



Further Ministerial Guides & Guardrails

Our Constitution additionally sets forth Ministerial Guides, which are adaptations to documents originally drafted by representative Puritan pastors and theologians, first published in London, in 1645. These are adapted by Reformed Heritage Church to align with and support our application of biblical doctrines as expressed in our Second London Confession of Faith. Our Constitution states that these resources “shall be utilized as further guides and guardrails for the health and vitality of this Church.”

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MINISTERIAL GUIDE I: **BIBLICAL FOUNDATION**

Chapter I

Christ, the King and Head of the Church

1. Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government is, whose name is called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and justice, from henceforth even forever, having all power given unto him in heaven and in earth by the Father, who raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come, and put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all; he being ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things, received gifts for his church

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and gave offices necessary for the building of his church, for making disciples of all nations and perfecting his saints.

2. There is therefore but one King and Head of the church, the only Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, who rules in his church by his Word and Spirit. His mediatorial office includes all the offices in his church. It belongs to his majesty from his throne of glory not only to rule his church directly but also to use the ministry of men in ruling and teaching his church through his Word and Spirit, thus exercising through men his own authority and enforcing his own laws. The authority of all such ministerial office rests upon his appointment, who has ordained government in his church, revealed its nature to us in his Word, and promised his presence in the midst of his church as this government is exercised in his name.

3. Christ orders his church by the rule of his Word; the pattern of officers, ordinances, government, and discipline set forth in Scripture is therefore to be observed as the instruction of the Lord. Church government must conform to the scriptural pattern and follow the specific provisions revealed in the New Testament. In those circumstances not specifically ordered by Scripture the church must observe the general rules of the Word. Among the biblical admonitions applicable to all circumstances are those requiring that all things must be done decently, in order, and for edification. A particular form of church government is bound to set forth what Christ requires for the order of his church and to arrange particular circumstances only in the manner, to the degree, and for the purposes that the Lord of the church has appointed in Scripture. Nevertheless, while such scriptural government is necessary for the perfection of church order, it is not essential to the existence of the church visible.

4. Jesus Christ, having ascended into heaven, abides in his church by the Holy Spirit whom he has sent. Through his Spirit he has given his Word revealing his ordinances; through the Spirit also he exerts his saving and governing power in the teaching of his Word and the administration of his ordinances. Only by the gifts and calling of the Spirit are men endued and qualified for office in Christ's church.

Chapter II

The Church

1. Jesus Christ, being now exalted far above all principality and power, has erected in this world a kingdom, which is his church.

2. The universal church visible consists of all those persons, in every nation, together with their children, who make profession of saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and promise submission to his commandments.

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3. In accordance with the teaching of Scripture, the many members of this church universal are to be organized in local and regional churches, confessing a common faith and submitting to a common form of government.
4. The work of the church, in fellowship with and obedience to Christ, is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness. The means appointed by Christ through which the church does this work include the confession of the name of Christ before men; the exercise of fellowship in encouraging one another; the reading, teaching, and preaching of the Word of God; praying; singing; fasting; administering baptism and the Lord's Supper; collecting and distributing offerings; showing mercy; exercising discipline; and blessing the people.

Chapter III

The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

1. The power which Christ has committed to his church is not vested in the special officers alone, but in the whole body. All believers are endued with the Spirit and called of Christ to join in the worship, edification, and witness of the church which grows as the body of Christ fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplies, according to the working in due measure of each part. The power of believers in their general office includes the right to acknowledge and desire the exercise of the gifts and calling of the special offices. The regular exercise of oversight in a particular congregation is discharged by those who have been called to such work by vote of the people.
2. Those who join in exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction are the ministers of the Word or teaching elders, and other church governors, commonly called ruling elders. They alone must exercise this authority by delegation from Christ, since according to the New Testament these are the only permanent officers of the church with gifts for such rule.
3. All church power is only ministerial and declarative, for the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority; all its decisions should be founded upon the Word of God. "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship" (Confession of Faith, Chapter XX, Section 2).
4. All church power is wholly moral or spiritual. No church officers or judicatories possess any civil jurisdiction; they may not inflict any civil penalties nor may they seek the aid of the civil power in the exercise of their jurisdiction further than may be necessary for civil protection and security.

