fellowship and love without the risk of infection. Two optional services are attached to the end of this guide.

### **Visitation**

As if our homebound and ill seniors aren't isolated enough, along comes the coronavirus to incite fear and increase their sense of loneliness. We, the church can respond as Jesus would have us...with calm, intentional and well-planned out visitation that is mindful of precautionary measures that prevent the spread of COVID-19, keeping the visitor and the visited safe from infection. Below are some infection control guidelines to be mindful of in your visitations and preparation of communion kits. So keep calm, and carry on in your Christian visitation as much as safely possible.

Please respect if your ill or homebound church members would prefer to engage in social distancing. Telephonic, video calls, or emails are options for members who would prefer no physical visits. Also, if community isolation goes into effect, please respect public health guidelines. Ensure that the homebound member has family or friends to look after them or contact the local department of health if they are in need of assistance.

### **Sanitize In and Out:**

The basics of any visitation are to sanitize going into a visit and out of a visit. Likewise, human touch is vital, but it doesn't have to be hand to hand. You can touch someone on the shoulder or arm if you or they are uncomfortable with hand contact. If you are bringing in communion (see section on communion kit preparation), use hand sanitizer on yourself first (for the second time) and offer it to the receiver if they will be receiving the elements from you (provided they aren't too ill to hold them). Celebrate the Lord's Supper and keep your hands away from your face. Immediately following your visit, sanitize again. Remember: **sanitize in and sanitize out.**

### Nursing Home Facilities:

**Please Note:** The guidelines for nursing home visits may change rapidly depending on CDC or state DOH guidelines. As of the evening of 03/12/20, all visitors, including clergy have been banned from visiting nursing facilities per the CDC. As an alternative, assemble volunteer phone calling trees to reach congregants who cannot be visited to pray with them in this time of spiritual dismay.

Once visitors are allowed back in nursing facility caution will still be needed. The majority of facilities have a two-pronged policy for all visitors (medical, clergy, family/friends). Be prepared to have your temperature taken and pass a verbal screening tests designed to protect the entire facility, not just you or the person you are seeing. The questions pertain to:

- 1) Do you or have you experienced a fever today or in the last two weeks?
- 2) Have you been in contact with anyone with a fever in the last two weeks? What were the circumstances and what infection management precautions were taken?
- 3) Have you been out of the country in the last 2 weeks?
- 4) What countries have you visited?

Also, be prepared to don protective garb if you are allowed to visit.

### Home Visitation:

Infection management involves your awareness of the home environment you are entering. When you set up a time to visit, please ask the person you are seeing or their caregiver:

- 1) Do you (or the visitee) have a fever or flu-like symptoms?
- 2) Has anyone in the household had a fever or flu-like symptoms in the last 2 weeks?

This doesn't prevent you from visiting, but you may want to reschedule, or you can request an ill visitee to wear a mask on your visit. Do not feel obligated to visit a sick person. It's totally up to your own comfort level.

### Hospice & the Dying:

Hospice is at the forefront of infection control practices for their patients and family members. They work closely with their county disease control centers as well as the CDC. Should a congregant be in Hospice at home or at a facility, please practice the same infection prevention strategies suggested above.

### Communion Kit Preparation:

"Extending the Table" is an essential part of Christian visitation in many local churches. Communion Kits with hosts wafers, cups, and juice are prepared and put out alongside the bread and chalice to be included in the consecration of the elements on Sunday morning by the pastor. They are then taken by the pastor or visitation team members on visits. If this is the case for your healing ministry, then a very intentional practice of sterilizing these kits should be undertaken. I suggest that the kits be cleansed with dish soap and then boiling water. In addition, disposable gloves should be used to replenish them as part of infection control (along the lines of food safety).

Other options:

- 1) Individual disposable host/juice sets are available for purchase online (i.e. – you don't have to worry about carrying around and refilling entire kits, and a bowl of these could be consecrated by the pastor at the communion table).
- 2) Anointing oil – may be an alternative to offering communion in visitation.

So remember, break the chain of infection, protect our home-bound and ill congregants, and visit them OFTEN! And may the Lord Jesus Christ richly bless you and your visitation ministry.

