

## THE JOB OF RENEWAL

*(excerpts from June 2008 "Leadership & Congregational Development Newsletter" by Church Consultants Dan Smith & Mary K. Huycke.)*

*Whether or not a congregation thrives is ultimately up to the laity. A pastor can teach, guide, lead, support, inspire, and even cajole others. In the end, congregational health is a function of how people in the congregation relate to one another, to God, and to their community. The church is a microcosm of the greater Church. It is the embodiment of the body of Christ.*

*A congregation that is truly BEING the church brings people into a loving, life-giving relationship with God and others that is transformational. That is the nature of the kingdom of God, where covenantal relationships model the best aspects of family. People find hope. They experience belonging, extend and receive forgiveness. They discover a sense of purpose and direction. They learn to live with appreciation and joy no matter what circumstances they find themselves in. While a pastor can preach and teach this message, the message only has power to the extent that the people from the congregation live it and practice it with one another. Practicing loving, life-giving relationships transforms congregation members. Witnessing such living draws others who want something similar for themselves and their families.*

*Congregations are not businesses, but they can fall into the trap of thinking that it is the features and the gimmicks that people want. We need to remember that the greatest asset the church has is the unique gift of the people themselves and the possibilities for transformation they can offer to others.*

*Congregational renewal is a renewal of the people's ability to notice and experience God in our midst, and the desire to partner with God in achieving His aims for the world.*

*These aims are for a new way of looking at church, the work of the congregation and what it has to offer the world. Renewal is a renewing of the people's understanding of their relationship with God, their relationship with our community and a renewal of our calling. Aiming for a bigger building or more hi-tech worship or create more programs are secondary. Congregational renewal happens through people renewal.*

*Jesus came to offer abundant life. A renewed congregation embodies that message for its members, the surrounding community and the world.*

*John Wesley found the service of Covenant Renewal rich and meaningful, as expressed in his Journal: "Many mourned before God, and many were comforted (Apr. 1756); "It was an occasion for a variety of spiritual experiences. . .I do not know that ever we had a greater blessing. Afterwards many people 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. (Jan. 1, 1775)*

*The heart of this service focuses on the Covenant Prayer, and it requires people to commit themselves to God.*

## WESLEY'S COVENANT SERVICE

### INVITATION

**Pastor:** 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.***

**Pastor:** 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.***

**Pastor:** Christ will be the Savior of none but those who are His servants. He is the source of all salvation to those who strive to obey. Christ will have no servants except by consent to be such, and He will not accept anything less than 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 words of advice:

First, set apart some time, more than once, to be spent alone before the Lord to earnestly seek God's special assistance and gracious acceptance of you; to carefully think through all the conditions of the covenant relationship; and in searching your hearts as to whether you have already freely given your life to Christ. Consider what sin is in your life. Consider the commands of Christ, how holy, strict, and spiritual they are, and whether you are willing to choose and follow 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 His promises of giving you grace and strength, so that you can keep your promises. Trust not your own strength and power.

Fourth, resolve/determine 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 to the old ways.

And last, be prepared to renew your covenant with the Lord. Humble yourself before God, lift your hands toward heaven, open your hearts to Him.

**COVENANT PRAYER** [Congregation in **BOLD**]

*Righteous God, for the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, see me as I bow 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.*

**Pastor:** God requires that you shall put away all your idols.

*I here and now, from the bottom of my heart, renounce all my idols, 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 out for all temptations that will lead me away from You. For my own righteousness is riddled with sin, unable to stand before You.*

**Pastor:** 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.*

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

*Jesus, I do here and now bowed before You, accept Jesus 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 other servants. With all my power, accept you as my Lord. 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.*

**Pastor:** Christ has told you that you must suffer with Him.

*I do 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 separate me from You.*

**Pastor:** God has given holy laws as the rules for 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 rules 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.*

**Pastor:** The almighty God searches and knows your heart.

*Father God, You know that I make this covenant with You today without any resentment or reservation. If any falsehood should be in it, guide me and help me to set it right. And now, glory be to You, Heavenly Father, whom I from this day forward shall look upon as my God. Glory be to You and to Your 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, Holy Spirit, who by Your almighty power have turned my heart from sin to God. Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You have now become my Covenant Friend. Through Your infinite grace, I am now Your covenant servant. So be it! And let the covenant I make on earth here today be noted and sealed 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. With all reverence, lay the service before the Lord as your act and deed. And when you have done this, sign it. Keep it as a reminder of the holy agreement between God and you that you may remember it during doubts and temptations.)*

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_