

RESOURCES FOR TRANSITION RETREATS©

Transition retreats are conducted for those passing through a significant change in their life and/or vocation/ministry. They are intended to enable the retreatant to make a meaningful closure of the previous stage and to progress to what God has in mind for their future.

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(i) Introduction to Transition Retreat

***“I leave the past behind and with hands outstretched to whatever lies ahead, I go straight for the goal – my reward the honour of being called by God in Christ”
(Phil:3:13,14, J B Phillips)***

This Retreat is based on the various facets of the Lord's Supper. All the work done in individual and plenary sessions is recorded in the participant's confidential Retreat Diary. In each segment the participant(s) work in silence on their own. Individual segments are followed by a time to share individual work. However, in the “Repentance” segment, sharing is optional.

- **REMEMBRANCE**

“Do this in remembrance of me.....” (1 Cor 11:24,25)

- We celebrate what God has done for us in and through Christ
- A resource based on **Colossians** (Paul's 'Christology epistle') will help us in this segment

- **REPENTANCE**

“Examine yourselves....” (1 Cor 11:28)

- We seek to get things right with God and others
- We reflect on our past experiences
- In silence, we confess, using **Psalm 51** (David's great Psalm of confession) to help in our preparation
- We accept God's forgiveness, based on the finished work of Christ (Rom 5:8; 1 John 1:9)
- By faith we close the door on what we don't feel good about
- We seek to identify what we can learn from this reflection

- **THANKSGIVING**

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift...” (2 Cor 9:15)

- We thank God for his “unsurpassing grace” we have received in Christ.
- With the help of **Psalm 103**, we seek to recall the many other evidences of God's undeserved kindness in our life and ministry and sincerely thank him.

- **PROMISE & HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

“.....until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26)

- We celebrate our Christian hope (*John 14:3*)
- The Christian life is meant to be a series of new beginnings
- We seek to identify possible options God may have for us in the future
(*Jer 29:11 – “I know the plans I have for you.....”*)

- **RECOMMITMENT**

“With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies as a living sacrifice consecrated to him and acceptable by him.” (Rom 12.1, J B Phillips)

- We renew our “sacramentum” – our oath of allegiance to Christ
 - The **Wesleyan Covenant Prayer** guides us in this act of Recommitment

THE LORD'S SUPPER is celebrated as the climax of the Retreat, in which work on the above is integral



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TRANSITION RETREAT

(ii) A LETTER OF COMMENDATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT - from a leading Christian psychologist

Dear Participant in this Transition Retreat

Experiences such as this Transition Retreat can become as important to one's spiritual journey as a lighthouse is to a ship in a storm. It can be a moment of exciting discovery, from which decisions about one's personal life and ministry can be made. The Bible is full of stories of people who had close encounters with God. Some amazing discoveries emerged from these encounters.

A retreat can also be dangerous, because not far from the lighthouse are the rocks that can crush the ship. In a 1950's movie, *The Robe*, a Tribune who has been a powerful figure in the Roman Empire becomes a Christian. His life was radically changed and in making the transition from powerful leader to humble Christian he was executed for his faith. Inevitably, change brings exciting and joyful discoveries, as well as painful confrontations that may be costly. So while it is important to take time out with God to ask questions about our life and ministry, we need to remember that to place our lives before God is an awesome thing. In other words, we should not ask questions of God unless we are prepared for the answers!

The retreat John Mallison has designed includes what have been for each previous participant inspiring times of celebration and thanksgiving as Christ, in all his uniqueness is explored and worshipped, personal experiences of God's grace, his love and his great faithfulness are recalled and gratitude expressed. Critical life events both positive and negative in one's journey of fellowship and service in the life of the church are identified and dealt with appropriately. Hope and faith play a vital role as options for the future are explored.

I like the centrality of the Cross and resurrection in these retreats that help us to undertake this experience on a firm foundation of grace.

These retreats are not meant to be a deep uncovering of one's life as might happen in a psychotherapy environment; spiritual guidance and psychotherapy have some common, but also quite different goals. Nevertheless a retreat will inevitably open up one's life to scrutiny, so we need to be aware that some critical issues may emerge.

