

Chapter 2

RECEPTION OF MEMBERS

5550. When candidates for covenant membership or community membership have been approved for reception as given in 553-563, the pastor shall appoint a time during a regular worship service for their public reception, and shall preside over the service of reception, or appoint a representative to preside. In those churches in which the local churches must vote on the reception of covenant members, such vote should be taken at a meeting prior to the service of reception. Paragraphs 5565-5567, "Reception of Covenant Members," "Covenant Questions," and "Declaration of Purpose" have the authority of statutory law. The paragraphs must be followed as prescribed, except that paragraph 5566 may be addressed during membership preparation classes and omitted during the service of reception if a shortened service is desired.

5555. *The service of reception may begin with a hymn and scripture reading such as one of those listed below, and with the administration of the sacrament of baptism to any who have not previously received it.*

Hymn. "The Church's One Foundation," "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord," "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Scripture Lesson. Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-27; Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16; 5:25b-27.

5560. Introductory Remarks.

Minister: Dear *friends*, the privileges and blessings which we have within the fellowship of the church of Jesus Christ are very sacred and precious. Christ so loved the church that He gave Himself for it, sanctifying Himself that the church might be sanctified. He chose to speak of Himself as the Head of the church and of the church as His body; and again He spoke of Himself as the husband and of the church as His bride. Christ gave Himself unselfishly, and He asked the church to share its glorious relationship with all humankind, sending it into the world to preach the Scriptures, to save the lost, to administer the sacraments, to maintain Christian fellowship and discipline, and to build up the believer until He comes again. All of us, whatever our age or position, stand in need of Christ's church and of those means of grace which it alone makes available.

It is in keeping with Christ's commission to the church, that we meet together now. There *are some* among us who *testify* to having been received

already into the spiritual fellowship of the universal church, and who *desire* to be received into the official and visible fellowship of this local unit of the body of Christ.

5565. Reception of Covenant Members.

(The minister shall call before the congregation those who are being received as covenant members. If the covenant questions have not been addressed previously, or if a public response to the questions is desired, the questions in paragraph 5566 shall be asked as prescribed).

These persons standing before you come to enter into covenant as members in full relationship with The Wesleyan Church, with all of the accompanying rights, privileges and responsibilities. They testify to having been born again. They have received the sacrament of baptism, have been instructed in and have accepted the doctrines and polity of The Wesleyan Church, and have been approved by vote as manifesting in spirit and practice God's work of grace within their hearts.

(If a shortened service is desired, and the candidates have been asked the membership covenant questions and have responded appropriately, the presiding minister may add the statement [They have each responded appropriately to the membership covenant questions as required by The Discipline], (cf. 5550), omit the questions, and move to paragraph 5567).

5566. Covenant Questions.

Minister: We now propose, in the fear of God, to question *these persons* as to *their* experience, faith and purpose, that you may know that *they are* proper *persons* to be admitted into this Church.

Dear *friends*, you have come seeking union with the church of Jesus Christ. We rejoice that you have chosen to undertake the privileges and the responsibilities of membership in The Wesleyan Church. Before you are fully admitted thereto, you should here publicly and individually make your vows, confess your faith and declare your purpose, by answering the following questions:

Minister: Do you believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? That Jesus Christ the Son suffered in your place on the cross, that He died but rose again, that He now sits at the Father's right hand until He returns to judge all people at the last day? And do you believe in the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God? That by the grace of God every person has the ability and responsibility to choose between right and wrong, and that those who repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are justified by faith? And do you believe that God not only counts believers as righteous, but that He makes them righteous, perfecting

them in love at entire sanctification, and providing for their growth in grace at every stage of their spiritual life, enabling them through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to live a victorious life?

Candidate: This I believe.

Minister: Do you have the witness of the Spirit that you are a child of God?

Candidate: I do.

Minister: Have you the assurance that you have experienced the deeper grace of heart cleansing through the infilling of the Holy Spirit? If not, do you purpose to diligently seek this grace?

Candidate: I do.

Minister: Do you cordially accept our Covenant Membership Commitments and Elementary Principles as biblical guidelines for your conduct, and do you accept the authority of *The Discipline* of The Wesleyan Church in matters of church government?

Candidate: I do.