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5. Nevertheless, church government is a valid and authentic jurisdiction to which Christians are commanded to submit themselves. Therefore the decisions of church officers when properly rendered and if in accord with the Word of God “are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in his Word” (Confession of Faith, Chapter XXXI, Section 2).

Chapter IV

The Unity of the Church

1. Since the church of Christ is one body, united under and in one God and Father, one Lord, and one Spirit, it must give diligence to keep this unity in the bond of peace. To this end the church must receive those endowed with gifts of Christ as Christ himself, must submit to those whose call to govern in the church has been properly acknowledged, and in particular must learn of those with gifts of teaching the Word of God. Further, since every Christian is endowed with some gift for the edification of the body, he must minister this gift to the church as a faithful steward. Church government must maintain this fellowship in Christ and in the gifts of the Spirit and seek its restoration when it has been disrupted through schism.
2. It is the right and duty of those who rule in the church of God to maintain order and exercise discipline, for the preservation both of truth and duty. These officers and the whole church must censure or cast out the erroneous or scandalous, always observing the requirements of the Word of God, and seeking the honor of Christ’s name, the good of his church, and the reclamation of the offender.
3. The manifestation of the unity of the church requires that it be separate from the world. Apostasy in faith and life is destructive of the fellowship in Christ; only by rejecting such error can Christian fellowship be maintained. There are many antichrists, many false apostles and teachers. From these the church must turn away, and those who steadfastly hear the voice of false shepherds and follow them cannot be regarded as the sheep of Christ. There are organizations which falsely call themselves churches of God, and others which once were churches, but have become synagogues of Satan. Communion with such is spiritual adultery and an offense against Christ and his saints.
4. The visible unity of the Body of Christ, though not altogether destroyed, is greatly obscured by the division of the Christian church into different groups or denominations. In such denominations Christians exercise a fellowship toward each other in doctrine, worship, and order that they do not exercise toward other Christians. The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error, and some have gravely departed from apostolic purity; yet all of these which maintain through a sufficient discipline the Word

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and sacraments in their fundamental integrity are to be recognized as true manifestations of the church of Jesus Christ. All such churches should seek a closer fellowship, in accordance with the principles set forth above.

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MINISTERIAL GUIDE II: **Calling A Pastor**

1. Only biblically qualified elders will be called.
2. When a congregation desires to call a pastor it shall ordinarily choose a special committee from its own membership to assist it in selecting him. If the committee is not identical with the Body of Elders, invitations to preach to the congregation shall be issued only with the approval of the Body of Elders. No person shall be called by the congregation without the prior approval of the Body of Elders, except that any ten members entitled to vote or one-fifth of all those entitled to vote, which ever be the larger number, may present a nomination to the congregation, such nomination having been previously submitted to the special committee for its consideration.
3. When the special committee is prepared to make its report it shall inform the Body of Elders and present to it a copy of its proposed report so that the Body of Elders may consider such nominations as may be contemplated in the proposed report. The Body of Elders shall then, if it deems it advisable, convene a meeting of the congregation for the purpose of hearing the report of the committee and acting on it; it shall, however, always be the duty of the Body of Elders to convene the congregation.
4. When the meeting has been convened and the call of the meeting has been found in order, it is expedient that the moderator give an exhortation to the congregation suited to the purpose of its coming together. The special committee, or the Body of Elders, shall then present its report, after which the congregation shall determine whether it wishes to proceed to call a pastor.
5. If the congregation decides to vote to call a pastor, the moderator shall conduct the election. The voting shall be by ballot, a majority being required for election. If the vote is unanimous a call shall be drawn in due form. If there is a majority and a minority the moderator shall address the congregation seeking to persuade the minority to concur in the call. A ballot shall then be taken to determine the number concurring in the call. If there is still a minority unwilling to concur, the moderator shall advise the majority and the minority concerning their mutual responsibilities. A final ballot shall then be taken to determine the number desiring to prosecute the call in the circumstances.
6. When the congregation has determined to issue a call it shall by vote determine the terms of the call, and shall order it subscribed either by the electors, or by the Body of Elders or other representatives of its choice. The Body of Elders shall then draw up the call in proper form and see to its signing by the proper signatories.

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The moderator shall also certify as to the validity of the meeting of the congregation and that the call as presented has been prepared in all respects as directed by vote of the congregation.