Assuming that one is prepared to take this exciting journey with God, I offer some simple guidelines to participants.

1. Be open-minded and prepared for the wonderful surprises God can bring to you.
2. Remember that the changes you make will have a direct impact on your family and friends. Keep them in mind and where appropriate find ways to include them.
3. All change is stressful, even good change. Take time-out when needed and pace yourself carefully.
4. Remember that you are not alone. The risen, glorified Christ is with you through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.
5. Remember you are part of a large community of faith, with each of us living at different points in our journeys with God. Significant, loving, prayerful members of this fellowship of the Holy Spirit will be upholding you during your preparation, during the retreat and afterwards.

I pray that your retreat will be rich and rewarding.

With every blessing,

Peter Powell (Director, Pastoral Counselling Institute, 16 Mason's Dr, Nth Parramatta)



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(iii) Notes for Transition Retreat Leaders

INTRODUCTION

The retreat is a time for reflection and listening to the voice of God. We seek to intently and expectantly listen to God speaking primarily through Scripture, through silent times of communion with him and through the dialogue between the leader and the retreatant(s).

It is assumed that the retreat leader has good active listening skills, uses a 'grace-giver' and not a 'truth teller' style of leadership, has some understanding of how adults learn, can ask good questions and is open and prepared to receive, especially in terms of being addressed by God themselves. (See *'Mentoring to Develop Disciples & Leaders'*, John Mallison)

Central to the process I use is the frequently neglected supernatural power of **the finished work of Christ, authentic Christian community** and **corporate prayer**.

All too often, there are major deficiencies in much of our efforts as Christians to help others. A bonding in prayer with a spiritual community of faith and a clear focus on Christ's death and resurrection is essential for help that divinely makes a lasting difference.

In the transformation of human lives, we need to focus on the **centrality of Christ's all-powerful gospel** of promise and hope. An essential role in this process is a genuine community of Christ-like love, created and maintained by the Holy Spirit, in providing prayerful support and encouragement.

These retreats will inevitably open the retreatant's life to scrutiny, with the emergence of some critical issues.

Retreat leaders need to be aware of limitations they may have in dealing with deep issues that could arise, which should be dealt with in a psychotherapy environment. Spiritual guidance and psychotherapy have some common, but also some quite different goals.

Occasionally after completing a retreat, I have referred the retreatant to a person qualified to deal with issues that are beyond my expertise and experience. During one retreat conducted for a person with the early signs of burnout (with the retreatant's approval) I worked in conjunction with help being given by a psychologist and a medical practitioner.

The format and resources provided here are the outcome of careful reflection on my leadership of these activities over a number of years.

Each time I conduct an event, while maintaining the main aspects I have found to be central for this type of retreat, I usually vary some sections to suit the specific needs of the retreatant.

VENUES, EQUIPMENT, ETC

Retreat Centres have provided the ideal environment. I try to arrange for a room for our collective meetings and separate small rooms (often bedrooms) for individual work.

Occasionally I have used a commercial Conference Centre without separate areas as above, but with a larger room including separate tables on which to work.

Prior to the commencement I place a small self-standing cross on a table in the meeting room, together with the elements for communion.

A whiteboard (electronic, if possible) is useful for work during the combined sessions.



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LENGTH OF RETREAT

I have found that six to seven hours is needed for these retreats. We commence at 9am and conclude between 4 and 5pm, with morning and afternoon breaks and 1-1.5 hours for lunch. (Lunch usually includes some exercise in the form of a walk and a meal away from the retreat centre, if possible).

Shorter retreats have required a prior briefing session, during which the resources are given and the work required explained. This completed work provides the material for the shorter retreat sessions.

I have found the one-day retreats to be the more effective.