## **Social Holiness**

### **Be Calm, But Also Prepared**

It's okay to recognize the feelings of our church members around the spread of COVID-19. Some may think this is all a big waste of time. Some might be deeply frightened and dramatically altering their lives in anticipation of it. Tell your congregants that it is okay for them to be afraid, or to be frustrated, but that we don't have to let these feelings be the final word in how we behave. Remind those who dislike the extra precautions that we are doing this in order to protect our frail and vulnerable members. If there are objections because people believe that the precautions are raising anxiety levels, remind them of St Paul's instructions in First Corinthians: we are all one body. If one part of the body suffers, we all suffer (1 Cor. 12:26). We want to keep that suffering from happening. Likewise, some of our church members may indeed be anxious and welcoming of the precautions. As such, we should seek not just our own good, but the good of others (1 Cor. 10:24).

It is normal for parents to be fearful for their children. Many parents are considering pulling their children out of school or day care and keeping them at home. Encourage the parents to consult with their child's pediatrician before doing this. Unless public health officials close schools, it may not be necessary to keep children at home. Encourage parents to practice good hygiene with their kids, teaching them how to wash their hands properly and cover their coughs and sneezes. However, please encourage parents to keep their families home from worship services and/or church activities if a member of the family is sick.

### **Public Health Guidelines, Including Cancellation of Services**

Encourage your church members to follow public health guidelines. If anyone is flagged for voluntary or mandatory quarantine, please urge them to follow all rules given to them by officials and keep in prayerful email or telephonic contact with them.

If, due to a spread of COVID-19 in your area, the local department of health requires that public gatherings be cancelled, please follow their guidelines for as long as they are in effect. If you have the capability of conducting short services over webinar or social media, or you want to provide recordings of sermons or prayers, those are options, as well as email prayer chains and telephone trees to share joys and concerns. Unfortunately, large gatherings of people are ideal locations for spreading COVID-19; cancelling worship and church activities may be necessary to protect our church members from harm.

The more we can keep ourselves and each other healthy and free from COVID-19, the more we free up room in hospitals, testing facilities, labs, and other health care resources for people who are actually sick, and the less pressure we put on health care professionals who are already at high risk of coming into contact with COVID-19 as part of their jobs. This is another aspect of being a loving neighbor.

### **The Blame Game**

Please discourage your congregation from engaging in the blame game on social media, through email, or in conversations. Conspiracy theories have emerged blaming the Chinese government for the creation of the virus, leading to harassment of people of Asian origin in the US. Other theories have emerged blaming political groups or shadowy conspiracy groups for intentionally spreading the disease to disrupt the economy. Some foreign governments allow

rumors to spread that blame the US for the virus. These theories are not true, but they spread like viruses and behave like viruses, doing harm to others. Spreading them is like spreading COVID-19 on purpose: harmful, and may get people injured or killed. Scapegoating by fearful people during pandemic situations is as old as humankind, and Christians throughout history have frequently used them as excuses to hurt and kill their neighbors. At one point, Christians themselves were scapegoated for community problems. These historical lessons should give us pause. Engaging in the behavior of spreading rumors and theories and then harming others because of these theories is NOT loving your neighbor as yourself. We are all potentially at risk of contracting COVID-19, regardless of age, race, religion, national origin, or political belief. Channeling our anxiety into keeping ourselves healthy and helping our congregations is a much better use of our fear than blaming innocent people for forces beyond their control. If you are tempted to spread rumors, say a prayer asking for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit instead. Let the rumor die with you, because you refuse to pass it on. Then go wash your hands.

### **Hoarding**

Leo Tolstoy once asked, "How much land does one man need?" We may ask ourselves how much hand sanitizer one person may need, or how many masks one person may need, especially since you're not supposed to wear one unless you are sick. In which case, you should be staying home anyway. Your church may need hand sanitizer to get through 2-3 months' worth of weekly use. However, neither you nor your church need 6 months' continuous daily use-worth of hand sanitizer. Medical facilities are running into difficulties in getting supplies of masks and hand sanitizer, as well as thefts of these items from their facilities, due to fearful hoarding behavior. Medical facilities NEED these items in order to provide good care. You will be fine with soap and water. Soap and water are better at getting rid of germs overall when used properly. If you have to go into quarantine, you can ask public health officials for supplies and assistance.

