

CHURCH OFFICER TRAINING

The Presbytery of Tres Rios - Presbyterian Church (USA)
Recommended by the Committee on Training & Nurture
2012



Presentation

According to the Book of Order, the responsibility to prepare and train elders and deacons falls upon the session and we recognize the capability of our sessions to fulfill this responsibility with excellence and as we always say “decently and in order.”

We have prepared the present booklet to help our sessions in this area providing materials to facilitate the process of training our new elders and deacons.

The last booklet we had for Elders Training was prepared in 2006 and with the approval of the new Book of Order became outdated.

The present materials have been compiled from different sources and revised by different teaching and ruling elders of our Presbytery.

The booklet is a guidance that you may use in different ways. You may create a special Sunday school class for the new elected elders and deacons or especial training sessions on other day of the week. You also may download this booklet to individual computers and have online trainings or a combination of online sessions with face to face meetings.

In 2006-2007 some clusters decided to have clusters trainings for the churches of each cluster and this still is an option with this new material.

The number of training sessions is flexible and you may decide how many sessions your group needs. You also may use a short version of this booklet using only the worksheets and the final session V.

We are thankful for the help of the ruling and teaching elders Glenn Rogers, Kay Long, Glenda Harbert, Cheryl Homsher, Tim Davenport-Herbst, Bob Reno and Jim Miles who invested time reading, correcting and improving the present document.

We hope this material will be a useful resource for our congregations.

Presbytery Committee on Training and Nurture

CHURCH OFFICER TRAINING

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CHURCH OFFICER TRAINING

Session I

Our faith and the Bible – Worksheet # 1

The Bible in the Book of Order

The Doctrine of Scripture in John Calvin

The Bible in Our Confessional Tradition

Guidelines for Holy Scripture

Worksheet # 1

The Bible Tells Me So

The Understanding of and Use of Holy Scripture

For each of these statements about the Bible, indicate **your own position** using the following scale:
(you may change your position during the conversation)

| | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 - Strongly Agree | 2 - Agree | 3 - Not Sure – No Opinion |
| 4 - Disagree | 5 - Strongly Disagree | |

- God dictated the words of Scripture to the original authors who recorded them without addition or omission. _____
- God inspired the authors of Scripture in such a way as to ensure their writing, shaped by the author's individuality, nevertheless accurately recorded God's Word. _____
- God used the authors of the Scripture, in their own particular historical and cultural contexts, to communicate God's Word for that time and place. _____
- God has protected the translations of Scripture through the ages so that what we have in our modern Bibles is the same as God's original words. _____
- The Bible is inerrant—completely without error of any kind. _____
- The Bible may contain errors and inconsistencies, but only in trivial matters. _____
- Apparent errors in the Bible are a result of our limited understanding of God's Word. _____
- The Bible is a human document and it is limited and subject to errors of both fact and history _____
- The Bible contains errors and inconsistencies, but that does not reduce its capacity to communicate truth. _____
- The Bible is a collection of interesting myths, stories, and tales— just like other historical writings—that conveys important truths to every age. _____
- Modern knowledge and experience may override biblical understandings and invalidate what the Bible says. _____
- The Bible contains everything there is to know about God. _____

The Bible in the Book of Order

of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Read in the Book of Order 2011/2013:

F-2.02 (p.9)

F-3.0106 (p.12)

Directory of Worship Preface (a) – (p.74)

W-1.1004 (p.76)

W-1.2004 (p.78)

The doctrine of Scripture in the writings of John Calvin

John Calvin's view of Scripture can be found mainly in his Institutes of the Christian Religion.

Necessity

Calvin viewed Scripture as necessary in two ways:

1- *To interpret what we see in the creation:*

General revelation cannot in itself give us a saving knowledge of God. Although he can be known in some ways through creation he has "added the light of his Word in order that he might make himself known unto salvation." [1] Calvin compares Scripture to being like a pair of spectacles that enable us to properly interpret what we see in creation:

For as the aged, or those whose sight is defective, when any book, however fair, is set before them, though they perceive that there is something written, are scarcely able to make out two consecutive words, but, when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly, so Scripture, gathering together the impressions of Deity, which, till then, lay confused in our minds, dissipates the darkness, and shows us the true God clearly. [1]

2- *To have a depository of doctrine and avoid the errors inherent in oral transmission and traditions:*

For if we reflect how prone the human mind is to lapse into forgetfulness of God, how readily inclined to every kind of error, how bent every now and then on devising new and fictitious religions, it will be easy to understand how necessary it was to make such a depository of doctrine as would secure it from either perishing by the neglect, vanishing away amid the errors, or being corrupted by the presumptuous audacity of men. [2]

Authority

According to Calvin, Word and Spirit must always go together. Scripture gives us a saving knowledge of God, but only when its certainty is "founded on the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit." [3] It is "foolish to attempt to prove to infidels that the Scripture is the Word of God," since this can only be known by faith. [3] Nevertheless, he did see a place for evidences of Scripture's authority, as long it is recognized that they are secondary. The human testimonies which go to confirm it will not be without effect, if they are used in subordination to that chief and highest proof, as secondary helps to our weakness. [3] The "chief and highest proof" being, of course, the testimony of the Holy Spirit, though Calvin does not say that the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit is the source of this authority.

Character

Calvin viewed Scripture as being both majestic and simple.

1- **Majesty:** Calvin believed that Scripture possesses "a divine majesty which will subdue our presumptuous opposition, and force us to do it homage." [4] It speaks with a unified voice, and its parts make up a perfect harmony:

How admirably the system of divine wisdom contained in it is arranged—how perfectly free the doctrine is from every thing that savours of earth—how beautifully it harmonizes in all its parts—and how rich it is in all the other qualities which give an air of majesty to composition. [5]

2- **Simplicity:** Scripture, according to Calvin, also has an "unpolished simplicity". It is not particularly eloquent, for that would detract from its message:

The sublime mysteries of the kingdom of heaven have for the greater part been delivered with a contemptible meanness of words. Had they been adorned with a more splendid eloquence, the wicked might have caviled, and alleged that this constituted all their force. But now, when an unpolished simplicity, almost bordering on rudeness, makes a deeper impression than the loftiest flights of oratory, what does it indicate if not that the Holy Scriptures are too mighty in the power of truth to need the rhetorician's art? [6]

Notes: [1] ^{a b} *Institutes* I.vi.1.

[2] *Institutes* I.vi.3.

[3] ^{a b c} *Institutes* I.viii.13.

[4] *Readings in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 38. [5] *Institutes* I.vii.4. [6] ^{a b} *Institutes* I.viii.1.

The Bible in Our Confessional Tradition

The Confession of 1967

The Bible

9.27 The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. The church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated.

9.28 The New Testament is the recorded testimony of apostles to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The Old Testament bears witness to God's faithfulness in his covenant with Israel and points the way to the fulfillment of his purpose in Christ. The Old Testament is indispensable to understanding the New, and is not itself fully understood without the New.

9.29 The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ. The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. As God has spoken his word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that he will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.

9.30 God's word is spoken to his church today where the Scriptures are faithfully preached and attentively read in dependence on the illumination of the Holy Spirit and with readiness to receive their truth and direction.

The Declaration of Faith*

Chapter Six—The Word of God

(3) The Bible is the written Word of God.

Led by the Spirit of God the people of Israel and of the early church preserved and handed on the story of what God had said and done in their midst and how they had responded to him.

These traditions were often shaped and reshaped by the uses to which the community put them. They were cherished, written down, and collected as the holy literature of the people of God.

Through the inward witness of the same Spirit we acknowledge the authority of the Bible. We accept the Old and New Testaments as the canon, or authoritative standard of faith and life, to which no further writings need be added.

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are necessary, sufficient, and reliable as witnesses to Jesus Christ, the living Word. We must test any word that comes to us from church, world, or inner experience by the Word of God in Scripture.

We are subject to its judgment
all our understanding of doctrine and practice, including this Declaration of Faith.
We believe the Bible to be the Word of God as no other word written by human beings.

Relying on the Holy Spirit,
who opens our eyes and hearts, we affirm our freedom to interpret Scripture responsibly.
God has chosen to address his inspired Word to us through diverse and varied human writings.

Therefore we use the best available methods
to understand them in their historical and cultural settings
and the literary forms in which they are cast.

When we encounter apparent tensions and conflicts in what Scripture teaches us to believe and do, the final appeal must be to the authority of Christ. Acknowledging that authority, comparing Scripture with Scripture, listening with respect to fellow-believers past and present, we anticipate that the Holy Spirit will enable us to interpret faithfully God's Word for our time and place.

Guidelines for Holy Scripture*

For the Understanding and Use of the Holy Scripture

For Understanding

1. Determining What the Text Says
 - a. Use of the Original Languages
 - b. Employment of the Best Manuscripts
 - c. Priority of the Plain Sense of the Text
 - 1) Definition of Literary Units
 - 2) Recognition of the Cultural Conditioning of Language *
 - 3) Understanding of Social and Historical Circumstances
2. How the Text Is Rightly Used
 - a. Purpose of Holy Scripture
 - b. Precedence of Holy Scripture
 - 1) Priority of Holy Scripture
 - 2) Use of Knowledge
 - 3) Use of Experience
 - c. Centrality of Jesus Christ
 - d. Interpretation of Scripture by Scripture
 - e. The Rule of Love
 - f. The Rule of Faith
 - g. Fallibility of All Interpretation
 - h. Relation of Word and Spirit
 - i. Use of All Relevant Guidelines
3. Realize that points of view are conditioned by points of viewing—try to see the issues from the perspectives of others. Can differences be preserved in ways that lead toward mutual understanding?
4. The preached word must inform the study of the written word—the search for truth includes the life of public prayer and worship.
5. In the immediate situation when controversy arises, locate areas of agreement and disagreement.
 - a. Is there agreement as to what biblical passages are relevant to the contemporary issue?
 - b. Is there agreement to the meaning of those texts in their original setting?
 - c. Is there agreement as to how these texts should be applied to the present situation?
 - d. Is there agreement as to what the Christian tradition in general and the Reformed tradition in particular have taught concerning this issue?
6. In potentially long-term controversies, covenant together to study the Bible in regard to the issue—ensuring openness to differing opinions.
7. Together try to determine the range of options that are open to the church for speech and action in regard to the contemporary situation.
8. Rely on the democratic process of the denomination in assemblies. Use the established channels of communication and the process of voting to express conviction, either as part of the majority or the minority. Be willing to accept decisions and welcome the continuing advocacy of minority view.