PRAYER COVER

I firmly believe in the imperative of prayer and the divine power released through the collective intercession of a number of faithful followers of Christ, therefore I enlist the prayer support of my closer intercessors (50 or more) for this retreat. I request that they pray:

- that the power and glory of our risen glorified Christ will be paramount,
- that we will be able to recognise and celebrate the many evidences of God's grace in the lives of those involved
- that the power of Christ's finished work on the Cross would pervade the whole experience releasing from any bondage and giving a new freedom and joy
- that God's intention for the future will become clear
- for wisdom and empowerment for myself

I also require the retreatant/s to enlist the prayers of a number of intercessors.

PREPARATION BY THE PERSON(S) UNDERTAKING THE RETREAT

Life Overview Chart:

Prior to the retreat I have the retreatant(s) reflect on their life and prepare A Life Overview Chart. This comprises a timeline drawn across the centre of the chart. Above the timeline are noted the positive experiences they could recall and below, the negative experiences. The dates and names of those associated with each are recorded. I encourage them to be very thorough and creative. This is an important resource, especially for the repentance and thanksgiving segments.

Prayer Cover:

As mentioned above, retreatants are required to build their own prayer base for the retreat.

RETREAT JOURNAL

I usually provide well-bound, ruled exercise books that are available from most better-class stationers, in which retreatants keep notes in each session. This journal is used after the retreat for further personal reflection and in mentoring sessions.

Occasionally I have provided a fixed pocket refillable display book, with 30 pockets into which the worksheets and note pages are placed. A title page with the person's name is placed in the insert packet front cover.



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INVOLVEMENT OF RETREATANT'S SPOUSE

I have found it beneficial to include the spouse of the mentoree in an appropriate manner. Usually this has been a pre-retreat meeting of the three of us, often over a meal, during which I provide copies of the sheet giving the outline of the retreat and clarify aspects. I then encourage both to talk about the highs and lows of their lives and ministries over the last few years. This is followed by reflection on the things they can celebrate and what they might have done differently.

On the evening following the day's retreat, we again meet over a meal to debrief and consider the day's activities.

Involvement of the spouse in both the above and the retreat has also proved to be most beneficial. When this happens, the individual segments have been done separately with the three of us involved together in the sessions for feedback and thinking together about responses.

SCRIPTURE RESOURCES

A cursory glance through the retreat outline and the resources clearly show that Scripture is the prime resource.

I usually photocopy the various passages for each participant to encourage the marking of relevant aspects. I also provide plenty of space for notes, etc.

It is imperative that the retreat leader has a good understanding of each Scripture passage in order to be able to capably facilitate the plenary segments. The leader's preparation should include an exegetical study of the texts, including background information, etc. To handle the session involving an overview of Paul's letter to the Colossians, it is essential to have a knowledge of why Christ's supremacy was an issue for these Christians. Syncretism, the uniqueness of Jesus, his leadership, etc, etc, are all matters Paul deals with here.

The questions on the worksheets seek to bring the Scriptures to bear on the retreatant's life and ministry. The leader should maintain this emphasis in order that the Scriptures not just 'inform' but 'transform'!

NOTEPAPER / CARDS

I provide attractive notepaper (and sometimes 'thankyou' cards) for retreatants to at least begin the write a note of thanks for some of those who have blessed them, and who were identified in the Thanksgiving section.

TIMING OF SESSIONS

- **Introduction** – 15 minutes
- **Remembrance** – Individual work 45 minutes, Plenary 30 minutes
- **Morning break** – 20-30 minutes
- **Repentance** – Individual work 20-30 minutes, Plenary 20-30 minutes
- **Lunch Break** – 60 minutes
- **Thanksgiving** – Individual work 20-30 minutes, Plenary 30 minutes
- **Afternoon break** – 20-30 minutes
- **Promise and Hope for the Future** – Individual work 20-30 minutes, Plenary 20-30 minutes (+)
- **Celebration of Lord's Supper & Recommitment** – 20 minutes



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I set a time for the individual work, then make occasional checks to see if a longer or shorter time is needed.

USING THE LIFE OVERVIEW CHART

This is used in both the Repentance and Thanksgiving sections during the individual work segments. I have them reflect on their charts and make notes on their worksheets or in their journals.