A call from a congregation shall be in the following or like form:

The congregation of _____ Church being, on sufficient grounds, well satisfied with the ministerial qualifications of you _____, and having good hopes that your ministrations in the gospel will be profitable to our spiritual interests, do earnestly call and desire you to undertake the pastoral office in said congregation; promising you in the discharge of your duty all proper support, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord. And that you may be free from worldly care and employment, we promise and oblige ourselves to pay you the sum of _____ in regular _____ payments during the time of your being and continuing the regular pastor of this church, together with free use of a house and _____ vacation each year.

The Body of Elders shall require him to answer affirmatively the following questions:

- (1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- (2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
- (3) Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of this Church?
- (4) Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
- (5) Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote his glory in the gospel of his Son?
- (6) Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel, and the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?
- (7) Do you promise to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all private and personal duties which become you as a Christian and a minister of the gospel, as well as in all the duties of your office, endeavoring to adorn the profession of the gospel by your life, and walking with exemplary piety before the flock over which God shall make you overseer?
 - d. Under no circumstances shall such a person be permitted to undertake any of the duties contemplated in the call nor to occupy living quarters that are to be provided by the calling body, and he shall be strongly advised not to change his residence in any case, until after the call has been approved and his reception by the Body of Elders has been completed.

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A person receiving a call shall respond to it ordinarily within three weeks unless otherwise agreed to by the calling body.

The office of the minister is first in the church for dignity and usefulness, for, by our God's sovereign design, the ministry of the Word is the primary instrument in our Lord's gathering and perfecting of his church. The person who fills this office is designated in Scripture by different names expressive of his various duties. As he has the oversight of the flock of Christ, he is termed bishop. As he feeds them with spiritual food, he is termed pastor and teacher. As he serves Christ in his church, he is termed minister. As it is his duty to be grave and prudent, and an example to the flock, and to govern well in the house of God, he is termed elder. As he is sent to declare the will of God to sinners, and to beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, he is termed ambassador. As he is commanded to warn the house of Israel against the enemies of God and his Word, he is termed watchman. And, as he dispenses the manifold grace of God and the ordinances instituted by Christ, he is termed steward of the mysteries of God.

He shall instruct them concerning the duties of a congregation toward a pastor, and shall endeavor to give the people a proper sense of the solemnity of both ordination to the office and installation in the field of service.

Then, addressing the candidate, he shall propose to him the following questions:

- (1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- (2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
- (3) Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of this Church?
- (4) Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
- (5) Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote his glory in the gospel of his Son?
- (6) Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel and the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?
- (7) Do you promise to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all private and personal duties which become you as a Christian and a minister of the gospel, as well as in all the duties of your office, endeavoring to adorn the profession of the gospel by your life, and walking with exemplary piety before the flock over which God shall make you overseer?

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(8) Are you now willing to take the charge of this congregation, in agreement with your declaration when you accepted their call? And do you promise to discharge the duties of a pastor to them as God shall give you strength?

The candidate having answered these questions in the affirmative, the moderator shall propose to the people the following questions, to which they shall answer in the affirmative by holding up their right hands:

- (1) Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive _____, whom you have called to be your minister?
- (2) Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?
- (3) Do you promise to encourage him in his arduous labor and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?
- (4) And do you promise to continue to him, while he is your pastor, that worldly maintenance which you have promised, and whatever else you may see needful for the honor of religion and his comfort among you?

A time shall be appointed for the installation at such time as may appear most convenient and due notice thereof given to the congregation.

- (1) Are you now willing to take the charge of this congregation as its pastor, in agreement with your declaration when you accepted its call?
- (2) Do you conscientiously believe and declare, as far as you know your own heart, that in taking upon you this charge you are influenced by a sincere desire to promote the glory of God and the good of his church?
- (3) Do you solemnly promise that, by the assistance of the grace of God, you will endeavor faithfully to discharge all the duties of a pastor to this congregation, and will be careful to maintain a deportment in all respects becoming a minister of the gospel of Christ?

Having received satisfactory answers to all these questions, he shall propose to the people the following questions, to which they shall answer in the affirmative by holding up their right hands:

- (1) Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive _____, whom you have called to be your minister?
- (2) Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?