For Interpreting

1. Be guided by the basic rules for the interpretation of Scripture that are summarized from the Book of Confessions.
 - a. Recognize that Jesus Christ is the center of Scripture.
 - b. Let the focus be on the plain text of Scripture, to the grammatical and historical context, rather than to allegory or subjective fantasy.
 - c. Depend upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit in interpreting and applying God's message.
 - d. Be guided by the doctrinal consensus of the church, which is the rule of faith.
 - e. Let all interpretations be in accord with the rule of love, the twofold commandment to love God and to love neighbor.
 - f. Remember that interpretation of the Bible requires earnest study in order to establish the best text and to interpret the influence of the historical and cultural context in which the divine message has come.
 - g. Seek to interpret a particular passage of the Bible in light of the entire Bible.
2. Recognize that individual perceptions of the truth are always limited and therefore not absolutely authoritative.

**Summaries of "Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture" (A position statement adopted by the 123rd General Assembly [1983] of the Presbyterian Church in the United States) and "Biblical Authority and Interpretation" (A resource document received by the 194th General Assembly [1982] of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America)*

CHURCH OFFICER TRAINING

Session II

Presbyterian Reformed Tradition: History & Principles

Some Essential Tenets of the Reformed Tradition

Book of Confession Outline

The Confessions Overview

History, Beliefs and Confessions – Worksheet # 2

Presbyterian Reformed Tradition – History & Principles

History Outline of the Reformed Branch of the Reformation

The Protestant Reformation of the early 16th century was an attempt to reform the Catholic Church. German theologian Martin Luther wrote his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the sale of indulgences in 1517. Parallel to events in Germany, a movement began in Switzerland under the leadership of Ulrich Zwingli. The political separation of the Church of England from Rome under Henry VIII, beginning in 1529 and completed in 1536, brought England alongside this broad Reformed movement. The Scottish Reformation of 1560 decisively shaped the Church of Scotland and, through it, all other Presbyterian churches worldwide.

Following the excommunication of Luther and condemnation of the Reformation by the Pope, the work and writings of John Calvin were influential in establishing a loose consensus among various groups in Switzerland, Scotland, Hungary, Germany and elsewhere. In the course of this religious upheaval, the German Peasants' War of 1524–1525 swept through the Bavarian, Thuringia and Swabia principalities. The confessional division of the states of the Holy Roman Empire eventually erupted in the Thirty Years' War of 1618–1648. This left Germany weakened and fragmented for more than two centuries, until the unification of Germany under the German Empire of 1871.

Reformed Tradition in Historical Context

- Children of God
- Children Of Abraham (the Jews)
- Christians
- Roman Catholic Christians
- Protestant Christian
- Reformed Christians
- Presbyterians PC(USA)

The Protestant Reformation

- Reforming the Roman Catholic Church

- Martin Luther challenged the abuses of the church system
- Indulgences—salvation by works
- Scriptures interpreted only by clergy
- Church authority vs. Scriptural
- Return to Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone

The Reformed Reformation

- Developed by Swiss reformers in the sixteenth century:
 - Ulrich Zwingli
 - John Calvin (Frenchman who made his home in Geneva)
- Became alternative to Lutherans and Anabaptists

Major Beliefs of the Catholic Tradition

- One holy, catholic, and apostolic Church
- Recognition of canonical Scriptures
- Formation and adoption of the ecumenical creeds:
 - Nicene Creed—personhood of Jesus Christ and the reality of the Holy Spirit
 - Apostles' Creed—One God in three persons (Trinity) and God as creator of heaven and earth

Major Beliefs of the Protestant Tradition

- God's grace in Jesus Christ is revealed in Scripture
- Grace alone—God's gift
- Faith alone—not our works
- Scripture alone—no other authority

Five Major Affirmations of the Reformed Faith

1. Election of God's people not only for salvation but also for service
2. Life together marked by disciplined concern for order in the church according to God's Word
3. Faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation
4. Recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny
5. The people of God are called to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God

Six Central Beliefs of the Reformed Tradition

1-Sovereignty of God

- There is no part of life that is separate from God
- Every human being at every moment has to do with the living God
- Human life is rooted in the will and intention of God
- The Glory of God and God's purposes in the world are more important than the salvation of one's own soul

2- The Authority of Scripture

- The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the only rule of faith and practice
- The Bible is to be interpreted in light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ {BoC 9.29)

3- The Lordship of Jesus Christ

- Christ alone is deserving of our allegiance and devotion
- The presence of God in Jesus Christ makes more sense out of life, and gives more meaning to life than any other revelation

4- Justification by Faith

- We are put right with God by grace through faith alone and not by any thing we are, believe, or do
- Note: the opposite of justification by faith takes two forms: works righteousness (where we earn our salvation by being good) and beliefs righteousness (where we earn our

salvation by believing the right things)—both of which put the responsibility for salvation in humans, not God

5- The Priesthood of All Believers

- All persons have equal access to God
- No priest (minister) can answer for any human being
- Believers have a right and responsibility to answer for themselves and for their neighbors before God
- There is no qualitative distinction between clergy and lay, sacred and secular, Sunday Christianity and work-week life

6- The Fellowship of the Church

- You can't be a Christian by yourself; Christianity is corporate as well as personal
- Love of neighbor is the truest test of orthodoxy and doctrine

The Reformed Motto

Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda

- The Church reformed and always reforming or, the Church reformed and always to be reformed

Comparison to Other Traditions

Polity

- Reformed: governance by teaching (ministers) and ruling elders in representative democracy
- Episcopalian: hierarchical authority through bishops
- Congregational: authority vested in individual congregations

Lord's Supper

- Reformed: bread and wine are unchanged, but Christ is truly present
 - Catholic: bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Jesus

Some Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith

FROM Book of Order 2011/2013 - F-1.01 – F-2.05

| Tradition | Tenet/Belief/Doctrine |
|--------------------------------|--|
| CATHOLIC (universal) | 1. Trinity— the mystery of the triune God |
| | 2. Incarnation— of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ |
| PROTESTANT | 3. Justification by grace through faith— grace alone, faith alone |
| | 4. Scripture reveals God's grace in Jesus Christ— Scripture alone |
| REFORMED | 5. Sovereignty of God— the majesty, holiness, and providence of God who creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love |
| | 6. Election for service and salvation— love of neighbor as well as love of God |
| | 7. Covenant life— marked by disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God |
| | 8. Stewardship— that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation |
| | 9. Human tendency toward idolatry and tyranny— which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God |

Book of Confessions Outline

Adapted from material in the preface to The Book of Confessions and the preface to each individual confession.

The Book of Confessions - Part 1 of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

To Confess

- To confess means openly to affirm, declare, acknowledge, or take a stand for what one believes to be true.
- The truth that is confessed may include the admission of sin and guilt but is more than that.
- When Christians make a confession, they say, "This is what we most assuredly believe, regardless of what others may believe and regardless of the opposition, rejection, or persecution that may come to us for taking this stand."

What a Confession Is...

- 1- An act of Christian faith
All Christians are by definition people who confess their faith—people who make their own the earliest Christian confession: "Jesus Christ is Lord."
- 2- A document of Christian faith
An officially adopted statement that spells out a church's understanding of the meaning and implications of the one basic confession of the lordship of Christ.

The Three Directions of Confessions of Faith

- 1- God
Confessions of faith are first of all the church's solemn and thankful response to God's self-revelation, expressed with a sense of responsibility to be faithful and obedient to God.
- 2- The church itself
Members of a Christian community seek to make clear to themselves who they are, what they believe, and what they resolve to do.
- 3- The world
Christians confess their common faith not only to praise and serve God and not only to establish their self-identity but to speak to the world a unified word that declares who they are and what they stand for and against.

The Time for Confessions

- Throughout the history of the Christian movement, churches have written confessions of faith because they feel that they must do so, not just because they think it would be a good idea.
- Confessions of faith may result from a sense of urgent need to correct some distortion of the truth and claim of the gospel that threatens the integrity of the church's faith and life from within the church.
- They may result from some political or cultural movement outside the church that openly attacks or subtly seeks to compromise its commitment to the gospel.
- Sometimes the urgency to confess comes from the church's conviction that it has a great new insight into the promises and demands of the gospel that is desperately needed by both church and world.
- Confessions are written when the church faces a situation of life or a situation of death so urgent that it cannot remain silent but must speak, even at the cost of its own security, popularity, and success.

The content of Confessions of Faith

- At the heart of all confessions is the earliest confession of the New Testament church, "Jesus is LORD."
- Sometimes the situation required a short pointed confession dealing with one or more specific issues.
- Sometimes, confessions are short summaries of elements of the whole of Christian faith.

The Functions of Confessions

- Worship
- Defense of orthodoxy
- Instruction
- Rallying point in times of danger and persecution
- Church order and discipline

The Historical Limitations of Confessions

- Confessions address the issues, problems, dangers, and opportunities of a given historical situation.
- Confessions have been deliberately or unconsciously expressed in the language and thought forms that were commonly accepted when they were written.
- Confessions have also distorted the truth revealed in Jesus Christ, been unable to grasp parts of the biblical witness to God's presence and work in Christ, and divided the church into churches with conflicting views of what Christian faith and life are all about.