In the reporting back segments, while the above is being communicated, I note emphasis, tone and body language and record these under the appropriate negative and positive columns on my notepad. While having them explore other significant aspects, I encourage them to identify the feeling associated with any of what they have shared. We then process this.

People who have contributed to their pilgrimage in helpful or unhelpful ways are identified and appropriate action explored.

CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

I follow the shorter traditional order of service for this sacrament.

The copies of worksheets are placed on the 'communion table'.

We recall how God got our attention during the reflection on the Colossians Scripture passage, then respond in prayers of adoration.

During the **confession segment**, we each make silent personal confessions and I then follow the traditional order, giving assurance of forgiveness from Scripture.

Following this, I dip my finger in the common cup and make the mark of a cross over the sheet that indicates the negative influences on their life. We spend a time reflecting on that in silence, and they respond in a short prayer. Often I tear up the sheet listing what they don't feel good about (sometimes taking it outside to burn it in a small container), then place the remains before the Cross on the table while repeating Psalm 103:12.

The names of the various people listed on the Life Overview Chart who had a negative influence are noted and the mentoree encouraged to ask forgiveness from God on their behalf and if able, and appropriate, express this forgiveness to each individual. No pressure is brought to bear at this point. If they are not able to forgive, I encourage them in silence to seek grace to **want** to forgive, in the hope they will be given grace to do so in the future.

The **thanksgiving prayer** expresses gratitude for the aspects of their life and work in which God's grace was evident. Focusing on those who had made a positive contribution to their journey and expressing thanksgiving for each of them individually then follows.

The elements are then received.

The futuristic aspect of this sacrament, 'until I come' is celebrated and the significance of our gospel of promise and hope reflected upon in terms of the next stages of their life or ministry following this experience. Appropriate prayers follow.

The **recommitment prayer** is prayed following a time of silence during which the prayer is read and its implications faced before reciting it together.



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Final blessing. I anoint them with oil, placing the sign of the cross upon their foreheads, lay hands on them and pray for the Holy Spirit to anoint them and empower them for the new way ahead.

SOME VARIATIONS

The Lord's Prayer and a brief study of **the Atonement** were the main resources for one of these retreats.

The Lord's Prayer: Each segment of the prayer (eg 'Our Father in Heaven', etc) was reflected upon together and notes made on the electronic whiteboard. A printout was made of the summaries on the whiteboard for reference later.

After each segment, both of us responded in prayer.

I noted responses by the mentoree which I raised later, (eg on one occasion they did not associate 'love' with 'Father', only 'provision').

Reflection on the Atonement

Each of us spent time reflecting individually on a photocopy of three pages of verses of Scripture relating to the atonement of Christ (these were taken from a Topical Bible). We shared our individual responses. These were noted on the electronic whiteboard and later a printout was made of this work.

The holiness of God and the power of the super abundance of his love and undeserved kindness in Christ's death and resurrection were overwhelmingly evident in these verses. We both responded to our work in this section by choosing a hymn that best expressed our response to the way that God got our attention and then prayed together.

The above work (interspersed with prayer and worship segments) occupied the first half of a one-day retreat, providing resources for the next stage. The second half of the day was spent following the general format for the Transition Retreat without the Scripture reflections from the 'Repentance' stage.

SUGGESTED READING FOR LEADERS

- **Healing The Family Tree**, Dr Kenneth McCall, *Sheldon Press*
- **The Gift of Inner Healing**, Ruth Carter Stapleton, *Word Books*
- **Life Cycle Theory & Pastoral Care**, Donald Capps, *Fortress Press*
- **Counselling & Life-Span Development**, R Murray Thomas, *Sage*
- **Christian Life Patterns**, Evelyn Eaton Whitehead & James D Whitehead, *Image*



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(iv) Brief Theological Basis for Transition Retreat

As explained in the Introduction, this retreat is based on segments present in a balanced biblical celebration of the Lord's Supper. This sacrament has been central in the life of the Christian church from its beginning (*1 Cor. 11:23-32; Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20*).