Minister: Do you recognize your obligation to God and the Church, and do you purpose to contribute your resources as the Lord has prospered you for the support of the gospel as the Church fulfills its mission in the world?

Candidate: I do.

5567. Declaration of Purpose.

Minister: By coming before us today you indicate your purpose to publicly confess the Lord Jehovah, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to be your God and the object of your highest love. You accept the Lord Jesus to be your Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit to be your Sanctifier, Comforter and Guide. You joyfully dedicate *yourselves* to God that within the everlasting covenant of His grace you might be used in His service to glorify and honor Him. And you promise to hold to Him as the highest good of your *lives*; that you will give diligent attention to the commandments and principles of His Word; that you will seek the honor and advancement of His kingdom; and that forsaking all ungodliness and worldly desires, you will live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.

You do also purpose to join *yourselves* to this church, submitting *yourselves* to its principles of government; and by walking in love and fellowship with all its members, seek its peace, purity and growth in grace.

Do you freely and sincerely devote *yourselves* to be the Lord's within the fellowship of this church?

Candidate: I do.

5570. Reception of Transfers from Other Denominations.

Minister: There are *those* who *have* found Christ in some other branch of His church, but who now *desire* to transfer *their* membership to The Wesleyan Church, and who present *themselves* for reception as covenant *members* by transfer. To *them* we address this question:

Minister: Dear *friends*, in transferring your covenant relation to this branch of Christ's church, you again renew your vows of church fellowship. Relying upon the grace of God, you promise to walk in all His commandments and ordinances, and to seek His service as your highest joy. You promise to submit to the rules and *The Discipline* of The Wesleyan Church; to strive earnestly for its peace, purity and growth in grace, and to walk with all its members in love and Christian faithfulness. Do you sincerely devote *yourselves* to be the Lord's and do you hereby renew your covenant with the church of Jesus Christ by joining *yourselves* to this fellowship of believers?

Transferee: I do.

5575. Reception of Community Members.

(Paragraph 5575 is provided for those churches implementing community membership. For other churches or if no community members are being received, the minister will skip 5575 and go directly to 5580.)

Minister: The church of Jesus Christ is not only for those who are spiritually strong and mature, but it is intended by its Head and Master for all who know Him as Savior and who love and serve Him as Lord. There are those who are not yet ready for covenant membership in The Wesleyan Church. For these, the Church has provided the category of community membership, that they may enjoy its pastoral care and spiritual nurture, and that they may grow in grace and knowledge until they take their place in full relation to the Church. *These* come now that *they* may be questioned and received as *their* experience makes fitting.

To you who have so recently been converted to Christ, and to *all* of you who desire to study and grow toward spiritual maturity, and who have here presented *yourselves* for reception as community *members*, we address these questions:

Minister: Does the Lord now forgive your sins?

Candidate: Yes, He does.

Minister: Is it your purpose to grow spiritually, to study daily in private devotions and regularly at the church, to become acquainted with the Scriptures and *The Discipline* of our Church, and to prepare to be received at the proper time in covenant membership?

Candidate: Yes, it is.

5580. Response of the Church.

Minister: May the members of the church now join me in welcoming *these* new ones to our fellowship, assuring *them* of our love, of our prayers and of our care over *them* in days to come. Do you, the members of this church, receive *these* to our communion and fellowship as beloved *brothers and sisters*, and promise to walk with *them* in love, to instruct, counsel, admonish and cherish *them*, and to watch over *them* with all long-suffering, gentleness and love?

Congregation: We do.

5585. Prayer.

Minister: O God of the church, we thank You for the blessing of Christian fellowship, for joining together in one body all those who truly believe in Jesus Christ, Your Son. We thank You for *these* who this day are becoming a part of this local church, this branch of Christ's body. Grant to *them* the grace and strength *they* shall need to fulfill *their* vows, and bind our hearts together in Your holy love, that we may aid each other and that together we may share Your gospel with the world for which Christ died. In His name we pray. Amen.

5590. Right Hand of Fellowship.

Minister: And now, in behalf of The Wesleyan Church and of this local congregation, I extend to you the right hand of fellowship, welcoming you as *members* with us of the body of Christ.

5595. *The service of reception may close with a hymn and a benediction such as the following:*

Hymn. "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "Lead On, O King Eternal," "Soldiers of Christ, Arise."

Benediction. Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.