Reformed Confessions Emphasize

- The ecumenical character of Reformed churches
- Faith AND practice—belief AND action
- The claim of God on ALL life
- Grace AND law

Authority of Confessions in the Reformed Tradition

The multiplicity of confessions, written by many people in many places over such a great span of time, means that the Reformed tradition has never been content to recognize any ONE confession or COLLECTION of confessions as an absolute, infallible statement of the faith of Reformed Christians for all time.

Confessional Authority Is...

- Provisional authority
All confessions are the work of limited, fallible, sinful human beings and churches.
- Temporary authority
Faith in the living God present and at work in the risen Christ through the Holy Spirit means always being open to hear a new and fresh word from the Lord.
- Relative authority
They are subordinate to the higher authority of Scripture, which is the norm for discerning the will and work of God in every time and place.

A New Confession? - Confessional Documents Process

Amendments to the confessional documents of this church may be made only in the following manner:

- The approval of the proposed amendment by the General Assembly and its recommendation to the presbyteries;
- The approval in writing of two thirds of the presbyteries;
- The approval and enactment by the next ensuing General Assembly.
- Before such amendments to the confessional documents shall be transmitted to the presbyteries, the General Assembly shall appoint a committee of elders and ministers, numbering not less than fifteen, to consider the proposal, of which not more than two shall be from any one synod.

Overview of the Book of Confessions

The Book of Confessions contains - Eleven historical statements
(Information on these three areas is given in the chart below.)

| Confessions | Date | Location | Historical context/issues/themes |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|--|
| Nicene Creed | 325 | Nicaea | Constantine, Roman emperor converted to Christianity, sought to address disputes. |
| | 381 | Constantinople | Nature of Christ—was the divinity of Christ created by God or the same as God? |
| Apostles' Creed | 180 | Rome | Marcionite heresy: Jesus was not OT Messiah |
| | 2nd/3rd c | Rome | Forgiveness of sins |
| | 4th/5th c | N. Africa | Holy catholic church |
| | 5th c 8th c | Gaul | He descended into hell (finalized as we know it) |
| Scots Confession | 1560 | Scotland | Scottish Parliament declares Scotland a Protestant nation; new confession of faith; John Knox; emphasizes God's providence and calls for trust and commitment in turbulent times |
| Heidelberg Catechism | 1562-63 | Germany | Tension between Reformed and Lutheran movements: nature of Christ's presence in Lord's Supper; creed states what both can affirm; based on Romans 7:24-25 |
| Second Helvetic Confession | 1561 | Switzerland | Swiss-German Reformed Church—Bullinger wrote it as part of his Last Will and Testament; adopted by churches of Switzerland. |
| Westminster Confession | 1647 | England | English government called for settling issues of Church governance and liturgy; Westminster Assembly convened; political and religious conflicts; civil war; adopted later by other countries |
| | 1647 | England | |
| | 1729 | America | |
| | 1903 | (addendum) | |
| Shorter Catechism | 1649 | England | Westminster Assembly (above) |
| Larger Catechism | 1649 | England | Westminster Assembly (above) |
| Theological Declaration of Barmen | 1934 | Germany | Rise of Nazi Germany, WWII; equating nationalism, militarism, and patriotism (under Hitler) with Christianity; there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, who is Lord over every area of life |
| Confession of 1967 | 1967 | USA | UPC(USA); turbulent 1960s; concurrent with Vatican II; prompted by request to revise the Westminster Confession; themes of reconciliation and the Church's role in the world; addressed need to interpret Scripture; Book of Confessions adopted |
| A Brief Statement of Faith | 1983 | USA | Reunion of northern and southern branches of Presbyterianism in USA to form PC(USA); articulates common identity in midst of diversity and disagreement; gender inclusiveness, care for God's creation; "In life and in death, we belong to God" |

Worksheet # 2*

History, Beliefs and Confessions

History

1. The Reformation movement that began in Switzerland at the same time that Martin Luther led another movement of similar characteristics in Germany was led by _____.
2. The work and writings of _____ were influential in establishing a loose consensus among various groups in Switzerland, Scotland, Hungary, Germany and elsewhere.
3. The Reformed reformation became alternative to _____ and _____.
4. The Reformed Motto is "*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*" that means: _____.

Beliefs

1. One of the six central beliefs of the Reformed tradition that state: "there is no qualitative distinction between clergy and lay, sacred and secular, Sunday Christianity and workweek life is called: The _____ of all _____.
2. The Reformed tradition belief that in the Lord's Supper _____ and _____ are unchanged but _____ is truly present.

Essential Tenets

1. Mention two of the essential tenets of the Reformed Faith:

_____.
2. God elects people for _____ and _____.
3. "*Scripture Alone*" means that _____ reveals God's grace in _____.

Confessions

1. A Confession is:
a- _____.
b- _____.
2. The three directions of Confessions of Faith are: a. _____ b. _____
c. _____.
3. Reformed confessions emphasize: a- The _____ character of _____ churches; b- Faith and _____. c- The claim of _____ on _____ life. d- Grace and _____.
4. The Nicene Creed addressed the theme of _____ of _____.
5. The Brief Statement of Faith in 1983 born as result of the historical context of the _____ of the northern and southern branches of _____ in _____.

**Answer key on the last page of this booklet*

CHURCH OFFICER TRAINING

Session III

What's Presbyterian worship like?

The Meaning of Sacraments

Worship and Sacraments – Worksheet # 3

**Case of Study on Baptism, the Lord's Supper
and Children**

What's Presbyterian worship like?*

From the Book of Order

The order of a Sunday worship service in a Presbyterian church is determined by the pastor and the session, the church's governing body. It generally includes prayer, music, Bible reading and a sermon based upon scripture. The Sacraments, a time of personal response/offering and a sharing of community concerns are also parts of worship.

The constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) suggests that worship be ordered in terms of five major actions centered in the word of God (gathering around the word, proclaiming the word, responding to the word, the sealing of the word and bearing and following the word into the world), but recognizes that "other orders of worship may also serve the needs of a particular church and be orderly, faithful to Scripture, and true to historic principles" (*Book of Order*, W-3.3202).

Prayer

"Prayer is at the heart of worship. In prayer, through the Holy Spirit, people seek after and are found by the one true God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ. They listen and wait upon God, call God by name, remember God's gracious acts, and offer themselves to God. Prayer may be spoken, sung, offered in silence, or enacted. Prayer grows out of the center of a person's life in response to the Spirit. Prayer is shaped by the Word of God in Scripture and by the life of the community of faith. Prayer issues in commitment to join God's work in the world" (*Book of Order*, W-2.1001).

Music

"Song is a response which engages the whole self in prayer. Song unites the faithful in common prayer wherever they gather for worship whether in church, home, or other special place ... through the ages and from varied cultures, the church has developed additional musical forms for congregational prayer. Congregations are encouraged to use these diverse musical forms for prayer as well as those which arise out of the musical life of their own cultures. To lead the congregation in the singing of prayer is a primary role of the choir and other musicians. They also may pray on behalf of the congregation with introits, responses, and other musical forms. Instrumental music may be a form of prayer since words are not essential to prayer. In worship music is not to be for entertainment or artistic display. Care should be taken that it not be used merely as a cover for silence" (*Book of Order*, W-2.1003 ; W-2.1004).

Scripture

"The church confesses the Scriptures to be the Word of God written, witnessing to God's self-revelation. Where that Word is read and proclaimed, Jesus Christ the Living Word is present by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the reading, hearing, preaching, and confessing of the Word are central to Christian worship. The session shall ensure that in public worship the Scripture is read and proclaimed regularly in the common language(s) of the particular church" (*Book of Order*, W-2.2001).

"The minister of Word and Sacrament is responsible for the selection of Scripture to be read in all services of public worship and should exercise care so that over a period of time the people will hear the full message of Scripture. It is appropriate that in the Service for the Lord's Day there be readings from the Old Testament and the Epistles and Gospels of the New Testament. The full range of the psalms should be also used in worship. Selections for reading in public worship should be guided by the seasons of the church year, pastoral concerns for a local congregation, events and conditions in the world, and specific program emphases of the church. Lectionaries offered by the church ensure a broad range of readings as well as consistency and connection with the universal Church" (*Book of Order*, W-2.002 – W-2.003).

Preaching

“The preached Word or sermon is to be based upon the written Word. It is a proclamation of Scripture in the conviction that through the Holy Spirit Jesus Christ is present to the gathered people, offering grace and calling for obedience ... the sermon should present the gospel with simplicity and clarity, in language which can be understood by the people ... the preaching of the Word shall ordinarily be done by a (teaching elder) minister of Word and Sacrament” (*Book of Order*, W-2.2007).

“The Word is also proclaimed through song in anthems and solos based on scriptural texts, in cantatas and oratorios which tell the biblical story, in psalms and canticles, and in hymns, spirituals, and spiritual songs which present the truth of the biblical faith. Song in worship may also express the response of the people to the Word read, sung, enacted, or proclaimed. Drama and dance, poetry and pageant, indeed, most other human art forms are also expressions through which the people of God have proclaimed and responded to the Word.” (*Book of Order*, W-2.2008).

Sacraments

“The Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are God’s acts of sealing the promises of faith within the community of faith as the congregation worships, and include the responses of the faithful to the Word proclaimed and enacted in the Sacraments” (*Book of Order*, W-3.3601).

Offering

“The Christian life is an offering of one’s self to God. In worship the people are presented with the costly self-offering of Jesus Christ, are claimed and set free by him, and are led to respond by offering to him their lives, their particular gifts and abilities, and their material goods. Worship should always offer opportunities to respond to Christ’s call to become disciples by professing faith, by uniting with the church, and by taking up the mission of the people of God, as well as opportunities for disciples to renew the commitment of their lives to Jesus Christ and his mission in the world” (*Book of Order*, W-2.5001 – W-2.50).