This service, so rich in its significance, reminds us of the central and critical role of the Cross in the Christian belief and behaviour. It is the heart and centre of our faith. It is the focal point of Christ's life and mission in restoring our relationship to God and empowering us to live a life honouring to God. When the message of the Cross is proclaimed, understood and responded to in faith, it is powerful to change peoples' lives.

We not only remember Christ's suffering and death in this meal, but that **Christ is present**. It is a "communion" with Christ (*John 6:56; 1 Cor. 10:16*. We feed on the Bread of Life (*John 6:33-35*). The receiving of the symbols of his body and blood signifies our bond with Christ by faith to enrich our faith and strengthen our life and witness. Here that 'communion' is sharply focused.

Repentance is an essential aspect because God reveals his true nature in the Cross. God's attributes of righteousness and love, mercy and truth, justice and love, are clearly evident in our Lord Jesus Christ's death.

Yes, this is the greatest demonstration of God's love for us (*John 3:16*), but it also graphically demonstrates a holy God's intense loathing for sin. Our expected response is repentance towards God and faith in what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us through his suffering and death (*1 Cor 15:3; 1 Peter 3:18*).

This needs to be followed by confidently quoting Scripture which gives the assurance that if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (*1 John 1:9*). This we accept by faith rather than trusting in any accompanying feelings.

Our response to this amazing act of divine grace should be one of heartfelt **thanksgiving**. The early Church Fathers used the Greek word 'Eucharist', which means 'thanksgiving', for the Lord's Supper. We express our deep gratitude for God's undeserved kindness in redeeming us through Christ from the penalty (*Gal 3:13*) and power of sin (*Titus 2:14; Matt 20:28*); the power of Satan (*2 Cor 2:14; Col 2:15*) and all evil (*Heb 9:12*).

The Lord's Supper is a **celebration of the promise of hope God gives us through Christ for the future**. We do this 'until he comes' (*1 Cor 11:26*), It is a pledge that Christ will come again and a foretaste of the fuller and deeper fellowship with Christ.

It assures us that Christ is the Lord of history that embraces even the minutest detail of our everyday lives. We leave the past to his mercy and confidently face the future with hope and faith. The Christian life is then full of new possibilities, new beginnings, new steps of trust in all God is and all he has done for us, and all we can trust him to do in the future. The Lord's Supper is a time to be expectant, to explore possible options God may have for us in the future. With Paul, we can say, 'I leave the past behind and with hands outstretched to whatever lies ahead, I go straight for the goal...' (*Phil 3:13, 14*). As one door closes another opens for the person who is indwelt by Christ.

This sacrament is a time for **recommitment**. The early church could not but be impressed by the oath of allegiance the Roman soldier made to his Emperor which could only be broken by death. It was known as the 'sacramentum' from which comes our word 'sacrament'. This is a



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a time for us to follow Christ's ultimate example of his self-surrender ('I come to do your will' *Heb 10:9*) and renew our commitment to our Sovereign Lord.



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(v) Transition Retreat Worksheets

See (ii) Notes for Transition Retreat Leaders re Scripture resources to accompany most of the following.

- a. The Centrality of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ to our Life and Ministry**
- b. Getting Things Right with God and Others**
- c. What I Don't Feel Good About**
- d. Thanks Be to God!**
- e. Promise and Hope**
- f. Recommitment**

Transition Retreat Worksheet (a)

**The Centrality of the
Person and Work of Jesus Christ
to our Life and Ministry**

- **Identify the teaching** in Paul's letter to the **Colossians** which indicates the characteristics of this epistle.
 - Then **seek to relate** each aspect to your own life and future ministry.
(Make notes in your journal)
1. The **unique supremacy** of Christ.
 2. The **total adequacy** of Christ to meet **all** our needs.
 3. Jesus Christ has **rid men and women of their subjection** to the “elemental spirits of the world” and **defeated** the powers of evil.
 4. The **freedom** Christ gives from all forms of legalism, rules and regulations – no other intermediaries are necessary.
 5. The **holiness of life** expected of and possible for those who truly follow Christ.
 6. The **hope** we have in Christ.



