

An Order of Service for a Contemporary Covenant Service of Worship



**CONTEMPORARY
CHRISTIANITY**

BIBLICAL FAITH FOR
A CHANGING WORLD

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Contemporary Christianity is the successor to Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI, 1988 – 2005) and the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland (2005-2010). The conviction of those involved in ECONI was that faithful witness must take seriously the biblical command to make peace and do justice. Where loyalty to political and cultural identities had obscured loyalty to Jesus Christ, Christians needed to rediscover what it meant to live for God and his glory alone. This order of service follows the model of worship service outlines established for ECONI Sundays which were offered to Churches in the mid “1990’s” The hope behind those outlines was that the resources would be a genuine help in considering the nature of Christian witness in a divided society. We share that same hope for this outline in the “2010’s”.

Preamble

On September 28th 1912, the majority of the adult Protestant population of Ulster signed a document known as the Solemn League and Covenant, in order to articulate their absolute opposition to the policy of the British government. That government had devised a Home Rule Bill in order to grant Ireland a devolved government in Dublin. This would leave Ireland still firmly within the British Empire however Ulster's Unionists believed that a Dublin executive would not govern Ulster in a fair or effective way. Economically, the north would suffer and the culture and religion of Protestants would soon be under threat.

The leaders of the main Protestant denominations in Ulster, and some of the smaller ones, were united in support for the Covenant, urging their members to sign it and holding church services on 28th September in order to invoke God's help in this ambitious public campaign to prevent Home Rule from ever passing. While a number of the clergy and the laity disagreed with the Covenant, it is fair to say that the project did help to create solidarity amongst the Protestants of Ulster. It also persuaded the British government that Unionists 'meant business' and so it prepared the ground for the creation of Northern Ireland in the years after the Great War.

For many Christians in today's Protestant churches, within Northern Ireland and beyond, the Covenant of 1912 stands as a highly respected and heart-stirring document which reflected the spiritual and political principles of an earlier generation and still speaks today of the resolve needed to preserve Ulster's distinct heritage. For other Christians, there are several problems with the document, in particular its insistence that God is on the side of Unionism and its implication that physical force may be needed in order to prevent political defeat.

What is quite indisputable is that the world has changed radically since 1912. Looking back at the violence, division and religious hatred that has disfigured our country, it is surely imperative that we learn to walk together towards whatever the future may hold. This order of service/liturgy has been prepared for those communities of Christians who—on this historic anniversary of the Ulster Covenant - and the Home Rule Bill which it opposed - wish to commit themselves to a fair remembrance of the past and to work towards a better future, founded on the Kingdom values of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

A Contemporary Covenant Service

We Gather to Worship God

Responsive Call to Worship

At the name of Jesus

every knee should bow.

If you have found any encouragement from being united in Christ,
if his love has brought you any strength or consolation,
if you have any sense of fellowship in the Spirit,
if you have any tenderness or compassion within you,
then live that out by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

At the name of Jesus

every knee should bow.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or personal pride, but in true humility help others before helping yourselves.

Seek not your own advantage, but also the interests of others.

Your mindset should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

At the name of Jesus

every knee should bow.

He was in his very nature God, yet did not cling on to his equality with God;
Instead he emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant, becoming human.
And having become human, he humbled himself still further
He obediently subjected himself to death – to a shameful death on a cross!

At the name of Jesus

every knee should bow.

In the light of this God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is exalted above every name,

At the name of Jesus

every knee should bow.

Everyone and everything, in heaven and on earth and under the earth shall bow before him

and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

At the name of Jesus

every knee should bow.

Adapted from Philippians 2:1-11 (NIV)

Opening Praise (suggestions)

All hail the power of Jesus' name (CMP 13)

At the Name of Jesus (CMP 41)

Blessing and honour, glory and power (CMP 976)

Christ triumphant ever reigning (CMP 77)

Meekness and majesty (CMP 465)

or

What shall our greeting be? (tune: Moscow)

1 *What shall our greeting be:*

Sign of our unity?

JESUS IS LORD!

May we no more defend

Barriers he died to end:

Give me your hand, my friend:

One Church, one Lord!

2 *What is our mission here?*

He makes his purpose clear:

One world, one Lord!

Spirit of truth descend,

All our confusions end:

Give me your hand, my friend:

JESUS IS LORD!

3 *He comes to save us now:*

To serve him is to know

Life's true reward.

May he our lives amend,

All our betrayals end:

Give me your hand, my friend:

JESUS IS LORD!

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We Listen for the Word of God

Old Testament Reading

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14 (NIV)

Responsive Psalm:

I will exalt you, my God and King:

I will praise your name for ever and ever.

Every day I will praise you

I will praise your name for ever and ever.

Great is the Lord and worthy of our praise;

his greatness no-one can comprehend.

One generation will remind the next about your wonderful works;

they will tell of your mighty acts.

They will speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty.

And I will mediate on your miracles

They will tell of the power of your **awesome actions**

And I will proclaim all the great deeds you have done

They will celebrate your **boundless goodness**

And I will joyfully sing of your righteousness.

You O Lord are gracious and full of compassion,

You are slow to anger and rich in love.

You O Lord are good to all;

You have compassion on all of your creation.

All you have made will praise you, O Lord;

your people will exalt your name.

They will tell of the glory of your kingdom

and speak of your mighty power,

Therefore all people will know of your might

and the stunning splendour of your kingdom.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,

and your authority endures through all generations.

You O Lord faithfully fulfill your promises

and steadfastly love all that you have made.

You uphold all those who stumble

and lift up all those who are bowed down.