If you are preparing for community isolation, calculate how much you would need for staying home for 2-4 weeks. Anything beyond that is hoarding, and it takes away from people who may also need to stay home for that length of time. Prayerfully consider how much you need before making purchases, buy only what you need, and resist the urge to clean off a shelf at Aldi, Save-A-Lot, Dollar General, Tops, or Wegmans out of fear.

While it is generally recommended by public safety officials to have a weeks' worth of bottled water supplies on hand for your household, it is unlikely that running water will be turned off in quarantined communities. Even in the most locked down cities and regions of China and Italy, water supplies have not been disrupted or turned off. Unless there is already a problem with water quality in your area due to non-COVID-19 related reasons, you don't need to buy large quantities of bottled water.

### **Conclusion**

We hope this guide has been helpful for you and your congregation. Keep us in your prayers; we will keep you and your congregations in ours. Together, we can continue to witness to the love of Christ in our words and actions around this epidemic by showing our love through caution, kindness, and preparedness. If you have questions, you may contact us at the information below. Your first line of information about COVID-19 itself should be the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), your state departments of health, your county departments of health, and your physicians. They will frequently have more up to date information than we will.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

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## **Wesleyan Covenant Service - Traditional**

### **The Greeting**

Leader: Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations

People: You are the one true God who reigns forever.

### **Opening prayer**

Leader: Almighty God, You search our hearts and you see every part of us. All our desires are known to You, and from you no secrets are hidden. By the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, cleanse our hearts so we may perfectly love you and glorify Your holy name. We pray this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Leader: Now as God's dearly loved children, let us pray together:

People: Our Father in heaven, holy is Your Name  
Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven  
Give us today Your daily bread  
And forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us  
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil  
For the Kingdom, the power, and glory are Yours, both now and forever. Amen.

### **Scripture Lesson(s)**

2 Kings 23:1-3  
Psalm 50  
1 Peter 1  
John 15:1-8

### **The Proclamation**

Leader: Dearly loved brothers and sisters, the Christian life is a life found in Christ, redeemed from sin, and consecrated to God. We are those who have entered into this life and have been admitted into the new covenant of Jesus Christ. He is the Mediator of this covenant. He sealed it with His own blood so it would last forever.

On one side of this covenant stands God, who promises to give us new life in Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. Every day God proves His goodness and grace to us, showing us that His promise still stands firm.

On the other side, we stand as those who promise to no longer live life for ourselves but instead to only live for Jesus Christ because He has loved us and given His life for us.

There are times in our lives when it is important for us to remember and reaffirm our promises and vows. In this same way, we come today to renew our covenant with God. Many generations have done this before us. Today we make the covenant our own, renewing with both joy and sincerity the covenant that binds us all to God.

## **The Confession**

Leader: We are those who seek to live as true disciples of Jesus Christ, but sometimes we fall short. Let us now examine ourselves before God, humbly confessing our sins and submitting our hearts so that we do not deceive ourselves and cut ourselves away from God. Let us pray:

People: Father God, You have set forth the way of life through Your Son Jesus Christ, whom You love dearly. We shamefully confess that we have been slow to learn of Him and have been reluctant to follow Him. You have spoken and called to us but we have not listened. You have revealed Your beauty to us, but we have been blind. You have stretched out Your hands to us through our friends, but we have passed by them. We have accepted Your gifts and offered little thanks. We are unworthy of Your unchanging love.

Leader: We now confess to you our sins.  
Please forgive us for the poverty of our worship...  
for the selfishness of our prayers...  
for our inconsistency and unbelief...  
for the ways we neglect fellowship and Your grace...  
for our hesitation to tell others about Christ....  
for the ways we deceive others...

People: Forgive us for when we waste time and when we misuse the gifts you have given us. Forgive us for when we have made excuses for the wrong things we have done and when we have purposefully avoided responsibility.

