

*Covenant:
Preparing for
Commitment
as an Associate*



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Opening Ritual

Introduction

What do you carry in your hearts as you gather here for this Associate Inquiry Meeting? What stirs in your hearts as you think of yourselves as Providence people? You have all been accepted and invited to become an Associate.

Can you go back in time to when you first felt called to consider making a commitment to live as witnesses of Providence? What was it that drew you to the Inquiry Stage of becoming an Associate of Providence?

Has that burning desire or curious energy changed since you first experienced call? How? In what way? Are you more sensitive to the consolation, peace and challenge that being called to be Associate Members entails?

As you think about this, what wells up within you?

Prayer (Option 1)

For prayer today I would now like to guide you through an imagery experience that will lead you to a pleasant place ...one of your favorite places, where you will meet Jesus and have an opportunity to speak with Jesus about what you are experiencing in your life as you prepare to make your commitment as an Associate, or what it is like for you as a man or woman of Providence who feels called to respond to an invitation to be about building up the Kingdom in the spirit of being providence for others.

Guided Prayer: Breathing, Guided Imagination
"Be Still" #1 Always with You by Kathy Sherman, CSJ

Prayer (Option 2)

Leader: In the name of our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier

All: We gather as women/ men of Providence to give you thanks and praise.

Leader: Glory to You source of all being Eternal Word and Holy Spirit

All: As it was in the beginning is now and will be forever. Amen

Leader: It was You who formed my inward parts.

You knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Pause for Silence.

Leader: Be still and aware of God's presence

All: Within and all around

All: Let all that breaths praise you, O God!



Side 1 O God of beginnings, as your Spirit moved over the face of the deep on the first day of creation, move with us now in our time of possible beginnings when the air is rain-washed. The bloom is on the bush, and the world seems fresh and full of new possibilities, and we feel ready and full.

Side 2 We tremble on the edge of maybe.....a new covenant relationship, a new thing, a tentative start, and the wonder of committing ourselves as Associates. The wonder of it all lays its fingers on our lips.

Side 1 In prayer now, Lord we share our eagerness and uneasiness about this something we would be or do; and we listen for your leading to help us separate the light from the darkness in the change we wish to shape by formalizing our desires to be an Associates... women of Providence.

Side 2 We know that our time together during this Inquiry Period has shaped us in many ways and gave us insights to discover your Providence in the events in our lives, and in this call now to discern about entering into a covenant.
(Adapted from Guerrillas of Grace; Ted Loder)

All: Let all that breaths praise you, O God!

Reading 1: Jeremiah 31:31- 33

Pause For Reflection

Leader: Let us pray:

All: God of Providence, turn Your Spirit loose now and each of us with it. Grant that we may enter into the mystery of the uncertainty of making a covenant with trust. Give us the light we need to realize that you and your gifts of Providence are with us always. Fill us with a new hope as we prepare to respond to our calls of covenant promise as Associates of Providence Color our hearts anew with the fire of passion that you are and will be with us every turn of our human journey. Amen

After Prayer:

Your hearts have been shaped and formed by your everyday experiences during this period of Inquiry. You have been touched by one another, your Associate gatherings, by your Mentor Association, families, different friends, our world reality, as well as by presenters or/and authors who spoke about unique and graced ways of looking at the gift of Providence.

As you prepare to enter into a deeper covenant with our God of Providence as an Associate with the Sisters of Divine Providence, I would like to invite you to reflect on some of the basic theological concepts and the spirituality of covenant.



Theology Of Covenant

God wishes to lead all people to a life of communion with Himself. This concept is fundamental to the doctrine of God's plan of salvation, and which is given expression in the theme of the covenant.

In the Old Testament, covenant dominates all religious thought, but it intensifies and deepens with the passage of time.

In the New Testament, covenant acquires an unparalleled fullness, for it has as its content the total mystery of Jesus Christ. Covenant is the unbounded love of God outpoured in relationship.

Before being concerned with the relations of people with God, the covenant (*berith*) pertains to the social and juridical experience of people. God uses the cultural reality and circumstances of the day to help clarify God's unbounded love for people.

People were commonly bound among themselves by agreements and contracts implying rights and duties that were usually reciprocal. There were pacts among groups or equal individuals who wanted to help one another.

