

A Service for Renewal

This service is a more informal, experiential service particularly suited for gatherings in flexible spaces. Whenever and however you decide to do it, you need to prepare for the service like any other renewal service. Visit www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/worship/assemblies/prepare.htm for help.

Set the place up in such a way that indicates the special nature of this event. Go to extra lengths to use pertinent art in banners and/or in the narthex area. Keep the communion table as the Lord's Table for communion only. Think about chair arrangement, if you can. A circular seating arrangement or a monastic choir arrangement (two banks of chairs in curved rows facing each other across the table) creates more a feeling of more intimacy than chairs lined up facing a speaker.

Think about the symbols you want present. Surely the cross should be preeminent. Candles work well for contemplation in the lengthening shadows of evening. Pronouncing the Assurance of Pardon at the baptismal font while picking up and allowing the water to roll off your hand could be quite powerful. A simple set table should be central. If you serve communion, you will want to think carefully about how this is done in order for it to function as the powerful symbol of our reconciliation and union in Christ that it is.

Gather materials. Though you may elect not to do some of the following, these are the elements suggested in the service below:

- Lots of candles
- Working fire extinguisher readily available just in case
- Water for the baptismal font
- Communion elements
- Ashes for imposition if Ash Wednesday
- Pens/pencils
- Bulletins with list of sins inserted
- Index cards
- Pieces of paper the size of an index card (index cards will not burn well)
- Large, safe metal container for burning paper in
- Matches
- Ventilation from smoke if burning occurs or if lots of candles are lit
- Table where they can make symbolic offerings of self with paper, crayons, construction paper, pipe cleaners, symbols, etc.
- Book and pen for signing
- Bulletins with different symbols inconspicuously placed on the back
- Two to four ushers who can discreetly hand out different marked bulletins
- Genuinely welcoming greeters
- A dynamic preacher
- Discerning leaders of worship

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What follows is a suggestion about the flow of a service for renewal apart from the ordinary worship service time. You will want to do what is most appropriate for your particular place of ministry, using all your best pastoral discernment in prayer.

Entrance during **Prelude** into darkened, candlelit space where people sit in silent meditation (which you may wish to provide in a bulletin in which an explanation of the service is provided in order to dispel discomfort). If there is any music playing, it should be soft and contemplative.

Welcome. Announce the intentionality of the service and the suspension of a set time in order to let the Spirit work as the Spirit will.

Scriptural **Call to Worship** using pertinent parts of Joel 1-2

Silence with meditative music to center selves for worship

Prayer of Invocation welcoming God's presence and asking that we be opened to see the Lord.

Music sung together as long as seems good. Music focusing on the goodness and holiness of God are more appropriate than music that sings the praise of a God who in and of Godself is worthy of praise. Avoid music that talks about praising the God who makes us feel good. This is not about us and our feelings about God, but about God.

Scriptural Call to Confession. This one shows the connection between our entrance in praise and now our move to confess our sins: "*We glimpse the glory of God's goodness and say with Isaiah, "Woe is me for I am unclean, living among a people with unclean ways [Isaiah 6:5]. But hear the promise of God: 'If my people, which are called by my name,' says the Lord, 'shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.'*" [II Chronicles 7:14]

Examination of Conscience. Seque into an explanation of what will follow next in the service. You may wish to briefly explain sin, not just as something we do but as a rebellious, captive condition in which we live whereby we choose our own ways over against God's ways and thereby deprive ourselves and others of the fullness of God's goodness in Christ.

An examination of conscience is: it is a thorough inventory of the ways in which we have fallen short of God's good intentions for us. You may wish to provide a catalog of sins inserted into the bulletin for people to meditate upon during silent confession. (See Examination of conscience at www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/worship/assemblies/hold.htm) You and your team may well come up with your own list that is different. This can be inserted in

the bulletin and pencils/pens made available for folks to make notes on during a time of personal reflection. If you do not provide such a list, you need to spell out that we need to examine the ways in which we sin as individuals, as a church, as members of their community, and as a people of our nation against others on the earth.

You might want people to leave their seats and find a spot within earshot for individual reflection so that they can make an honest inventory. Invite them to write down any long-term sinful actions/thoughts that they particularly need the Lord to remove at this time. You may also ask them if there is unforgiveness or resentment they need to let go of or any other such questions that you will have worked out ahead of time. Tell people about how much time they will have here, though you will want to be flexible with regard to how the Spirit is moving. Ten minutes should be the bare minimum for this examination of conscience once people are in place.