Community concerns

“Worship is an activity of the common life of the people of God in which the care of the members for each other and for the quality of their life and ministry together expresses the reality of God’s power to create and sustain community in the midst of a sinful world. As God is concerned for the events in daily life, so members of the community in worship appropriately express concern for one another and for their ministry in the world” (*Book of Order*, W-2.6001).

**Posted on the website of PC(USA)*

The Meaning of Sacraments*

By Paul Galbreath

- ***‘Visible words’***

The sacraments provide a picture of God’s promises to us. John Calvin said sacraments are “visible words” that help strengthen faith and nurture discipleship. Calvin recognized only two sacraments — baptism and the Lord’s Supper — because they are rooted in the Gospel account of Jesus’ life, and provide a form of proclamation of the good news.

- ***Sacraments are grounded in Scripture.***

Both baptism and the Lord’s Supper draw on multiple New Testament images.

- ***Sacraments define the church.***

Sacraments are one of the identifying marks of the church. As Calvin defines it, the church is where the Word is truly preached and the sacraments are rightly administered.

- ***Sacraments connect us to Christ.***

Sacraments connect us to Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Baptism and communion are connected practices, not independent acts. Baptism begins a lifelong journey of discipleship, and communion sustains us on that journey.

- ***Sacraments create community.***

In participating in the sacraments, we profess that our faith in Jesus Christ transcends political and personal differences. This links us with a global community that shares these practices around the world.

- ***Sacraments celebrate God’s creation.***

Presbyterian emphasis on the use of local elements provides a natural connection to the care of all God’s creation: “The water used for baptism should be common to the location” (*Directory of Worship*, W-3.3605).

**Summary of the same article appeared in May 2009 issue of Presbyterians Today and posted on the website of PC(USA)*

Worksheet # 3*

Worship and Sacraments Quiz (True or False)

1. _____ "There can be no worship without mission and outreach."
2. _____ "Being in a particular structure, familiar or not, does not guarantee that people will be treated with Christian love or respect."
3. _____ "As church officers we are especially responsible to the church in our prayer life."
4. _____ Presbyterians celebrate four sacraments: the Lord's Supper, Baptism, weddings, and funerals.
5. _____ A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ.
6. _____ All children are eligible for baptism.
7. _____ A child being baptized in a Presbyterian church must have parents who are members of a Presbyterian church.
8. _____ No one can be excluded from the Lord's Table.
9. _____ Children are not allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper until they are confirmed.
10. _____ Artistic expressions (architecture, furnishings, music, drama, etc.) should evoke, edify, and enhance the worshiper's need for comfort and reassurance of grace.
11. _____ Those responsible for worship are to be guided by the Reformed tradition, the tradition of the local congregation, and openness to diversity and inclusive language.
12. _____ In a particular church, the teaching elders are to provide for worship and shall encourage the people to participate fully and regularly in it.
13. _____ The session has authority to choose Scriptures and lessons to be read, to oversee the prayers offered on behalf of the people, and to choose the music to be sung.
14. _____ The sequence or proportion of the elements of worship are the responsibility of the session with the concurrence of the pastor.
15. _____ The sermon is the heart of worship.
16. _____ In worship, music is not to be for entertainment or artistic display.
17. _____ The teaching elder has responsibility for the selection of the version of text from which the Scripture lessons are read in public worship.
18. _____ The congregation may read Scripture responsively, antiphonally, or in unison as a part of the service.
19. _____ Only a teaching elder can invite another teaching elder to preach in his or her pulpit.
20. _____ It is possible to be re-baptized if someone has a conversion experience.
21. _____ Baptism is authorized by the teaching elder and can be celebrated in private or public worship.
22. _____ The session assumes responsibility for nurturing the baptized person in the Christian life.
23. _____ It is appropriate to celebrate the Lord's Supper as often as each Lord's Day.

**Answer key on the last page of this booklet*

Case Study on Baptism, The Lord's Supper and Children

The story

A new family joins your church. They come from traditions where infants are not baptized. They have two children ages 10 and 4. They are struggling with the question of baptizing their children. The problem comes when Communion is served.

The Book of Order establishes that invitation to the Lord's Supper shall include baptized children (W-2.4011 & W-2.2002)

Dilemma

Do you, as the Session, allow the children to participate in the Communion even though they are not baptized?

Aspects to be considered

- What is my responsibility as ruling elder of the session with this family? (G-2.0202, G-2.0201 - W-2.3008a,b – W-2.3011)
- Can the session substitute the baptism for a “presentation” of the baby? (W-3.3101)
- Who are the participants in an infant baptism?
- How can the Book of Order be used as a resource?
- How does the Book of Order help the session and this family to experience God's grace and grow in faith?
- What if I disagree with the practice of the church regarding either infant baptism or the admission of children to the Lord's Table.

CHURCH OFFICER TRAINING

Session IV

Principles of Presbyterian Policy – Worksheet # 4

The Great Ends of the Church

The Congregation and their Relationship with Others

How is the Presbyterian Church Governed?

What has changed with the new Form of Government?

New Form of Government: What DOES CHANGE

New Form of Government: What DOES NOT CHANGE

Case Studies – The office and duties of Elders

Worksheet # 4*

Principles of Presbyterian Polity

Book of Order 2011/2013.

The head of the Church

Reference

F-1.02

1- _____ is the Head of the Church F-1.0201

The Great Ends of the Church

F-1.0304

2- The church exists for the _____ of Humankind F-1.0201

3- The Church exists for the _____, _____ and the _____ of the children of God.

4- The Church exists for the _____ of divine _____

5- The Church exists for the preservation of _____

6- The Church exists for the promotion of _____

7- The Church exists for the exhibition of the _____ of _____ to the world.

Historical Principles of Church Order

F-3.01

8- _____ is the Lord of the conscience, this means _____ or _____ judgments in all matters that respect religion are _____ and unalienable . F-3.0101

9- Every church has the right to establish the _____ of admission into its fellowship and the _____ of its ministers and members F-3.0102

10- Jesus Christ appointed officers not only to preach and administer the Sacraments but also to exercise _____ F-3.0103

11- _____ is in order to goodness F-3.0104

12- There are truth and forms with respect to which (people) of good Character and principles may _____ ...It is the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual _____ toward each other.

13- Election of persons to the exercise of this authority (ordered ministry) is in the hands of that _____ F-3.0106

14- The _____ are the only rule of faith and manners F-3.0107

Principles of Presbyterian Government

F-3.02

- 15- The particular congregations..., taken collectively, constitute _____
_____ . F-3.0201
- 16- The church is governed by _____ that may be ruling elders
or teaching elders. F-3.0202
- 17- The _____ part of the church shall govern the _____ F-3.0203
- 18- Presbyters... are to seek together to find and represent the _____
of _____. F-3.0104
- 19- Decisions shall be reached in councils by vote and a _____
shall govern F-3.0205
- 20- Ruling elder, teaching elder and deacons are ordained only by the
authority of a _____ F-3.0207

**Answer key on the last page of this booklet*

The Great Ends of the Church

So what is the mission or the end for a local congregation? Nearly 100 years ago the United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPNA), in the midst of revising its constitution, settled on six “great ends” of the church to focus their mission for a new century. This now-classic statement, “The Great Ends of the Church,” originally adopted by the UPNA in 1910, was incorporated into our present Constitution (G-1.0200) in 1983 when the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA – which had included the UPNA in a 1958 merger) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) united to form the Presbyterian Church (USA).

*The great Ends of the church are:**

The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind

The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God

The maintenance of divine worship

The preservation of the truth

The promotion of social righteousness

The Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world

**Discuss each of these statements*

Very little is known about the precise origin of the now-familiar language of The Great Ends of the Church. In 1997 the 209th General Assembly of the PC(USA) called for a two year emphasis on the Great Ends of the Church in order to “pull together around this inclusive vision for the life and mission of the church.”^[10] The emphasis was an attempt to rediscover “common ground” in the wake of division over sexuality.^[11] In light of the emphasis, George T. Adams, Jack B. Rogers, and Robert E. Blade undertook inquiries to uncover the historical roots of this potential point of unity.^[12] They didn’t find very much. In brief, “no direct information regarding the legislative history of the Great Ends of the Church” was discovered.^[13]

When the UPNA was formed in 1858, the language of “great ends” was apparently already in common currency. A simpler version than our six statements appears in the Government of the United Presbyterian Church of North America in 1865: “The great ends of the Church are the preservation of the truth and ordinances of true religion, for the glory of God and salvation of souls.”^[14] Moreover, an earlier, more rudimentary instance of the phrase occurred as early as 1782, and was preserved in a document of one of the UPNA’s predecessor denominations. “The end of Church-fellowship is to exhibit a system of sound principles, to maintain the ordinances of Gospel worship in their purity, to promote holiness, and to prepare the saints for heaven.”^[15]

William Keesecker has made a quite plausible case for tracing the rudimentary beginnings to The Westminster Standards.^[16] Both predecessor denominations of the UPNA had a firm commitment to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.^[17] Chapter XXV.4 would appear to contain the seeds of what became the Great Ends: “visible... particular churches... are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.” These essential commitments to ministry from Westminster reflected since the 18th century in the government and discipline of the Associate and Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches were part and parcel of the UPNA from its inception.