These are the covenants of peace:

Genesis 21:22, 26,28 -- Abraham and Abimelech at Beersheba)

Amos 1:9 -- Covenants of brothers decree

1 Samuel 23:18 -- Agreements of friendship (David and Jonathan made a pact.)

Jeremiah -- Marriage itself

There were also unequal treaties, in which the superior and powerful one promises protection to the weak, while the latter engages self to serve the former. Biblical History offers many examples of this. (1 and 2 Samuel) Suzerain Treaties

The theme of Covenant appeared and was introduced into the thinking of the Old Testament at the beginning of ALL religious thought, and makes it different from all of the surrounding religions.

At Sinai the people entered into a covenant with Yahweh and thus the worship of Yahweh becomes its national religion.

Covenant with Yahweh is clearly not a pact between equals. Yahweh decided with a sovereign liberty...with unbounded love and compassion to grant allegiance to Israel and Yahweh dictates what this covenant would require from them.

Never the less, biblical exegetes tell us not to push the comparison too far. The Covenant at Sinai shows God as the initiating cause, but it also reveals from the beginning an essential aspect of the plan of salvation. Right from the vision of the burning bush, Yahweh revealed to Moses a name and plan for Israel. God wants to deliver Israel from Egypt to set her up in the land of Canaan (Exodus 3:7-10 ff.) Israel is Yahweh's people, and God desires to give her the land promised to her fathers. (Genesis 12:7)

This already supposes that on the part of God, Israel is the object of election and the depository of a promise. But God needs the people to respond to the offer. The Exodus confirms the promise made to Abraham. God is the master and is capable of imposing God's will. (Exodus 14:31)

With this point secured, God can reveal a plan of covenant. "If you hear my voice and observe my covenant, you will be my people privileged among all peoples. For all the earth is mine, but you will be for me a priestly kingdom and a consecrated nation. (Exodus 19:5, 6) God chooses Israel without any merit on the part of Israel. These words emphasize the gratuity of the divine election. God reserved Israel for God's Self: She would serve Yahweh God with her worship and she would become Yahweh's Kingdom. In return Yahweh assures her aid and protection. Yahweh had born her on eagles wings and brought her to the mysterious holy. Now looking to the future, God renews the promises to her (Exodus 23:20-31).



God's Covenant to Israel and making of promises to her, included some conditions which Israel was asked to observe concerning the worship of Yahweh alone. Moses made clear all that God had commanded and the people answered "Everything that Yahweh has spoken we will observe (Exodus 19:7 - ff). This is a solemn commitment. (We will do whatever he asks us to do.)

Once the pact was concluded, diverse objects would perpetuate its memory and witness to future generations the initial agreement of Israel with Yahweh.

The ark containing the Law is the memorial of the covenant and the sign of the presence of God with them. The tent in which it was placed was a figure of the future temple. It was the place of encounter between Yahweh and Yahweh's chosen people.

To keep the relationship alive, the covenant was renewed at certain crucial turning points in history. In Deuteronomy 27:2-26 one finds fragments of a liturgy which supposes a renewal of this type.

Yahweh enters into covenant with David and to his dynasty. This is considered to be an *UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT*, though there was a minority who viewed this covenant also as conditional because it was dependent on the Sinai Covenant. (Walter Brueggemann, Old Testament scholar and theologian)

The prophets enlivened the covenant with emotional overtones. The Deuteronomic Spirituality gathers the fruit of the deepening relation of God with the People. Again and again Deuteronomy recalls the demands, promises, and threats of the covenant, but most of all they emphasize the love of God which waits for the love of Israel. "You are my people and I am your God." Here again Israel's love for Yahweh should naturally show itself in obedience. The people are forced to make a decision.

The prophets turned their eyes to the future and presented in its totality the drama of the People of God, who bound themselves to Yahweh, despite their infidelities. Jeremiah compares it to a marriage.

The plan of the covenant revealed by God remains unchanged. The prophets speak of a new covenant. Hosea speaks of it in terms of betrothal, which would bring the bride love, justice, fidelity, knowledge of God and would re-establish peace between God and the People.

Jeremiah claims that the human heart would be changed, for God would write the law in their hearts. Ezekiel speaks of an eternal covenant of peace that would bring about a change of hearts and the gift of the divine Spirit. Thus the covenant made long ago would be achieved. "You will be my people and I will be your God.

The plan of the covenant which dominates all human history will find its culmination in the end of time. It will finally materialize in perfect form. At once interior and universal, by the mediation of the servant of Yahweh.