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(3) Do you promise to encourage him in his arduous labor and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?

(4) And do you promise to continue to him, while he is your pastor, that worldly maintenance which you have promised, and whatever else you may see needful for the honor of religion and his comfort among you?

If these questions have been satisfactorily answered the moderator shall pronounce and declare the minister being installed to be regularly constituted the pastor of that congregation. Solemn charges in the name of God shall then be given to the newly installed pastor and to the people, to persevere in the discharge of their mutual duties, and they shall both, by prayer, be commended to the grace of God and his holy keeping. At the conclusion of the service the pastor shall dismiss the congregation with a benediction.

MINISTERIAL GUIDE III: **The Book of Discipline**

Chapter I

The Nature and Purposes of Discipline

1. Church discipline is the exercise of that authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to the visible church for the preservation of its purity, peace, and good order.
2. Administrative discipline is concerned with the maintenance of good order in the government of the church in other than judicial cases. The purpose of its exercise is that all rights may be preserved and all obligations faithfully discharged.
3. Judicial discipline is concerned with the prevention and correction of offenses, an offense being defined as anything in the doctrine or practice of a member of the church which is contrary to the Word of God. The purpose of judicial discipline is to vindicate the honor of Christ, to promote the purity of his church, and to reclaim the offender.
4. All members of the church, both communicants and those who are members by virtue of baptism only, are under the care of the church, and subject to ecclesiastical discipline including administrative and judicial discipline.

Chapter II

Censure and Restoration

A. Censure

1. In judicial discipline there are five degrees of censure: admonition, rebuke, suspension, deposition, and excommunication. Censures shall be pronounced in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, as an act of the whole church, by the moderator on behalf of the trial judicatory.
2. If a person who has been adjudged guilty refuses or fails to present himself for censure at the time appointed, the trial judicatory shall cite him to appear at another time. If he does not appear after this citation, the censure shall be pronounced in his absence.

B. Degrees of Censure

1. Admonition

Admonition consists in tenderly and solemnly confronting the offender with his sin, warning him of his danger, and exhorting him to repentance and to greater fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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2. Rebuke

Rebuke is a form of censure more severe than admonition. It consists in setting forth the serious character of the offense, reproving the offender, and exhorting him to repentance and to more perfect fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Suspension

- a. Suspension is a form of censure by which one is deprived of the privileges of membership in the church, of office, or of both. It may be for a definite or an indefinite time. Suspension of an officer from the privileges of membership shall always be accompanied by suspension from office, but the latter does not necessarily involve the former.
- b. An officer or other member of the church, while under suspension, shall be the object of deep solicitude and earnest dealing to the end that he may be restored. When the trial judicatory which pronounced the censure is satisfied of the penitence of the offender, or when the time of suspension has expired, the censure shall be removed and the offender shall be restored. This restoration shall be accompanied by a solemn admonition. Restoration to the privileges of membership may take place without restoration to those of office.
- c. When a minister has been indefinitely suspended, the judicatory shall immediately notify all the presbyteries of the church.

4. Deposition

- a. Deposition is a form of censure more severe than suspension. It consists in a solemn declaration by the trial judicatory that the offender is no longer an officer in the church.
- b. When a minister is deposed from his office, the presbytery shall erase his name from the roll of the ministerial members of the presbytery and dismiss him to a particular church or enroll him as a member of the regional church without membership in a particular church.
- c. Deposition of a pastor or his suspension for an indefinite time involves the dissolution of the pastoral tie. The sentence of deposition or suspension shall be read before the congregation, and the pulpit shall be declared vacant. In case of suspension for a definite period the presbytery, after giving the Body of Elders an opportunity to be heard, shall decide whether the pastoral relation shall be dissolved.
- d. When a minister has been deposed, the judicatory shall immediately notify the sending church.

5. Excommunication

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Excommunication is the most severe form of censure and is resorted to only in cases of offenses aggravated by persistent impenitence. It consists in a solemn declaration by an ecclesiastical judicatory that the offender is no longer considered a member of the body of Christ.

C. Procedural Considerations

1. Pronouncement of Censure

The indefinite suspension, deposition, or excommunication of an officer or other member of the church shall be announced to the church in which the officer holds office, or in which the member holds membership. These censures shall always be accompanied by prayer to God that he may graciously use the discipline for the restoration of the offender, the edification of the church, and his own glory.