When the General Assembly of the UPNA determined to revise The Book of Government and Directory for Worship in 1902 (a process finally ratified by the presbyteries and the General Assembly in 1910) The Great Ends of the Church were included in Part I with such insignificant discussion or debate that no record was kept in the minutes or (apparently) any other account of the proceedings. In other words, having been thoroughly shaped theologically by Westminster, when the time came to write its “preliminary principles” The Great Ends of the Church had become second nature to an entire denomination!^[18]

Although arguments from silence can be slippery justifications, in the case of The Great Ends the paucity of information—that there is no discernible history regarding the origin or history of language of the Great Ends of the Church—can be seen as a welcome set of circumstances.^[19] Apparently there was no controversy; there was nary a comment recorded in the General Assembly Minutes. There was nothing at all remarkable about the Great Ends of the Church 100 years ago. And so they were easily adopted by a denomination thoroughly committed to this vision of being the Church.

Notes:

10) *Brown and Kirkpatrick, “Open Letter to Presbyterians from the Moderator and Stated Clerk...” (June, 1997).*

11) *Jerry L. Van Marter, “Summary of Issues at the 209th General Assembly,” General Assembly News, [Presbyterian News Service, June 14-21, 1997 (www.pcusa.org/pcnews/oldnews/1997/ga97024.htm)]*

12) *George T. Adams, “Let the Great Ends Guide Us,” The Presbyterian Outlook, May 19, 1997, p. 7; Jack B. Rogers and Robert E. Blade, “The Great Ends of the Church: Two Perspectives,” Journal of Presbyterian History 76:3 (Fall 1998), pp. 181-186 (hereafter cited as “Two Perspectives”).*

13) *Adams, “Let the Great Ends Guide Us,” p. 7.*

14) *William F. Keesecker, former moderator of the General Assembly, as recorded in “The Historical Background of the Great Ends of the Church,” Style Guide to the Great Ends of the Church (unpublished papers, Louisville: OGA Library), cited by Rogers, “Two Perspectives,” p183.*

15) *Reformation Principles Exhibited, Part II: Being the Declaration and Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America (New York: Hopkins and Seymour, 1806), p. 73, cited by Rogers, “Two Perspectives,” p. 183.*

16) *The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter and Larger Catechisms are found in The Book of Confessions.*

17) *“Historical Background of the Great Ends of the Church,” cited by Rogers, “Two Perspectives,” p. 183.*

18) *This is implied in a 1937 UPNA pamphlet, which began with words in reference to the Great Ends: “Little can be said on this subject that has not been said in substance a thousand times” (Adams, “Let the Great Ends Guide Us,” p. 7 and Rogers, “Two Perspectives,” p. 183).*

19) *Robert E. Blade, “Two Perspectives,” p. 184 has a little detail regarding a few of the individuals who appear to have been involved in crafting the statement.*

The Congregation and their Relationship with Others

Our Radically Connectional Church

By Michael Jinkins, President of Louisville Seminary

At first glance a Presbyterian understanding of the “connectional church” promises to be about as exciting as a brown paper bag — like the one I put my peanut butter sandwich in this morning. Other distinctively Presbyterian beliefs — like the doctrine of total depravity — pack some sizzle. Predestination: now that’s a doctrine you can sink your teeth into. But connectionalism? Yawn.

In fact, however, the theological ideas underlying connectionalism are rich and wonderfully grounded in the Bible and in the life of the church stretching back over 20 centuries. Arguably more blood has been spilled and more hearts broken around this concept than any other in the church’s history. The words that fly when the church’s connectionalism is called into question — words like schism, heresy, orthodoxy, secession, dissenters, apostates — are among the most inflammatory in the lexicon of faith.

Far from being a yawnfest, the church’s understanding of connectionalism is a minefield. What is needed most here is light, not more heat.

A revolutionary message

The New Testament understands the church as a spiritually organic reality. The relationship between Jesus and his disciples is not just that between a charismatic leader and his followers or a gifted teacher and his students, but is (according to John’s Gospel) like that between a vine and its branches and (according to Paul) like that between a human body and its head.

Reprinted from the March 2007 issue of Presbyterians Today

From the document: “Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership” - 2003 General Assembly Policy Statement. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Partnership

As Presbyterians, we recognize the Reformed tradition as one part of the larger Body of Christ, the Church. Other communions in the household of God have equally unique and valued places at the table of God’s mission. Recognizing our human limitations and because of our fundamental unity in Jesus Christ, we believe we are called to mission in the discipline of partnership. We believe that doing mission in partnership broadens our awareness of how interconnected God’s mission is at the local, national and global levels.

Jesus invites us as friends to follow his commandment of love and bear fruit that will last (John 15:12-17). Like Paul and Titus, we become partners with each other and with Christ in united and mutual service (II Corinthians 8:16-24). Guided by Christ’s humility, we work to empty ourselves of all pride, power, sin, and privilege so that God may be glorified (Philippians 2:5-11). Within and beyond our connectional community, doing mission in such true partnership opens us to opportunities for mutual encouragement, mutual transformation, mutual service and mutual renewal.

The practice of partnership guides our whole connectional church. It guides us individually as members, officers and pastors. It guides us collectively as congregations, presbyteries, synods, General Assembly ministries and related institutions. Through prayer, humility and a mutual openness to one another, we develop a cooperative witness that exalts the Lord we serve.

The discipline of partnership assumes that mission can best be done by joining hands with those who share a common vision. Partnership in mission involves two or more organizations who agree to submit themselves to a common task or goal, mutually giving and receiving and surrounded by prayer so that God's work can be more faithfully accomplished. Theologically and biblically, partnership is based on the fundamental belief that God's love for the world is greater than any one church can possibly comprehend or realize.

Knowing the breadth of God's love for the world, we affirm that there are different forms of partnership with different patterns of cooperation. We may join around a common goal with other churches, with secular organizations or with other faith communities. In any case, work for the common good extends partnership — and the service of God's mission — to all people.

Principles of Partnership

In doing mission in partnership, we seek to be guided by certain principles:

1. **Shared Grace and Thanksgiving.** Partnership calls all partners to confess individual and collective failings, to seek forgiveness for complicity with powers of injustice, to repent from histories of shared exploitation, to move toward common celebration of Christ's sacrifice of reconciliation, and together to give thanks and praise to God for all gifts of grace and renewal.
2. **Mutuality and Interdependence.** Partnership calls for interdependence in which mutual aid comes to all, where mutual accountability resides, and no partner dominates another because of affluence or "expertise."
3. **Recognition and Respect.** Partnership calls all partners to respect other partners in Christ, and to recognize one another's equal standing before God.
4. **Open Dialogue and Transparency.** Partnership calls for open dialogue where a common discernment of God's call to mission is sought, where Scripture is the base for prophetic challenge, where local initiative is respected, where differences are meditated in a Christ-like manner, and where all partners are transparent with regard to their activities and support.
5. **Sharing of Resources.** Partnership calls for the sharing of all types of resources: human, cultural, financial and spiritual; especially including friendly conversation and faith-transforming life experiences.

Taken from PC(USA) website

How is the Presbyterian Church Governed?

Presbyterian polity is a method of church governance typified by the rule of assemblies of presbyters, or elders. Each local church is governed by a body of elected elders usually called the **session** or *consistory*. Groups of local churches are governed by a higher assembly of elders known as the **presbytery**; presbyteries can be grouped into a **synod**, and Presbyteries, along with synods nationwide often join together in a **general assembly**. Specific roles in church services are reserved for an ordained minister or pastor known as a *teaching elder*. Presbyterian polity was developed as a rejection of governance by hierarchies of single bishops (episcopal polity), but also differs from the Congregationalist polity in which each congregation is independent. In contrast to the other two forms, authority in the Presbyterian polity flows both from the top down (as higher assemblies exercise limited but important authority over individual congregations, e.g., only the presbytery can ordain ministers, install pastors, and start up, close, and approve relocating a congregation) and from the bottom up (e.g., the moderator and officers are not appointed from above but are rather elected by and from among the members of the assembly). This theory of governance developed in Geneva under John Calvin and was introduced to Scotland by John Knox after his period of exile in Geneva. It is strongly associated with French, Dutch, Swiss and Scottish Reformation movements, and the Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

Basis

Presbyterian polity is constructed on specific assumptions about the form of the government intended by the Bible:

- "*Bishop*" (Koine Greek "*episcopos*") and "*elder*" (Koine Greek "*presbyteros*") are synonymous terms. *Episcopos* means literally *overseer* and describes the function of the elder, rather than the maturity of the officer. A bishop holds the highest office of the church (there is no Patriarch or Pope over bishops). Preaching (the ministry of the Word) and the administration of the sacraments is ordinarily entrusted to specially trained elders called "teaching elders") in each local congregation, approved for these tasks by a governing presbytery and called by the local congregation.
- In addition to these ministers, there are also "others ... with gifts for government ... commonly called "ruling elders".
- Pastoral care, church discipline, leadership and legislation are committed to the care of ruling assemblies of presbyters among whom the ministers and "ruling elders" are equal participants.
- All Christian people together are the priesthood (see priesthood of all believers), on behalf of whom the elders are called to serve by the consent of the congregation.

Presbyterianism uses a conciliar method of church government (that is, leadership by the group or council). Thus, the teaching and ruling elder govern together as a group, and at all times the office is for the service of the congregation, to pray for them and to encourage them in the faith. The elders together exercise oversight (episcopacy) over the local congregation, with superior groups of elders gathered on a regional basis exercising wider oversight. Presbyterians typically have viewed this method of government as approximating that of the New Testament and earliest churches.

Presbyterianism is also distinct from congregationalism, in that individual congregations are not independent, but are answerable to the wider church, through its councils (presbyteries, synods and assemblies). Moreover, the ordained ministry possesses a distinct responsibility for preaching and sacraments. Congregational churches are sometimes called "Presbyterian" if they are governed by a council of elders; but the difference is that every local congregation is independent, and its elders are accountable to its members, and congregationalism's wider assemblies are not ordinarily empowered to enforce discipline. Thus, these are ruled by elders only at the level of the congregations, which are united with one another by covenants of trust.