Leader: Forgive us that we have been unwilling to overcome evil with good and that we have not been ready to carry our cross. Forgive us that we have not allowed Your love to work through us to help others and that we have not made their suffering our own. Forgive us for those

times when instead of working for unity we made it hard for others to live with us because of our lack of forgiveness, inconsiderate judgment, and quick criticism.

People: Forgive us for when we have not tried to reconcile with others and when we have been slow to seek redemption.

Leader: Forgive us also for these sins that we silently confess to you now.

### **Words of Assurance and Pardon**

Leader: God, the Father of all mercies, is faithful to cleanse us from our sins and restore us to Christ's image. Praise and glory be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

### **The Invitation**

Leader: Let us gathered here before the Lord now in covenant commit ourselves to Christ as his servants. Let us give ourselves to Him so that we may fully belong to Him. Jesus Christ has left us with many services to be done. Some of these services are easy and honorable, but some are difficult and disgraceful. Some line up with our desires and interests, others are contrary to both. In some we please both Christ and ourselves, but then there are other works where we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.

Jesus Christ, we offer You this prayer:

People: Let me be Your servant. Let me follow your commands. I will no longer follow my own desires. I give myself completely to your will.

Leader: The power and strength to live as true servants is given to us in Christ. We accept the place and work that He gives us, acknowledging that He alone will be our reward.

People: I am not my own. I am Yours alone. Make me into what You will. Rank me with those You will. Put me to use for You. Put me to suffering for You. Let me be employed for You. Let me be laid aside for You. Let me be lifted high for You. Let me be brought low for You. Let me be full or let me be empty. Let me have all things or let me have nothing. With a willing heart, I freely give everything to Your pleasure and disposal.

Leader: Christ is Savior to those who are His true servants. He is the source of all salvation to those who obey. To be His servant is to consent fully to His will. Christ accepts nothing less. Christ will be all in all, or he will be nothing.

Now confirm this truth in holy covenant. Make it a reality in your life in these three ways:

First, set apart time in your day, more than once, to be spent alone with the Lord. Seek to perceive God's special care for you and gracious acceptance of you. Carefully think through the words of this covenant and its conditions. Examine your heart, even if you have freely given your life to Christ. Name the sins in your life. Reflect on whether you are willing to choose

Christ's holy laws and strict commands. Be sure you are clear in all of these so you do not lie to God!

Second, uphold a serious spirit of holy awe and reverence.

Third, claim God's covenant. Do not trust in your own strength and power but rely upon God's promise of giving grace and strength. In this way, He will empower you to keep your promise.

Fourth, be determined to be faithful. You have given your heart and life to God. You have opened your mouth to dedicate yourself to the Lord. With God's power, never go back to your former way of living.

And last, be prepared to renew your covenant with God. Fall on your knees. Lift your hands. Open your hearts.

## **The Covenant Prayer**

Leader: Let us pray together:

People: My righteous God, for the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, see me now as I fall down before You. Forgive my unfaithfulness when I have not done your will. You promise mercy if I turn to You with my whole heart.

Leader: God requires that you rid yourself of every idol in your life.

People: From the bottom of my heart, I here and now renounce every idol in my life, covenanting with You that I will not commit any known sin. By turning against Your will I have turned my love toward the world. In Your power I will watch for any temptation that will lead me away from You.

Leader: Through Jesus Christ, God offers to be your God again, if you allow Him to be.

People: Before all heaven and earth, I here and now acknowledge You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as my Lord and God. I vow to give all of myself, body and soul, to be Your servant and to serve You in holiness and righteousness all the days of my life.

Leader: Jesus Christ is the only way and means to God. God has given us Jesus as the way and means to salvation.

People: Jesus, I here and now accept You and the only new and living Way. I join myself in covenant with You. I come to You hungry, sinful, miserable, blind, and naked, unworthy even to wash the feet of Your servants. With all my power, I accept You as my Lord and Head. I renounce my own unworthiness, 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.

Leader: Christ has told you that you must suffer with him.

People: Jesus, I here and now make this covenant with You and accept whatever comes in life. Through Your grace I promise that neither life nor death will separate me from You.