At the end of this time, have musician play a *kyrie* ("Lord, have mercy") that they can pray as they sing (like a crying out). They may assume any posture that aids them in asking for God's mercy, which you can indicate in the bulletin without having to say anything so that it "just happens." If this is an Ash Wednesday service, this would be the time for the imposition of ashes. You may wish to have them list one sin they especially want removed on a small piece of paper the size of an index card and have them drop it into a container for burning their sins at the time they come up for the imposition of ashes or when they return to their seat later.

Then ask them to get in random groups of four and confess to one another the sins that they struggle with that they'd like prayer for. They don't have to share them all – just one as an individual, one as a church member, one as a citizen of the world. Then have them pray for one another. At the end of this time, the musician can play another *kyrie* or a song like "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying."

The leader needs to be attentive to the movement of the Spirit as he/she calls people to move back into larger assembly, perhaps with the musician playing. As people are assembling together, have the leader ask, "What sins do we confess unto the Lord? Shout them out – yours or others in your group. What are the sins we wish to unburden ourselves of?" [music keeps playing softly]. If you have them write one sin they especially want freed from on a separate piece of paper the size of a small index card, have them drop it in the container for burning as they return to their seats while they are also calling out their sins.

At the end of this time, pray "*O God, accept these sins and remove them, for we do humbly pray . . .*" Go straight into a

Corporate prayer of confession prayed in unison, printed in the bulletin. If there will a burning of sins, light them at this time.

Then walk to the font to pronounce an **assurance of pardon**, lifting and pouring water through your fingers as you do. If you are burning the sins, take pour water from the

font and pour it onto the burning pieces of paper as you announce the assurance of pardon. Be liberal with the pouring of this water. If you are doing the imposition of ashes for an Ash Wednesday service, you may want to take water from the baptismal font and trace over the ashen cross with it to wash away the smudge from each person's forehead with words like: *"Remember you have been baptized. You may be dust, but you are baptized in Christ, filled with his Spirit."*

The assurance of pardon announced to all should be scriptural and memorized so that eye contact can be made with people as the good news goes forth: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. A good one is taken from Romans 8:34 and II Corinthians 5:17:

"Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us. Anyone who is in Christ is of the New Creation. The past is finished, gone. Behold, new life has begun."

Then proclaim: *"Friends, believe the good news! Shout it out!"*

And have them respond: ***In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!***

"As people reconciled to God, let us now extend a sign of Christ's reconciliation to one another."

Ask the people to turn now and proclaim the good news of the gospel to their brother and sister, beginning to make amends with anyone with whom they are estranged by asking for forgiveness with a sign of our reconciliation in Christ (a hug, handshake, holy kiss). Look people in the eyes and say, *"In Jesus Christ you are forgiven. Be at peace."*

Call people to return to their seats with joyful music that sings praise for God's grace.

Prayer for Illumination that the Spirit may open us to hear Word among the words of scripture and preaching and testimony.

Scripture Readings. There are several scriptures that you may choose from among, including those that directly refer to times of renewal, which you can find at www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/worship/assemblies/prepare.htm — see Biblical and Historical Background on Solemn Assemblies.

Brief Sermon by a dynamic preacher who can help people understand the lengths God goes to in Christ to be in communion with us, God's beloved, who are called to repent AND believe the gospel.

Testimony. If you choose to do this, you may choose to introduce it with something like: *"Every one of us is forgiven and loved by God in Christ Jesus. We are all walking this path of Christian faith together. Sometimes we're skipping and singing, sometimes we're stumbling. Sometimes we're crawling. But we're all walking in the*

Way of Jesus Christ because of the presence of the Lord we have perceived at work in our lives and in the world. But we don't all see the same things. Christ comes to each of us in the way each of us needs redemption to come to our lives, and we need one another's visions to correct the shortsightedness of our own limited experience and vision. On the back of your bulletins is a symbol located (tell where on bulletin page). You may have {a dove, a cross, a triangle, or a star} [or whatever symbols you choose—enumerate them].

"Now, get in groups of {3 or 4 (the number depends upon how many different symbol groups you choose to have)} with one of each symbol represented in the group, no two symbols alike in the same group." [Wait until they've formed these groups before going on to give them the following instruction.] "Now, tell how Christ has come to you to transform your life by telling about a time when you knew the transforming presence of the Lord. It's ok to pass if you want to."