Offices

The Ruling Elder

There are two types of elder; the *teaching elder* and the *ruling elder*. The elders are persons chosen from among the congregation and ordained for this service. Beyond that, practices vary: sometimes elders are elected by the congregation for fixed terms. However ruling elders retain their ordination for life, even though they serve fixed terms. Even after the end of their terms, they may be active in presbyteries or other bodies, and may serve communion. In addition to sitting on the session and other church courts, ruling elders have duties as individuals.

The Teaching Minister

Presbyteries are responsible for the ordination of teaching elders and for preparing candidates for that office. Ministers called to a particular congregation are called *pastors*, and serve a function analogous to clergy in other denominations. Teaching elders may be considered equal in status with the ruling elders, but they have a distinct function. They are the primary preachers and teachers, celebrants of sacraments. Men and women are eligible for ordination as teaching or ruling elders.

Councils decide on what grounds a person may be ordained, but the ordination of ministers is the right of the presbytery, and the right to extend a call to a minister is the privilege of the members of the congregation.

The Deacon

The ministry of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion, and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry.

Councils

The Session

Elders make decisions for the local congregation through an elected council called the *Session* (Latin. *sessio* from *sedere* "to sit"). The members of the session are the teaching elder(s) (pastor) of that congregation and the installed ruling elders. The pastor(s) serves as moderator and thus presides over the session (*primus inter pares*). All elders have an equal vote in the session. In the Polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the pastor and associate pastor(s) have a vote as members of the session on any and all matters. The Pastor is not a voting member of the congregation.

The Presbytery

In Presbyterianism, congregations are united in accountability to a regional body called the *presbytery*. Presbyteries are made up of the teaching elders and a number of elders according the membership of the congregation, as well as other teaching elders such as theological college professors, chaplains, and retired ministers. When there is a larger number of teaching elders than ruling elders, additional ruling elders are appointed to redress the imbalance. The commissioners of the presbytery are expected to exercise their own judgment and are not required to represent the majority view of their congregations.

The officers of a presbytery are a moderator, a clerk, a treasurer and an executive presbyter (called in Tres Rios General Missioner). The moderator acts as chair of presbytery meetings and has a casting, but not deliberative, vote. As with the moderators of synods and assemblies, the moderatorship is a *primus inter pares* position appointed by the presbytery itself. The moderator is addressed as "moderator" during meetings, but his/her position has no bearing outside of the presbytery meeting and affords him/her no special place in other courts, although typically the moderator will conduct worship and oversee ordinations and installations of ministers as a "liturgical" bishop, and other ordinances which are seen as acts of the presbytery.

The clerk takes minutes and deals with the correspondence of the presbytery. Treasurer is responsible for the finances, bank accounts expenditures according an annual budget approved by the presbytery. General Missioner staffs all the committees of the Presbytery and is considered as “presbytery pastor”. They are elected for specific terms. Presbyteries meet at regularity during the year.

The Synod

The synod is the intermediate council serving as a corporate expression of the church throughout its region. It shall consist of not fewer than three presbyteries within a specific geographic region. When a synod meets, it shall be composed of commissioners elected by the presbyteries. Each presbytery shall elect at least one ruling elder and one teaching elder to serve as commissioners to synod. A synod may decide, with the approval of a two-thirds majority of its presbyteries, to reduce its function.

The General Assembly

The *general assembly* is the highest court of Presbyterian polity. Each presbytery selects a number of its members to be commissioners to the general assembly. The general assembly is chaired by its own moderator, who is elected to a single term. He or she is addressed as moderator during meetings, but like the other moderators, his/her position has no bearing outside of the assembly meeting and affords him/her no special place in other courts. He or she presides over meetings of the assembly, and may be called on in a representative function for the remainder of the year. The stated clerk and deputy clerk of the general assembly administer the minutes, correspondence, and business of the assembly. General assembly meets every other year. The general assembly speaks for herself and not in representation of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Changes in the Constitution have to be approved by the majority of the presbyteries, before being enacted by the general assembly.

What has changed with the new Form of Government?

The same basic polity that has defined the core work of councils (governing bodies) continues with the new Form of Government. This revision is not so much about “what” councils do – our essential polity – as it is about “who” and “how.” Increased flexibility in structures and procedures in a less regulatory environment is the major change. The new Form of Government allows councils to increase their focus on God’s work and how the church can most effectively participate in that work in each situation, rather than being focused on an increasingly lengthy and burdensome list of requirements.

What are the changes to terminology in the new Form of Government?

Former term

office
minister of the Word and Sacrament
elder
commissioned lay pastor
governing body

New term

ordered ministry
teaching elder
ruling elder
commissioned ruling elder
council

Will the change in terminology affect any of the six agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?

Under the new Form of Government, the GAMC will no longer be a council, but an agency of a council (the General Assembly). Therefore, the GAMC will have a new name in the coming weeks. The names of the other five agencies will remain the same (Board of Pensions, Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Foundation, Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, and Presbyterian Publishing Corporation).

What does the new Form of Government say about congregations?

In the old Form of Government, the congregation served as an essential mission arm of the presbytery and the larger church. In the new Form of Government, the congregation is the basic form of the church, but is not of itself a sufficient form of the church.

Sections of the new Book of Order

F – Foundations of the Presbyterian Polity

G – Form of Government

W – Directory of Worship

D – Book of Discipline

In this *Book of Order*

- (1) **SHALL** and **IS TO BE/ARE TO BE** signify practice that is mandated,
- (2) **SHOULD** signifies practice that is strongly recommended,
- (3) **IS APPROPRIATE** signifies practice that is commended as suitable,
- (4) **MAY** signifies practice that is permissible but not required.

New Form of Government: What DOES CHANGE

Basic terminology has been changed:

Minister of Word and Sacrament=Teaching Elder

Elder=Ruling Elder

Governing body=Council

| <i>New Book of Order Reference</i> | <i>Content of the Reference</i> | <i>What is the change?</i> |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| G.1.04 | Categories of membership | No longer an inactive membership roll |
| G.1.0501 | Quorums for congregational meetings | Congregations need to set their own quorum, no longer a set percentage G-7.0305 |
| G.10501 | Terms of Call reviewed annually | Conducted at congregational meetings but not required on an annual basis G.7.0302a |
| G.10502 | Call for a congregational meeting | Congregations need to set their own rule for adequate public notice, no longer 2 successive Sundays G-7.0303b |
| G.1.0505 | Signatures on congregational minutes | Moderator no longer needs to sign congregational minutes G-7.0307 |
| G.2.0503, G.2.0508 | Categories of membership for teaching elders | No longer an inactive list G-11.0406c |
| G.2.0504 | Installed pastoral relationships | Pastor, co-pastor and associates. Easier process for a co-pastor. No longer specific designated pastor but can have a pastor for a “designated time” G-6.0202b |
| G.2.0504 | Temporary pastoral relationships | No titles or descriptions for any temporary relationship G-14.0550 |
| G.2.0504c | Associates | Associates may become the next installed pastor with COM approval and $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of presbytery G-14.0513 |
| G.2.0504c | Interims | Former terms interims and supply pastors. . .these folks may now become the next installed pastor with COM approval and $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of presbytery G-14.0513 |
| None | Parish associates | There will no longer be a designation of Parish Associate G-14.0570 |
| G.2.0505 | Ministers from other denominations | Presbyteries have more flexibility based on mission strategy G-11.0404, G-11.0405 |
| G.2.0605 | Pastors serving the presbytery in temporary positions | Presbytery provides for the rule of who may serve in a temporary position. . .there are no longer distinctions of churches that the denomination is in correspondence with or in communion with G-11.0405 |
| G.2.0605 | Inquirers and candidates in relation to their sessions | Session and Presbytery oversight is no longer spelled out in specifics G-14.0412, G-14.0413 |
| None | Annual reports | Annual reports for inquirers and candidates are not mandated G-14.0421 |
| G.2.0608 | Transfer of an inquirer or candidate to another presbytery | More flexibility in transferring. Silence on when the transfer to a new church home takes place G-14.0461 |
| G.2.0610 | Alternate means exams | You no longer have to have failed the exam twice to request an alternate means. Still needs a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of presbytery G-14.0472 |
| G.2.0702 | Place of ordination | Presbytery of call examines and now ordains G-14.0481 |
| G.2.0903 | Moderator of congregational meeting when a dissolution | Presbytery now appoints moderator, previously, the pastor moderated (G-14.0612) |

| | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| G.2.1001 and following | CLP's (now called Commissioned Ruling Elders) | Training more flexible (g-14.0560) |
| G.2.1103a and b | Certified Christian Educators | No accreditation process is outlined (G-14.0720) |
| G.2.1103b | Certified Christian Educators at Presbytery | CCE may now have voice and vote, previously voice only (12.0730b) |
| G.4.0103 | Committee on Representation | COR's membership is not specified (G-9.0105a) |
| G.3.0104 | Length of term of office for Presbytery Moderator | Term of office no longer defined (G-9.0202b) |
| G.3.0109, G.3.0307 | Constitutional Committees | Councils may designate their own committees and commissions...COM, CPM are no longer required (G-11.0502- 03 and G-14.0410) |
| G.3.0109 | Administrative Commissions | Membership numbers no longer dictated (G-9.0504b) |
| G.3.0111 | Nominating Committees for all councils | No longer stipulations on composition or terms of service (G-9.0801a) |
| G.3.0203 | Quorum for sessions | No longer designated by Book of Order...sessions make their own rule |
| G.0204a | Rolls to be maintained | No longer an inactive roll; No longer need to keep marriages or differentiate between infant and adult baptisms (10.0302b) |
| G.3.0301 | Parity of commissioners to presbytery | No longer a formula for basic parity; now by presbytery rule (G-11.0101a) |