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

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Leader: The Almighty God searches and knows you, even the thoughts of your heart.

People: O God, You know that we have made this covenant today in sincerity, without deceit or reluctance. If You find anything false in us, guide us and help us to set it right. And now, glory be to You, God the Father. From this day forward, I shall look upon You as my God and Father. Glory be to You, God the Son. You have loved me and washed me from my sins in Your own blood. From this day forward, I shall look upon You as my Savior and Redeemer. Glory be to You, O God the Holy Spirit. By Your almighty power, You have turned my heart from sin to God. From this day forward I shall look upon You as my Comforter and Guide. O mighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you have now become my Covenant Friend. And I, through Your infinite grace, have become Your covenant servant. You are mine and I am Yours. So be it. May this covenant that I have made here on earth be ratified in heaven. Amen.

### **Dismissal with Blessing**

Leader: May our God, who establishes covenant relationship with those who seek to enter the Kingdom, be with you always. May Jesus Christ, who seals the new covenant with his blood on the cross, bring you peace. May the Holy Spirit guide your life both now and for ever. Go in peace to serve the Lord!

People: Amen.

## **Notes for Service Planning**

### **Notes on liturgical items:**

If your congregation is used to saying the Lord's Prayer together in worship, it is better to use your standard version rather than the updated version included here.

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### **Notes on music:**

#### **Hymn suggestions (with name of lyricist)**

“A charge to keep I have” (Charles Wesley)

“Come let us use the grace divine” (Charles Wesley)

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#### **Contemporary song suggestions (with name of recording artist)**

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“Seas of Crimson” (Bethel Music)

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## **Wesleyan Covenant Service - Modern**

### **The Greeting**

Leader: Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations

People: You are the one true God who reigns forever.

### **Opening prayer**

Leader: Almighty God, You search our hearts and you see every part of us. All our desires are known to You, and from you no secrets are hidden. By the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, cleanse our hearts so we may perfectly love you and glorify Your holy name. We pray this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Leader: Now as God's dearly loved children, let us pray together:

People: Our Father in heaven, holy is Your Name  
Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven  
Give us today Your daily bread  
And forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us  
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil  
For the Kingdom, the power, and glory are Yours, both now and forever. Amen.

### **Scripture Lesson(s)**

2 Kings 23:1-3  
Psalm 50  
1 Peter 1  
John 15:1-8

### **The Proclamation**

Leader: Dearly loved brothers and sisters, the Christian life is a life found in Christ, redeemed from sin, and consecrated to God. We are those who have entered into this life and have been admitted into the new covenant of Jesus Christ. He is the Mediator of this covenant. He sealed it with His own blood so it would last forever.

On one side of this covenant stands God, who promises to give us new life in Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. Every day God proves His goodness and grace to us, showing us that His promise still stands firm.

On the other side, we stand as those who promise to no longer live life for ourselves but instead to only live for Jesus Christ because He has loved us and given His life for us.

There are times in our lives when it is important for us to remember and reaffirm our promises and vows. In this same way, we come today to renew our covenant with God. Many generations have done this before us. Today we make the covenant our own, renewing with both joy and sincerity the covenant that binds us all to God.

## **The Confession**

Leader: We are those who seek to live as true disciples of Jesus Christ, but sometimes we fall short. Let us now examine ourselves before God, humbly confessing our sins and submitting our hearts so that we do not deceive ourselves and cut ourselves away from God. Let us pray:

People: Father God, You have set forth the way of life through Your Son Jesus Christ, whom You love dearly. We shamefully confess that we have been slow to learn of Him and have been reluctant to follow Him. You have spoken and called to us but we have not listened. You have revealed Your beauty to us, but we have been blind. You have stretched out Your hands to us through our friends, but we have passed by them. We have accepted Your gifts and offered little thanks. We are unworthy of Your unchanging love.

Leader: We now confess to you our sins.  
Please forgive us for the poverty of our worship...  
for the selfishness of our prayers...  
for our inconsistency and unbelief...  
for the ways we neglect fellowship and Your grace...  
for our hesitation to tell others about Christ....  
for the ways we deceive others...

