



## A WAY FORWARD

As GNJ congregations make and live covenants to thrive in their contexts, we invite you to create covenants in which blessing and love for God and your neighbors guide your ministry. You are also invited to pray for every congregation throughout the covenanting process.

*I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly -Jesus (John 10:10)*

### COVENANT

Covenant is a biblical word referring to the action of God entering into a sacred promise with individuals or the community. God offers saving grace through Jesus Christ, and Christians respond by accepting Christ into their lives and covenanting to live a disciple's life. Christian covenants are instituted through a distinguished sign, ritual or practice. Baptism and confirmation are examples of such rituals and practices. Meals have also been used as well as holy communion.

*My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.*  
- Maya Angelou

### BIBLICAL COVENANTS

Covenants are both personal and communal. In the Old Testament we see a covenant of friendship between David and Johnathan, 1 Samuel 18:1-3. There is also the communal covenant establishing the royal line of David in 2 Samuel 7:16. During this time together, you will reflect on your personal covenantal relationships as well as the practices of covenant in community.

#### A Covenant Prayer In the Wesleyan Tradition

I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by thee or laid aside by thee. Exalted for thee or brought low for thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine.

So be it. And the covenant that I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

#### Scriptural covenants incorporated in the Service of Baptism.

- Noah (not to destroy the earth) *Genesis 6:18*
- Abraham, (a great nation) *Genesis 12:2-3*
- Freedom for the Israelites (Promised Land) *Exodus 19:5-8*
- Jesus sent (promise of the Messiah) *John 3:16*

#### Throughout the Bible there are examples of God's continuous covenant building. Where do you resound with these covenants?

- *Jeremiah 31:31-34* (renewal of relationship between God and God's people)
- *Ezekiel 36:26-27* (God promises to restore and renew the people)
- *Hebrews 10:15-25* (Christ makes covenant with us,;in turn we make it with one another)
- *Hebrews 7:18-22* (better hope to draw near to God)

#### Living as a Covenant Community

- *Acts 10:34-43* (God expands the community, therefore extends the covenant) *Philippians 2:1-5* (encouragement offered in living in covenant with Christ and one another)
- *Philippians 2:1-5* (encouragement of a covenant with Christ and one another)

## COVENANTING PROCESS

The following questions are a guide to help a congregation think about their covenant.

1. As Wesleyan United Methodists, how do you, and will you use scripture, tradition, reason and experience to understand and make decisions?
2. Who is God?
3. Who is Jesus?
4. Why do people need Jesus?
5. What does it mean for your congregation to be the body of Christ?
6. Who lives in your community, and what are their spiritual and missional hopes and challenges? How do you know? Will you talk directly with people?
7. Why do people need your congregation?
8. Is there new ministry the congregation will explore with the people in your community?
9. For congregations who seek ministries with and by LGBTQ+ people, what ministry will you covenant to do?

**Those congregations are to include the following:**

- a. All human beings are of sacred worth, and LGBTQ+ people are not incompatible with Christian teaching.
  - b. Pastors are free to perform weddings for same-gender couples.
  - c. Churches are free to host weddings for same-gender couples.
  - d. Churches affirm the ordination, licensing and appointment of LGBTQ+ candidates on the basis of their gifts for ministry and are open to receiving appointments of gay and lesbian clergy.
  - e. Churches are free to use financial resources for ministry with all persons, including LGBTQ+ persons.
  - f. Individual clergy and laity are free to carry out such ministry without the threat of formal charges and/or other punitive measures, recognizing that United Methodists in Greater New Jersey are not punitive, but rather a body of believers who choose to live in grace and unity.
10. Reflecting on how you answered these questions, revisit how your present and future ministry are grounded in scripture, tradition, reason and experience and the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church.

## THE COVENANT

**Complete the following as your church covenant.**

We, the [INSERT CONGREGATION NAME] covenant to:

- Be disciples who [describe who you are]
- Be a congregation who serves [describe the community you will serve]
- Be in ministry by [describe the ministries you will do]
- Be committed to [describe how you will work together as a congregation to fulfill this covenant]
- Be in connection with [describe the congregations/organizations/groups who you will serve with]