New Form of Government: What DOES NOT CHANGE

| New Book of Order Reference | Content of the Reference | Old Book of Order Reference |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| F.3.0101 | God alone is Lord of the conscience | G-1.0301 |
| F.3.0205 | Decisions are made by majority vote | G.4.0301e |
| F.3.0206 | Higher bodies have the right of review over lower bodies | G-4.0301f |
| F.30207 | The individual Council (governing body) is the ordaining body | G.4.0301g |
| G.1.02 | Congregations can only be organized by authority of presbyteries | G.7.0101 |
| G.1.0302 | No person shall be denied membership not related to profession of faith | G-5.0103 |
| G.1.0503 | The business that may be conducted at congregational meetings | G-7.0304 |
| G.1.0504 | If moderators are unable to moderate | G-7.0306 |
| G.2.0102 | Governance of the church is representative and the rights of God's people to elect presbyters and deacons is inalienable | G-6.0107 |
| G.2.0105 | Freedom of Conscience within certain bounds | G-6.0108 |
| G.2.0202 | Deacons are under the authority of the session | G-6.0404 |
| G.2.0401 | Congregations elect deacons and elders | G-14.0221 |
| G.2.0402 | Elders and deacons to be trained by session | G-14.0240 |
| G.2.0404 | Terms of service for elders and deacons defined | G-14.0222 |
| G.2.0406 | Release from office | G-6.0600 |
| G.2.0502 | Presbytery validates the ministry of teaching elders | G-11.0403 |
| G.2.0601 | There are still two phases for those going into the Ministry: inquiry and candidacy | G-14.0401 |
| G.20602 | 6 month church membership requirement for a person, 1 year inquiry and one year candidacy for those seeking to go into ministry | G.14-4030 |
| G.20610 | Exceptions for ordination exams... alternate means still requires $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of presbytery | G-14.0470 |
| G.2.0610 | Inquiry/candidacy time frame of one year can be changed by $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of presbytery | G-14.0473 |
| G.2.0801-02 | PNC elected to fill a pastoral vacancy | G-14.0503-31 |
| G.2.0803 | Presbytery needs to be consulted before call extended | G-14.0532 |
| G.2.0804 | Terms of call must meet presbytery minimums including pension | G-14.0534 |
| G.2.0901 | Dissolution of installed call only by presbytery | G-14.0610 |
| G.2.0904 | Presbytery may dissolve a pastoral relationship in difficulty | G-14.0613 |
| G.2.0905 | Former pastors may officiate by invitation only | G-14.0603 |
| G.3.0103 | Committees on Representation still mandatory, but composition is up to the council | G-9.0105a |
| G.3.0105 | The right of dissent and protest is preserved | G.9-0303-04 |
| G.3.0106 | Each council shall develop a manual of operations | G-9.0405 |
| G-3.0106 | Presbyteries may level Per Capita, but new language is added : in no case shall the authority of the session to direct its benevolences be compromised | G-9.0404d |
| G.3.0107 | Records are the property of the council and clerk shall make arrangements to preserve them | G.9.0406 |
| G.3.0108 | The right of review of higher councils to lower councils | G-9.0407 |
| G.3.0108b | The right of special administrative review is maintained | G-9.0408 |
| G.3.0113 | All councils shall have a full financial review | G-10.0401d |
| G.3.0205 | Session elects treasurer | G-10.0401 |
| G.3.0301 | Minimum # of churches to form a presbytery - 10 | G-11.0102 |

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----------------------------------|
| G.3.0302 | Presbyteries: elect graders ord exams, est. minimum compensation, assume original jurisdiction when necessary, consider/ act on congregations requests re. property | G-11.0103 |
| G.3.0401 | Synods need to have 3 presbyteries | G-12.0101 |
| G.3.0405 | Synods need to meet at least biennially, can set its own quorum | G.12.0101 |
| G.3.0501 | GA. . .same formula for number of commissioners, same quorum, same guidelines for special called meetings | G.13-0102b |
| Chapter 4 | Regarding civil law and property is essentially the same | G-8.000-8.0100ff |
| G4.0203 | All property is held in trust for the denomination | G-8.0201 |
| G.4.0302 | Ministers, elders, deacons and Christian Educators are mandatory reports to both ecclesiastical and civil authorities | G-6.0204, 6.0304, 6.0402, 14.0732 |
| G.6.02 | An advisory committee to the constitution shall be in effect, same number of people | G-13.0112 |
| G.6.04 | Amending the constitution is the same process | G-18.0301ff |

Case Studies

The Office and Duties of Elders

Case No.1

A woman who is member of the church but has been living in a community 300 miles away from the church for nine years and does not attend the church, telephones the pastor to ask that their baby be baptized . At first she asks the pastor simply to come to her in-laws' home to do the baptism privately.

Questions:

1. *Can the pastor do that?*
2. *Does the pastor have any power to administer baptism or communion without going to the session first?*
3. *What about the vows the woman and her husband are going to take during the baptism?*
4. *What happened that the woman continued on the membership roll for nine years with this lack of participation in the life of the church?*

Let's assume the woman lives within the community but seldom attends and her older children have never participated in Sunday school.

Questions:

1. *Is the session obligated to approve the Baptism?*
2. *What about her vows?*
3. *How do you handle this request?*

Consult: W-2.3011 - W-2.3012 - W-2.3013 - W-2.3014 - G-3.0204a – G-3.0201b – W-3.3600 - W-6.2001 – W-6.2005 – W-4.2002 – W-4.2003

Case No.2

A member of the congregation works with the local Hospice program and we all know what a good program that is and what a great work it does. One Sunday morning that member stands up during the announcement portion of the service to say that the Hospice is in serious financial need and he has put out a collection plate at the back of the church for anyone who might want to donate.

Questions:

1. *Why should this not have happened?*
2. *How should it have been handled?*

Consult: G-3.0201c – W-2.5000

Case No.3

The congregation has elected the next class of elders. But those elders who now sit on the session have some grave reservations about one of those newly-elected people. It is known that he is an alcoholic who beats his wife and children. On occasion he is so hung-over that he cannot attend worship. A couple of times during night meetings he showed up smelling alcohol and was belligerent creating problems with other people. Those on session just cannot persuade themselves that this man should be ordained as elder (or worse, that he had already been ordained, but session does not think he should be allowed to come back to the session)

Questions:

- 1. Is the session either obligated to ordain, and hence seat him on the session or to allow him to return to the session since he was properly elected by the congregation?*
- 2. How should this situation have been handled?*

Consult: G-2.0104 – G-2.0401

Case No.4

A session got to checking around one day and discovered that one of the Sunday School teachers was using Jehovah Witness teaching materials. When the teacher was confronted, she protested that the assigned materials were too hard for her and the children, so she got the Jehovah Witness materials because they were easier to use.

Questions:

- 1. Who picks the Christian Education materials for the church?*
- 2. What if the Women's group decided to start using the Jehovah Witness materials, can they do that?*
- 3. What can the session do if the woman persists on continuing to use that material?*

Consult: W-6.2006 - G-3.0201c – F-2.00

Case No.5

A kind soul, in memory of her departed husband decided to donate the money to buy or build a heated bird bath statue to be placed in the church courtyard. She was shocked when the session said, "Thanks, but no thanks." It is difficult to make a decision because the Book of Order does not have a specific regulation about this.

Questions:

- 1. First, as a matter of common sense, why did the session refuse the memorial?*
- 2. Second, from the Book of Order, isn't session obligated to receive any and all memorials?*
- 3. Now broaden the question: Isn't the session likewise obligated to receive any and all financial gifts and offerings to the church? (and wouldn't the session do so anyway?)*
- 4. How you would handle this situation?*

Consult: W-1.3034 – W-4.10002 - G-3.0201c - W-2.5000 - W-2.5003

CHURCH OFFICER TRAINING

Session V

Constitutional Questions to Officers

Effective Leadership

How to Plan an Event?

Meeting Minutes Format

**Guidelines for Presbyterians during Times
of Disagreement**

**Why should your session and congregation agree
to use the Guidelines?**

**History, traditions and Manual of Operations of
the local congregation. Church officer duties.
Conversations about the future of the church:
Concerns and joys.**

Constitutional Questions to Officers

The teaching elder shall ask those preparing to be ordained or installed to stand before the congregation and to answer the following questions (W-4.4003)

| Question | Content Area |
|---|---|
| 1) Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? | Personal Faith |
| 2) Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you? | Doctrine The Authority of Scripture |
| 3) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God? | Doctrine Theology, the Confessions, and Authority in the Church |
| 4) Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions? | |
| 5) Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit? | Governance and Discipline |
| 6) Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world? | Individual Commitment |
| 7) Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church? | |
| 7) Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love? | |
| 8) (For elder) Will you be a faithful elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in governing bodies of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ? | Duties of the Office |
| 9) (For deacon) Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need? In your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ? | |

Effective Leadership

- **To Run an Efficient Meeting**

- a. Prepared, written and distributed agenda
- b. Indicate the expected length of time needed to handle each item or at least keep this in your mind as you develop the agenda
- c. Begins on time, ends on time
- d. Begin with prayer and some sharing questions
- e. Consider having a 15 minutes sharing time at the beginning, then distribute the agenda.
- f. Plan 1 or 2 discussion questions, so everyone can talk.
- g. Move a discussion through systematic problem solving by regularly summarizing and moving the group to decisions and action.
- h. Teach members to do their homework ahead of time, so that everyone is ready when you come to a particular discussion.
- i. End each major discussion by asking questions of implementation.
- j. Who will take responsibility for this? When will it be done? Who needs to be informed?
- k. As you end do the implementation and action plans.
- l. Make sure before you leave that every member is clear on what is expected of them and the deadline for getting back to you or the committee or by when it needs to be accomplished.