2. Review of Suspension

a. In case of indefinite suspension, the judicatory of original jurisdiction shall review the suspension, not later than twelve months after imposition of censure, to determine whether or not the offender has shown repentance and may be restored.

b. When, in its review of suspension, the judicatory of original jurisdiction is not satisfied that the offender has shown repentance, the judicatory shall determine whether the suspension should be continued or increased to deposition or to excommunication or to both.

c. Continued suspension for an indefinite time shall be reviewed again within twelve months of the conclusion of the previous review.

3. Increase of Censure

a. No further trial is necessary to increase the censure of indefinite suspension from office to deposition or the censure of indefinite suspension from the privileges of church membership to excommunication.

b. If increase of censure is imposed, without further trial, it shall be the duty of the judicatory so acting to record the circumstances in its minutes.

c. The judgment to increase censure shall in any case be subject to appeal.

D. Restoration

1. An officer deposed because of a commonly known offense shall be restored only after the judicatory has assured itself that the restoration will not be attended by injury to the cause of the gospel.

2. An officer who has been deposed cannot resume his former office without again being ordained.



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3. Restoration shall always be accompanied by a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his redeeming grace.

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MINISTERIAL GUIDE IV:

The Directory For The Public Worship of God

Preface

The purpose of this Directory is to express the Church's common understanding of the principles and practice of public worship that is Reformed according to the Scriptures and, subordinately, to the Confession and Catechisms. Where practices are understood by the Church to be required by the Word of God, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence, they are mandated. In matters of circumstance and form in worship not specifically provided for in Scripture, the Directory provides guidance for their ordering according to the light of nature and Christian prudence, consonant with the general rules of the Word.

The Directory seeks to make clear this distinction in its use of language. The following denotations used in the Directory are to be understood as indicated. The first category denotes practices that are required by the Word of God.

1. Practices that are mandated are denoted by "shall," "will," "is to be," "must," and "are to be."

The following three categories denote practices that are not mandated:

2. Practices that are strongly recommended are denoted by "should," "ought to," "is desirable," and "is advisable."

3. Practices that are commended as suitable are denoted by "is appropriate," "is well," and "is fitting."

4. Practices that are permissible are denoted by "may."

Other imperative forms occur in the Directory, and sometimes the forms in the list above are varied by modifying words or are put in the negative, either of which alters their force. For example, "may not" and "may only" are mandatory prohibitions, even though "may" is permissive. The meaning of these additional and altered forms is to be determined by the rules of English usage, with due respect to the distinctions outlined above.

The Suggested Forms for Particular Services are, by definition, suggested. The distinctions outlined above do not apply to the Suggested Forms.

Chapter I

The Principles of Public Worship

A. God's Institution of Public Worship

1. The living and true God, our triune Creator, has instituted the worship of himself by all people everywhere in spirit and in truth.

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- a. Because man's chief end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever, all of life is to be worshipful. Nevertheless, worship itself consists primarily in specific acts of communion with God.
 - b. Only those people whose hearts have been made new through God's grace by the work of the Holy Spirit can worship God.
 - c. While believers are to worship in secret as individuals and in private as families, they are also to worship as churches in assemblies of public worship, which are not carelessly or willfully to be neglected or forsaken. Public worship occurs when God, by his Word and Spirit, through the lawful government of the church, calls his people to assemble to worship him together.
2. In his Word, God has specially appointed one day in seven as a Sabbath to be kept holy to him. It is the duty of every one to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, the Sabbath was the last day of the week, marking the completion of six days of work, anticipating eternal rest in the coming Messiah. By raising Christ from the dead on the first day of the week, God sanctified that day. And from the time of the apostles, the church, accordingly, has kept the first day of the week holy as the Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day, and as the day on which it is to assemble for worship. Now each weekly cycle begins with the people of God resting in Christ in the worship of his name, followed by six days of work. The Lord's Day thus both depicts that the Christian's rest has already begun in Christ, and anticipates the eternal rest of his sons and daughters in the new heaven and the new earth.
3. God's covenant people are to devote the entire Lord's Day as holy to the Lord.
- a. In order to sanctify the day, it is necessary for them to prepare for its approach. They should attend to their ordinary affairs beforehand, so that they may not be hindered from setting the Sabbath apart to God.
 - b. It is advisable for each individual and family to prepare for communion with God in his public ordinances. Therefore, they ought to do this by reading the Scriptures, by holy meditation, and by prayer, especially for God's blessing on the ministry of the Word and sacraments.
 - c. They are then to observe a holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts concerning their everyday employment and recreations, and to devote themselves to delighting in the public and private exercises of communion with God and his people, in showing mercy and doing good in his name, and in works of necessity.