People: Forgive us for when we waste time and when we misuse the gifts you have given us. Forgive us for when we have made excuses for the wrong things we have done and when we have purposefully avoided responsibility.

Leader: Forgive us that we have been unwilling to overcome evil with good and that we have not been ready to carry our cross. Forgive us that we have not allowed Your love to work through us to help others and that we have not made their suffering our own. Forgive us for those

times when instead of working for unity we made it hard for others to live with us because of our lack of forgiveness, inconsiderate judgment, and quick criticism.

People: Forgive us for when we have not tried to reconcile with others and when we have been slow to seek redemption.

Leader: Forgive us also for these sins that we silently confess to you now.

### **Words of Assurance and Pardon**

Leader: God, the Father of all mercies, is faithful to cleanse us from our sins and restore us to Christ's image. Praise and glory be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

### **The Invitation**

Leader: Let us gathered here before the Lord now in covenant commit ourselves to Christ as his servants. Let us give ourselves to Him so that we may fully belong to Him. Jesus Christ has left us with many services to be done. Some of these services are easy and honorable, but some are difficult and disgraceful. Some line up with our desires and interests, others are contrary to both. In some we please both Christ and ourselves, but then there are other works where we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.

Jesus Christ, we offer You this prayer:

People: Let me be Your servant. Let me follow your commands. I will no longer follow my own desires. I give myself completely to your will.

Leader: The power and strength to live as true servants is given to us in Christ. We accept the place and work that He gives us, acknowledging that He alone will be our reward.

People: I am not my own. I am Yours alone. Make me into what You will. Rank me with those You will. Put me to use for You. Put me to suffering for You. Let me be employed for You. Let me be laid aside for You. Let me be lifted high for You. Let me be brought low for You. Let me be full or let me be empty. Let me have all things or let me have nothing. With a willing heart, I freely give everything to Your pleasure and disposal.

Leader: Christ is Savior to those who are His true servants. He is the source of all salvation to those who obey. To be His servant is to consent fully to His will. Christ accepts nothing less. Christ will be all in all, or he will be nothing.

Now confirm this truth in holy covenant. Make it a reality in your life in these three ways:

First, set apart time in your day, more than once, to be spent alone with the Lord. Seek to perceive God's special care for you and gracious acceptance of you. Carefully think through the words of this covenant and its conditions. Examine your heart, even if you have freely given your life to Christ. Name the sins in your life. Reflect on whether you are willing to choose

Christ's holy laws and strict commands. Be sure you are clear in all of these so you do not lie to God!

Second, uphold a serious spirit of holy awe and reverence.

Third, claim God's covenant. Do not trust in your own strength and power but rely upon God's promise of giving grace and strength. In this way, He will empower you to keep your promise.

Fourth, be determined to be faithful. You have given your heart and life to God. You have opened your mouth to dedicate yourself to the Lord. With God's power, never go back to your former way of living.

And last, be prepared to renew your covenant with God. Fall on your knees. Lift your hands. Open your hearts.

### **The Covenant Prayer**

Leader: Let us pray together:

People: My righteous God, for the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, see me now as I fall down before You. Forgive my unfaithfulness when I have not done your will. You promise mercy if I turn to You with my whole heart.

Leader: God requires that you rid yourself of every idol in your life.

People: From the bottom of my heart, I here and now renounce every idol in my life, covenanting with You that I will not commit any known sin. By turning against Your will I have turned my love toward the world. In Your power I will watch for any temptation that will lead me away from You.

Leader: Through Jesus Christ, God offers to be your God again, if you allow Him to be.

People: Before all heaven and earth, I here and now acknowledge You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as my Lord and God. I vow to give all of myself, body and soul, to be Your servant and to serve You in holiness and righteousness all the days of my life.

Leader: Jesus Christ is the only way and means to God. God has given us Jesus as the way and means to salvation.

People: Jesus, I here and now accept You and the only new and living Way. I join myself in covenant with You. I come to You hungry, sinful, miserable, blind, and naked, unworthy even to wash the feet of Your servants. With all my power, I accept You as my Lord and Head. I renounce my own unworthiness, 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.

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