

Suggestions for those leading worship in the Covenant Service

Approaching the Covenant Service

Here are some possibilities for engaging with the background ideas of covenant

Historical Perspective

- “From the earliest days of the Methodist societies, John Wesley invited the Methodist people to renew their covenant relationship with God. Wesley drew much of his material for the service from seventeenth-century Puritans and subsequently made changes to it.” (*Methodist Worship Book p. 281*)
- “In 1663 Richard Alleine, a Puritan, published “*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," in 1755 in what probably was the first real celebration of the Covenant Service in the Methodist movement. Wesley found the service rich and meaningful: "Many mourned before God, and many were comforted"; ... "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".
(edited from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/covenant-renewal-service>)

Theological Perspectives

- The **purpose** of the Covenant Service is the renewal of a person's covenant with God. Explore the idea of covenant in the Bible (*see the Bible passages in the Covenant Service – MWB p.284 and the words on p.285*). How do we see our relationship with God today?
- The purpose of the Covenant Service is also a renewal of commitment to Christ and the Church. Wesley expected full and wholehearted commitment to the Christian faith and an active desire for continuous spiritual growth. What does that look like today?
- The **theme** of Grace – God's gift of love – is at the heart of the Covenant Service. You may like to research Wesley's understanding of the nature of God's love which was fundamental to his theology. Hymns by Charles Wesley may help. What is our picture of God today? Does it allow for a grace-filled understanding of God? Our approach to the Covenant Service will be impacted by the sort of relationship we have with God. You may wish to use the poems on the webpage.
- A **problematic phrase** for some people is “put me to suffering” (*MWB p.290*) with the more modern wording of “in all that I may endure” (*MWB p.288*). Consider the phrase in the context of a lifelong committed relationship to God. Is it really suggesting that God's will is to send difficult times to people? Is it rather acknowledging that Christian faith is not an insurance policy? Does it help to see “suffering” as relating to “being done unto” – times when we are not active agents but have to cope with what comes our way? What is our faith like in those times?

Challenge

- Could you write a contemporary Covenant Prayer? What would you include? What language would you use?