And, this turns Yahweh's covenant with the people to the new testament. The word covenant now translated by the Greek word "*diatheke*" figures in the four stories of the last supper ...Take and eat this is my body.... This is my blood, the blood of the covenant which will be shed for many. Matthew adds "for the remission of sins." Luke and Paul say "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

Jesus regards himself as the suffering servant. Jesus becomes the mediator of the covenant which the message of consolation hints at in Isaiah. Through the blood of Jesus, human hearts will be changed and the spirit of God will be given.

This act will henceforth be rendered present in a ritual gesture which Jesus commanded us to do "again in memory of Him." It is by the Eucharistic participation, accompanied by faith, that the faithful will be united most intimately to the mystery of the new covenant and that we will benefit from its graces.

New Testament authors, influenced by the idea of a new covenant, saw in the



death of Jesus to be a new covenant with Israel. Thus the covenant theme is the background for the whole New Testament.

Today we believe, as did the people of the Old and New Testament days, that God invites us to a deeper union with Himself through the Eucharist and in our sensed call to be women and men of Providence, witnessing the good news. Just as a testamentary disposition or last will takes effect at the death of the testator, so the death of Jesus has put us in possession of the promised inheritance.

Our Provident God dwells with us today no less than Yahweh did with the people of Israel or those at the Last Supper.

The covenant we are being invited to enter is not about the letter of the law, but that of the Spirit, a spirit of being providence for others through the power of Jesus and the Spirit, thus making God's providence more visible and believable through us.

To be found by Jesus then, we must allow our hearts and minds to be flooded by a light beyond our control and comprehension. We are called to be open to the transforming power of a Provident God.

Acts 2:36-41 Repent and be baptized. It was to you and your children that the promise was made. This promise motivated Moses, David and all the prophets. Like Peter we too must turn to the Scriptures.

To be found by Jesus, we must accept Jesus on His terms.

Looking at your call to commit yourself to God in a type of heart/covenant with our God of Providence, to deepen your personal relationship with Jesus, and to share this gift with others with whom you live and work by being Providence People, we will be asked to enter into a process for writing our personal covenant statements.

Closing Ritual (Option 1)

(Facilitator: Have a selection of inspirational pictures.)

Inquirer: Select a picture that speaks to you about a challenge or call to deeper covenant or commitment in your life. Pray to the Spirit to help you discover one He has in mind for you, one that enables you to receive and experience the presence of a Provident God veritably humming in and through all the ordinary events of your life.

After selection, return to your place and reflect on what God might be saying to you as you prepare to write your covenant. Where is God in the picture? Where are you? What message comes to you as you reflect?

Song: *(Optional)* "You and I" #3 Always With You by Kathy Sherman, CSJ

Sharing

Prepared by Sister Anne Winschel



Closing Prayer (Option 2)

Leader: Jesus says, “I am the Way for you.”

All: And, so we come to follow Jesus Christ.

Leader: Jesus says, “I am the Truth for you.”

All: And, so we come to dwell in the Light.

Leader: Jesus says, “I am the Life for you.”

All: And, so we come, leaving behind all else to which we cling.

Leader: Look at your hands, see the touch of the tenderness,

All: God’s own for the world.

Leader: Look at your feet, see the path and the direction,

All: God’s own for the world.

Leader: Look at your heart, see the fire and the love,

All: God’s own for the world.

Leader: This is God’s world,

All: And, we will serve in it.

Leader: Jesus said, “I am always.”

May God the Creator bless you.

May God the Son walk with you.

May God the Spirit lead your lives with love.

All: Amen



Congregation of Divine Providence
Associate Renewal Covenant Statement

I _____ as an Associate of the Marie de la Roche Province of the Congregation of Divine Providence, commit myself to be faithful to the spirit of the Community for a period of ____ years. Through my prior commitment, I understand the purpose and guidelines of the Associate relationship and will strive to further the mission and goals of the Congregation to the best of my ability.

I acknowledge the richness of God's presence in my life, and I desire to continue to share with you, my sisters and Associates, my willingness to join in community, prayer, and ministry for the spreading of the Gospel. I lovingly support you in your call and ask for your prayers as I reach toward the attainment of my goals for this/these years.

My goal is

This mutual Covenant Statement is in effect from _____ to _____.

Signature of Associate

Date



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