

Planning for a Renewal Service: A Chronological Checklist

Twelve (or more) weeks prior

Pray. Do you sense God is leading your congregation or presbytery to hold a solemn assembly? Listen to the Spirit's guidance. Continue to pray as you study and think about what kind of renewal service would be best for your context.

Meet with the session. Bear in mind that *The Directory for Worship* (see W - 3.5300) specifies that “the Session is responsible for the authorization of [any gathering for prayer].” Before moving too far in planning a solemn assembly, be sure that you first have the approval of your pastor and session.

Meet with representatives across your presbytery and consider holding a solemn assembly in partnership with other congregations. Suggest names of worship planners and pastors who will lead the service.

Eleven weeks prior

Form a special prayer team to oversee all aspects of preparing for the assembly. This will involve some practical preparation as well as some spiritual preparation. But prayer is the most important preparation the team can engage in for God's renewal of your church or presbytery, so be sure that members of the team are people who are willing and eager to spend time in prayer. You will also want to recruit key leaders in your church – those good at recruiting volunteers, and those with experience in organizing events. Realizing each person brings a unique gift, do not be tempted to delegate the “practical” tasks to some members and the “spiritual” tasks to other members. Rather, let those who have gifts for prayer lead the whole group in its spiritual preparation and let those who are good with planning give leadership to the whole group in its practical preparation. Be careful not to divide these tasks, for the practical details of how a renewal service occurs should emerge out of prayer together. You will want to recruit people who add variety and diversity to the team so that the solemn assembly will be a blessing to the widest possible circle of participants.

Set a prayer meeting schedule for the weeks leading up to the solemn assembly and be sure all team members have these dates on their calendars. If more than one congregation is taking part in the service, be sure your team is made up of members of each of the respective congregations.

Be certain that at least one of the worship team members will focus on the needs of children and families. This person's task is to ensure that children and youth will be included in the service by helping the team think through when and how to include various age levels in worship through songs, stories, and/or prayers.

Schedule a time during an upcoming worship service to commission the prayer team for their unique task. Consider how you might invite the congregation to join with the team in prayer as all members prepare for the solemn assembly.

Ten weeks prior

While the pastoral staff will likely oversee the actual service and the design of the liturgy, the prayer team can make suggestions. In addition to spiritual preparation, the team will also consider practical aspects of the service such as:

- a) Setting a budget
- b) Surveying space and evaluate needs
- c) Designing special banners or creating liturgical elements to enhance worship
- d) Planning publicity
- e) Organizing any food/fellowship that might be offered in conjunction with the service.
- f) Childcare and/or other programming for infants and toddlers.

Covenant to pray together for the 40 days prior to the solemn assembly. You may want to explore a variety of resources to guide these days of prayer or it may be that your congregation has something already in place that could also function as a tool for a shared experience of prayer and preparation. We have created an outline for spiritual preparation specifically with a worship team in mind, and invite you to download these printable files from our website for your use.

See www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/worship/assemblies/spiritualpreparations.htm.

Eight weeks prior

Select a date, time and place for the solemn assembly and put it on your church calendar. If two or more congregations are meeting together, think carefully about a setting that is hospitable to everyone who might attend (consider wheelchair access, adequate sound equipment, space conducive to worship, property not linked to a particular political agenda or faction of the church, kitchen facilities if needed).

Meet with mission committee. Consider a mission project that the congregation(s) might support in conjunction with the solemn assembly. For example, consider how to designate an offering (if one is taken) for a particular mission project. Or, perhaps you could explore the idea of a mission project that serves as a community response to the renewal service.

Pray for God's guidance as you share your plans with the congregation(s). Schedule a "Minute for Mission" for each Sunday in the three weeks prior to the solemn assembly. Use this as an opportunity to educate participants about the meaning of a solemn assembly and what they can do to prepare themselves for the service mentally and spiritually.

Determine what additional kinds of publicity you will use and begin production and delegation:

- All-church mailing
- Postcards
- Church newsletter
- Sunday bulletin
- Posters
- Community awareness
- Banners
- Signs
- Personal phone calls
- Electronic invitations (email, Facebook, e-vite, etc.)

Six weeks prior

Pray. If you have a church pictorial directory or other roster of membership use this as a tool as you pray for the children, youth and adults who will be a part of this service. You might also make use of the “visitor registration” or other “sign-in” forms that are passed along during Sunday worship.

Meet with the pastoral staff to hear ideas about the direction the service is taking. Pray together for the anointing of the Spirit on all who are giving leadership and making preparations for the event.

Three weeks prior

Pray for the mission project you have chosen.

Continue to publicize the date and time for the solemn assembly and communicate to everyone about the meaning and purpose of this special service.

Confirm plans with those in charge of things such as food prep, childcare, set up and clean up, communion, etc.

Two weeks prior

Estimate how many people may be in attendance, adjust supplies as necessary, and update.

Make sure all audiovisual equipment, musical instruments, kitchen facilities and equipment are available and in working order.

One week prior

Continue last-minute publicity, announcements in church, and community awareness.

Make directional signs, if needed, within your church to help guide newcomers.

Make a final check of facilities, décor, signs, supplies and volunteers.

One day prior

Pray for God's guidance. Pray for yourself. Be thankful to God for the people around you, supporting you. Pray for the children of your congregation, your community, and our world.

Prepare and decorate the space. Set up supplies.

Pray with the prayer team and leadership before the start of the service.

Relax, knowing that all is in God's hands! Enjoy the Spirit of Christ moving within and among you all.