- **Discuss what it means to be a responsible committee member.**

- a. Follow through when you say you will do it.
- b. Do not take responsibilities you know are too time consuming for you at this time.
- c. Be on time to meetings.
- d. Be fair and consistent.
- e. Be well informed.
- f. If you cannot be at a meeting call let the moderator know in advance and then follow up for what happened in the meeting and any action you need to take.
- g. If you do what you are responsible for then someone else will not have to pick up the slack.
- h. Be confidential; things may need to be said in a meeting for informed decision making that need to stay in that meeting.
- i. People will be hesitant to discuss openly if they know their opinions and comments will be discussed later.

How to Plan an Event

Planning Page

Name of event _____

Date of event _____

Location of event _____

Chairperson _____

Planning committee members _____

Planning committee meeting dates _____

Purpose of event _____

Estimated number of people expected _____

| What Must Be Done to Hold This Event? | Date by Which Action Must Be Complete | Who Will Do This? |
|--|--|--------------------------|
| 2. _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 3. _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 4. _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 5. _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 6. _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 7. _____ | _____ | _____ |

List resources/supplies needed for this event:

Who Will Be Responsible? _____

What Publicity Is Required to Tell People About This Event?

Who Will Handle This? _____

What Are the Anticipated Expenses for This Event? _____

How much funding is available? _____

What is the budget? _____

Evaluation

Was this event effective? _____ Ineffective? _____

Why? _____

Appropriate? _____ Inappropriate? _____

Why? _____

Did it accomplish the purpose stated above? _____

How? _____

Would you suggest repeating the event? _____

Why? _____

How Could the Event Be Improved? _____

How Many Attended? _____

Meeting Minutes Format

These days, many of us find ourselves in the position of taking meeting minutes without a clue of how to go about it. The following is a guide for making this task easier:

- Make sure that all of the essential elements are noted, such as type of meeting, name of the organization, date and time, name of the chair or facilitator, main topics and the time of adjournment. For formal and corporate meetings include approval of previous minutes, and all resolutions.
- Prepare an outline based on the agenda ahead of time, and leave plenty of white space for notes. By having the topics already written down, you can jump right on to a new topic without pause.
- Prepare a list of expected attendees and check off the names as people enter the room. Or, you can pass around an attendance sheet for everyone to sign as the meeting starts.
- To be sure about who said what, make a map of the seating arrangement, and make sure to ask for introductions of unfamiliar people.
- Don't make the mistake of recording every single comment, but concentrate on getting the gist of the discussion and taking enough notes to summarize it later. Remember that minutes are the official record of what happened, not what was said, at a meeting.
- Use whatever device is comfortable for you, a notepad, a laptop computer, a tape recorder, a steno pad, shorthand. Many people routinely record important meetings as a backup to their notes.
- Be prepared! Study the issues to be discussed and ask a lot of questions ahead of time. If you have to fumble for understanding while you are making your notes, they won't make any sense to you later.
- Don't wait too long to type up the minutes, and be sure to have them approved by the chair or facilitator before distributing them to the attendees.
- Don't be intimidated, you may be called upon many times to write meeting minutes, and the ability to produce concise, coherent minutes is widely admired and valued.

Example of Minutes Format

| Name of Organization: | | | |
|-----------------------|------------|--------|--------------------|
| Purpose of Meeting: | | | |
| Date/Time: | | | |
| Chair: | | | |
| Topic | Discussion | Action | Person Responsible |
| 1. | | | |
| 2. | | | |

Guidelines for Presbyterians during Times of Disagreement

Seeking to be Faithful Together

In a spirit of trust and love, we promise we will...

Give them
a hearing...
listen before we
answer
John 7:51 and
Proverbs 18:13

- 1 Treat each other respectfully so as to build trust, believing that we all desire to be faithful to Jesus the Christ;
 - a. we will keep our conversations and communications open for candid and forthright exchange,
 - b. we will not ask questions or make statements in a way which will intimidate or judge others.
- 2 Learn about various positions on the topic of disagreement.
- 3 State what we think we heard and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to be sure we understand each other..

Speak the truth
in love
Ephesians 4:15

- 4 Share our concerns directly with individuals or groups with whom we have disagreements in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with Jesus' teachings.
- 5 Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence or integrity;
 - a. we will not engage in name-calling or labelling of others prior to, during, or following the discussion.
- 6 Share our personal experiences about the subject of disagreement so that others may more fully understand our concerns.

Maintain the
unity of the
spirit in the
bond of peace
Ephesians 4:3

- 7 Indicate where we agree with those of other viewpoints as well as where we disagree.
- 8 Seek to stay in community with each other though the discussion may be vigorous and full of tension;
 - a. we will be ready to forgive and be forgiven.
- 9 Follow these additional guidelines when we meet in decision-making bodies:
 - a. urge persons of various points of view to speak and promise to listen to these positions seriously;
 - b. seek conclusions informed by our points of agreement;
 - c. be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of those who do not agree with the majority and respect their rights of conscience;
 - d. abide by the decision of the majority, and if we disagree with it and wish to change it, work for that change in ways which are consistent with these Guidelines.
- 10 Include our disagreement in our prayers, not praying for the triumph of our viewpoints, but seeking God's grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly, and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all.

Adopted by the 204th General Assembly (1992) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for use by sessions and congregations

Why should your session and congregation agree to use the Guidelines?

As Presbyterians, we are called to work for the “peace, unity and purity of the Church” (Book of Order) as we seek to be faithful to God’s work in the world.

However, disagreements and conflicts are inevitable in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as we try to be faithful. They exist within committees, congregations, presbyteries, synods, at General Assemblies and in the national life of the denomination.

Conflicts are inevitable in all of life and certainly in the church. The history of the church is filled with conflicts and disagreements. Several of Paul’s letters address the conflicts which were common in the early church.

There have been and are going to be disagreements as Christians attempt to discern God’s work in the world and as we interpret scripture.

Conflicts can be harmful and even destructive. They can cause individuals a great deal of pain and the community of faith immeasurable damage. Congregations have been divided; denominations have experienced schisms.

At the same time, conflicts can be an opportunity for new insights, learning, and individual and corporate growth. Disagreements can illuminate a topic in helpful ways and can present solutions to problems which previously had not been seen. The successful resolution of conflict can also bind people together in a powerful way.

The Bible contains many stories of conflict and disagreement and much advice about how they can be addressed. As those stories indicate, God is already present wherever there is brokenness, granting wholeness and peace. God promises to be with us in times of disagreement and calls us to reconciliation, trust, love and forgiveness.

We realize that our perspectives are limited, so to help us affirm each other, enhance our community, stay open to the viewpoints of others and be sensitive to cultural diversity, we commit ourselves to the Guidelines in a spirit of prayer, trust, and love, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Adopted by the 204th General Assembly (1992) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

History/traditions and Manual of Operations of the local congregation. **Church officer duties. Conversations about the future of the church:** **Problems and joys.**

Each congregation will conduct this part providing local information about the mission and organization of the local church. This is the moment to “personalize” this training according to the needs of the local congregation.

Appendix

Answer keys for each worksheet

Worksheet # 1

The purpose of this worksheet is to know what your new elders and deacons believe about the Bible. It is recommended to review this worksheet again after you finish the first session. Responses may vary.

Worksheet # 2

History

- 1- Ulrich Zwingli
- 2- John Calvin
- 3- Lutherans and Anabaptists
- 4- The church reformed and always reforming

Beliefs

- 1- The Priesthood of All Believers
- 2- ...bread and wine are unchanged but Christ is truly present

Essential Tenets

- 1- Could be any of the nine principles (responses may vary)
- 2- God elects people for service and salvation (tenet #6)
- 3- ... means that Scripture reveals God's grace in Jesus Christ (tenet #4)

Confessions

- 1-A Confession is: a) an act of Christian faith - b) a document of Christian faith
- 2-The three directions of Confession of faith are: a) God - b) the church itself - c) the world
- 3-Reformed confessions emphasize: a- the ecumenical character of reformed churches;
b- Faith and practice; c- the claim of God on all life; d- grace and law
- 4-The Nicene Creed addressed the theme of Nature of Christ
- 5-.....the reunion of the northern and southern branches of Presbyterianism in USA

Worksheet # 3

- | | | |
|----------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1- True | 9- False | 17- True |
| 2- True | 10- True | 18- True |
| 3- True | 11- True | 19- False |
| 4- False | 12- False | 20- False |
| 5- True | 13- False | 21- False |
| 6- False | 14- True | 22- True |
| 7- False | 15- True according Calvin | 23- True according Calvin |
| 8- False | 16- True | |

Worksheet # 4

The Head of the Church

- 1- Jesus Christ is the head of the church

The Great Ends of the Church

- 2-....salvation
- 3-....the shelter, nurture and the spiritual fellowship of the children of God

- 4-for the maintenance of divine worship
- 5-for preservation of the truth
- 6-for the promotion of social righteousness
- 7-the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world

Historical Principles of Church Order

- 8- God alone is the Lord of the conscience; this means that right or private judgments in all matters that respect religion are universal and unalienable.
- 9- Everyto establish the terms of admission into its fellowship and the qualifications of its ministers and members
- 10- Jesus Christ appointed officers not only to preach but also to exercise discipline
- 11- Truth is in order to goodness
- 12- There are truth and forms... may differ...It is the duty...to exercise mutual forbearance...
- 13- Election of persons...is in the hands of that society
- 14- The Holy Scripture are the only rule of faith and manners

Principles of Presbyterian Government

- 15- The particular congregations..., taken collectively, constitute one church
- 16- The church is governed by presbyters that may be ruling elders or teaching elders.
- 17- The larger part of the church shall govern the smaller
- 18- Presbyters... are to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ
- 19- Decisions shall be reached in councils by vote and a majority shall govern
- 20- Ruling elder, teaching elder and deacons are ordained only by the authority of a council