Everything and everyone looks to you, and you sustain them day after day.

You open your hand and satisfy the needs of every living thing.

You O Lord are righteous in all you do and loving towards all you have made.

You O Lord are near to all who call on you, to all who call in truth.

May the words of my mouth speak in praise of you O Lord

Let every creature praise your holy name.

Suggested Gospel Readings

⁶⁶ "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. ⁶⁸ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), ⁷¹ salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— ⁷² to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, ⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven ⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

[Luke 1:68-79 \(NIV\)](#)

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

[Matthew 6:25-33 \(NIV\)](#)

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" ³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" ³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" ³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." ³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

[John 18:33-37 \(NIV\)](#)

We Respond to the Word of God

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, in your mercy hear us as we confess our sins.

For the sin that has made us elevate earthly loyalties and personal ambition over the purposes of your Kingdom:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, forgive.

For the sin that made us dress personal prejudices and worldly agendas in pious language and self-righteous indignation:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has made us tolerant of injustice, quick to condemn those who sin differently from us, and unwilling to overcome evil with good:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has made us prefer conquest to service, conflict to peace, revenge to reconciliation, and material wellbeing to spiritual satisfaction:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has caused us to be quick to divide people into us and them, and seek the welfare of us and ours above them and theirs:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has led us to seek the elevation of our rights over the rights of others, and to ignore our responsibilities to others and to you:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has led us to misuse your gracious gifts, failing to be good stewards of all the good things that have been entrusted to us by previous generations and to leave a healthy legacy for generations to come:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, forgive.

For the sin that made us selective in learning from your word, reluctant in following Christ, fearful in bearing the cross and slow to share your love with others:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has divided your church, brought shame on your name, and hampered the proclamation of your good news:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, forgive.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your constant love;

in the fullness of your mercy blot out my offences.

Wash away all my guilt and cleanse me from my sin.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Give me the joy of your help again and strengthen me with a willing spirit.

We are told that if we confess our sins,

God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins,

and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Therefore to all who truly repent this is his gracious word:

‘Your sins are forgiven.’

Amen. Thanks be to God.

A Contemporary Act of Covenant

(based on the Methodist Covenant which John Wesley adapted from that of the Puritan Richard Alleine)

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
citizens of the Kingdom of God,

let us together reaffirm our commitment to the solemn covenant which God has made with his people of all ages, nations and races,
a covenant of grace, sealed with the blood of Christ.

We are convinced that God's Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom;

All earthly empires and kingdoms rise and fall

but we confess our loyalty to a King that men did not crown and cannot dethrone.

His only earthly crown was one of thorns, a sign of sacrificial servant kingship.

And we know because of his death and resurrection that there is no power in heaven or on earth can separate us from that steadfast sacrificial love.

And so we take upon us the yoke of Christ,

making his purposes our priority,

seeking to do what is right in his eyes,

not necessarily what is popular among our peers, or in the court of public opinion.

We turn away in repentance from our failings in the past

And through the power of Christ's Spirit we commit ourselves to do what God desires,

to love as sacrificially as Christ has loved us;

to forgive as we have been forgiven;

to engage in the ministry of reconciliation;

to seek and make peace;

to speak the truth, in love;

to hope unswervingly and proclaim that hope consistently

to serve rather than be served,

to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but to God what is God's.

to act justly and practice mercy,

and walk humbly with our covenant God.

At times this may be easy, at others it will be difficult;

It will sometimes bring honour, at others shame;

At sometimes it will fit with our own inclinations and serve our material interests,

At others it will be contrary to both;

In some cases we may please Christ and please ourselves;

In others we will not be able to please Christ except by denying ourselves;

In some cases we may be loyal to Christ's kingdom and honour earthly loyalties;

In others we cannot be loyal to Christ and his kingdom except by rejecting previous loyalties and defying earthly authority.

Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.

Therefore let us make this covenant of God in Christ our own.

Let us give ourselves to him, trusting in his promises and relying on his grace.

Faithful Father God,
since you have called me through Christ to share in this gracious covenant,
I pledge myself to you and your Kingdom
I take upon myself with joy the yoke of obedience
To give to you all that I have and am
In all things to seek first your Kingdom
and to do what is right in your eyes;
Seeking to serve you wherever you chose to place me
in every sphere of my life.
To live for you and your glory alone.
Now and forever more. So be it. Amen.

Prayer of Intercession and Petition

We pray for politicians and those in positions of power in our nation and in all the nations of the world

May your Kingdom come, may your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

We pray for those who feel powerless – those whose rights have been eroded and whose freedoms have been curtailed

May your Kingdom come, may your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

We pray for those who are persecuted because of their faithfulness to you, your Gospel and your Kingdom

May your Kingdom come, may your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

We pray for those who are living in places where there is conflict.

May your Kingdom come, may your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

We pray for those continuing to live with the effects of conflict and division in our own land.

May your Kingdom come, may your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

We pray for all those who are working for peace, reconciliation and justice in our nation and in all the nations of the world.

May your Kingdom come, may your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Closing Praise (suggestions)

Brother Sister let me serve you
From heaven you came helpless babe (CMP 162)
I want to serve the purpose of God (CMP 859)
Christ's is the world in which we move

We Go with the Blessing of God

May God's kingdom come, his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Whatever your earthly loyalties may God's kingdom be your priority.
Whatever your will might be, may you seek to know and fulfil God's will.
Wherever you may go on earth, may you live as ambassadors of God's kingdom.

May you know the strong hand of God the King protecting you
May you know the love of Jesus the Son surrounding you
And may the Holy Spirit fill you with the hope of heaven.