This deliberately puts people together who wouldn't ordinarily get along because they think they're just too different. You can do this by having two circumspect ushers who know the different groups of people who are likely to come to the gathering hand out inconspicuously coded bulletins. The ushers can stack their bulletins so that in their hands they have a stack of one symbol on top, a stack of another symbol on bottom, pulling from the appropriate place for each person without calling attention to the fact that they are doing this.

You may have a greeter who knows many different people and who has the gift of hospitality greet folks as the ushers discreetly signal to one another who's to give whom what bulletin. This system will not work perfectly. But the idea is to group different people together who, as they testify of God's goodness to one another, come to see what they have in common despite their differences—a good God who loves all in Christ.

After people are in their groups, repeat the instructions again: *"Tell one another about a time when you have experienced or witnessed the transforming presence of God."*

When the time is right, informally gather people back together with a Hymn of Praise.

Ask, *"What have you come to know about God's goodness that you'd like to share with the whole group?"* Be mindful of the Spirit in the room. This is not about people talking to hear themselves talk, but about giving glory to God. Move on when it ceases to be of God. It is imperative to have a person who is sensitive to God's movement in groups lead this. Anyone who feels led to share may do so, and you may intersperse these testimonies with musical snatches of praise, ending with music on a more subdued note at the end of this time in order to move into ...

Prayers of Intercession. Segue from the last testimony time into the introduction to the prayers of intercession: *“You’ve heard people’s confessions of sin and faith here [today/tonight]. You’ve contemplated those who are sinned against in this world. As we go to the Lord in prayer, I’d like you to find someone you’ve talked with here tonight and ask them if you can pray for them in the weeks ahead. You may ask if you can pray for something you’ve heard from them or ask them if there’s something else you can pray for for them.*

Once you’ve exchanged prayer requests, write these down on your card with the other’s address, phone number, email address, or some way you agree to contact one another every now and then in the months ahead. Agree to also pray for one specific world problem. Take your card home and put it in a place that will prompt you to pray.”

After this has been done, you may go ahead and pray by introducing the notion of a bidding prayer asking that they add their prayers as you pray for creation, the church, the world, people in positions of authority over others, those who are hurting around the world, those here who need healing, those whose needs are known to us. Pause after each of these categories for those who wish to name names or offer prayers. OR You may fold the intercessory prayers into the communion liturgy at the proper time.

Communion Hymn

Holy Communion

If possible, you may wish to gather everyone around the table in a big circle to take communion. This way they can serve one another with the words, *“This is the body of Christ. The blood of Christ. OR The bread of life, the cup of salvation.”*

Invitation to the table

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

The flow of this prayer, which goes back to Jesus’ Jewish tradition, is as follows:

Praise of God

Sanctus (*“Holy, holy holy. . . Hosanna in the highest.”*)

Thanksgiving for Christ

Remembering his gift to us

[Words of institution can be said here]

Offering ourselves to God (see below)

Invocation of the Holy Spirit

[Prayers of intercession]

Ascription of Praise for the Triune God

Words of Institution or Words at breaking of bread and pouring into cup

Communion of the People

Prayer after communion

If people come to the table, they may choose to offer a symbol that indicates they are offering themselves and their lives to God. You may have a place where people

can choose or make such symbols that they can visit as they prepare to come to the table, but any creation of such symbols needs to be quiet and meditative.

Or you may wish to have people sign a book with their names in it representing the offering of their lives at this time of renewal. This option also gives you a way to follow up with who's there.

Hymn of Praise

Charge . Charge them with to go forth to live as new people as they depart to continue to serve the world in Christ's name. You may wish to use Amos 5:21-24 to remind people that our solemn assemblies mean nothing if we are not seeking to act justly with compassion in our worldly dealings.

Blessing. A blessing is different than a charge. It is a prayer that asks God's blessing upon our lives with hands raised in reminiscence of the hands laid upon us at our baptism that called forth the Holy Spirit's power. It is usually triune. The leader may go around to each person and lay hands on them as s/he blesses them mightily with the fullness of pastoral love. Or folks may be invited to bless one another in this manner as they leave.

Depart to serve singing something joyful and upbeat known by memory

Postlude