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Transition Retreat Worksheet (b)

Getting Things Right With God and Others

Section A

- Read and reflect upon **Psalm 51**.

(The following work will be confidential – you may share all or part of it only with God, unless you choose to do otherwise. Use the worksheet to help you be specific)

- What aspects of your personal and spiritual life during the time covered by this Retreat do you not feel good about (actions, neglect, thoughts, feelings, attitudes)?

- Your personal and spiritual life *(you may wish to refer to Colossians 3:1-25; 4:1 to guide you in this reflection)*.

- Your relationship to:
 - Family
 - Those in authority over you
 - Those over whom you exercise authority (staff, etc)
 - Those under your spiritual care
 - Others?

- Are there any people you need to forgive?

- Is there some other action you feel prompted to take as a result of this reflection?



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Transition Retreat Worksheet (b)

Getting Things Right With God and Others - *continued*

Section B

For Further Reflection and Discussion:
(Make notes in your journal)

- What can you learn from some of the experiences recalled:
 - about yourself

 - about others

 - about God

- What do you think Jesus would have done in one or two of the situations recalled?

- What would you do the same in future?

- What would you seek to do differently in similar situations in the future?

- What could help you to do things differently?



Transition Retreat Worksheet (c)

What I Don't Feel Good About

WORKSHEET

Item	Person(s) Involved	Possible Action



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Transition Retreat Worksheet (d)

Thanks be to God!

For what can you give thanks to God as you reflect upon your life and ministry during the period you are covering in this retreat?

- In Paul's letter to the **Colossians**, a number of issues cause him to give thanks. He also exhorts his readers to be joyful and thankful (see 1:3; 1:12; 1:24; 2:4; 2:7; 3:15, 16; 4:2). In what ways can you join Paul in being thankful.
- Read and reflect upon **Psalm 103**. Note some of the areas covered in this Psalm which are relevant to your own experience of God's goodness to you.
- Which individuals have invested their lives in you by encouraging, supporting, guiding and praying for you? How have they done this? (List their names and make comments after each).
- What challenges in your life and ministry has God enabled you to meet successfully.
- Recall some of the many and varied opportunities God has given you.
- What other ways you have experienced **Lamentations 3:21-24**.



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To whom do you feel the need to express your gratitude by writing a note of thanks or in some other way?

(Using the notepaper provided, begin to write a note which you can complete later).



Transition Retreat Worksheet (e)

Promise and Hope

The Christian life is meant to be a series of new beginnings

- "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be **born from above.**'" (*John 3:6,7*)
- "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a **new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!**" (*1 Cor 5:17*)
- "...These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens: 'I know your works. **Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.** I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.'" (*Rev 3:7-8*)
- "Be strong and be bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you." ... "**It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.**" (*Deut 31:6,8*)

Make notes in your journal as you consider the following:

- How do you respond to the above Scriptures? (Encouraged? challenged??)
- What uncertainties or apprehension do you have as you face the future?
- What confidence do you have about what lies ahead?
- What hopes and expectations do you have?



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Transition Retreat Worksheet (f) Recommitment

WESLEYAN COVENANT (Modified)

THE COVENANT:

And now, beloved, let us bind ourselves with willing bonds to our covenant God, and take the yoke of Christ upon us.

This taking of his yoke upon us means that we are thoroughly content that he appoint us our place and work, and that God alone be our reward.

Christ has many services to be done; some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural desires and worldly 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 of these things is assuredly given us in Jesus Christ, who strengthens us.

Being prepared in this way, let us now in sincere dependence upon God's grace and trusting in God's promises, give ourselves anew to the Lord.

THE COVENANT PRAYER

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

Put us to what you will, place us with whom you will; put us to doing, put us to suffering; let us be employed for you or out of action for you, exalted for you or humbled for you; let us be full, let us be empty, let us have all things, let us have nothing; we freely and cheerfully surrender all things to your pleasure and to your disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are ours, and we are yours. So be it. May the covenant that we have made this day on earth be upheld for all of our days in this world and may it be ratified in Heaven. Amen.