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- d. They shall so order works of necessity on that day that they do not improperly detain others from the public worship of God, nor otherwise hinder them from sanctifying the Sabbath.
4. The Lord's Day is a day of holy convocation, the day on which the Lord calls his people to assemble for public worship.
- a. Although it is fitting and proper that the members of Christ's church assemble for worship on other occasions also, which are left to the discretion of this Body of Elders, the Lord calls the whole congregation of each local church to the sacred duty and high privilege of assembling for public worship each Lord's Day. He expressly commands his people to draw near to him, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together.
 - b. It is highly advisable that a congregation assemble for public worship at the beginning and the ending of the Lord's Day. God established this pattern for his Old Testament people when he commanded morning and evening sacrifice and incense burning. Moreover, he sanctifies the entire Lord's Day to himself and gives his people in it a foretaste of their eternal enjoyment of him and his people.

B. The Nature of Public Worship

1. An assembly of public worship is not merely a gathering of God's children with each other, but is, before all else, a meeting of the triune God with his covenant people. In the covenant, God promises his chosen ones that he will dwell among them as their God and they will be his people.
 - a. The triune God is present in public worship, not only by virtue of the divine omnipresence, but, much more intimately, as the faithful covenant Savior. Through Christ, God's people have access by one Spirit to the Father.
 - b. In an assembly of public worship, the triune God is not only the One to whom worship is directed, but also the One who is active in the worship of the church. Through his public ordinances, the covenant God actively works to engage his people in communion with himself. In public worship, God communes with his people, and they with him, in a manner which expresses the close relationships of the Father and his redeemed children, of the Son and his beloved bride, and of the Holy Spirit and the living temple in which he dwells.
 - c. Pastors and ruling elders are to endeavor to inculcate in themselves and in the congregation expectations for, attitudes concerning, and behavior during public worship which are appropriate to the glorious fact that public worship is covenantal communion between God and his people in his public ordinances.

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2. Because Christ is the Mediator of the covenant, no one draws near to God except through him alone.

- a. God's people enter the Most Holy Place, the heavenly sanctuary, by the redeeming blood of Jesus, by the new and living way opened for them through the curtain, that is, his flesh. They draw near through him as their Great High Priest, who has not entered a man-made sanctuary but heaven itself, now to appear for them in God's presence.
- b. Public worship is to be conducted in a manner that plainly expresses conscious reliance upon the mediation and merits of Jesus Christ. To this end, it is well that there be a prayer of confession of sin early in the worship service. It is fitting that the minister, as God's ambassador, then declare an assurance of God's grace in Christ, reminding each worshiper that he can have boldness to approach the holy God only through the mediation and merits of Jesus Christ.

3. By the Spirit of the exalted Christ, God draws near to his people and they draw near to their God. They come by grace to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, joining innumerable angels and all the people of God in joyous and reverent communion with him.

- a. God's people not only are to come into his presence with a deep sense of awe at the thought of his perfect holiness and their own exceeding sinfulness, but also are to enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise for the great salvation that he has so graciously wrought for them through his only begotten Son and which he applies to them by his Holy Spirit. All are therefore to worship with sincere devotion, reverence, and expectation.
- b. Public worship is to be conducted in reliance on the gracious working of the Spirit of the exalted Christ, which alone can make anyone capable of such sincerity, reverence, devotion, awe, expectation, and joy. Hence, from its beginning to its end, public worship should be conducted in that simplicity which manifests dependence on the Spirit of Christ to bless his own ordinances.
- c. Accordingly, the whole congregation should assemble promptly, that all may be present and may join together for the entire worship service. Unless necessary, none should depart until after the benediction. All should refrain from any behavior that would distract other worshipers or detract from their communion with God.

4. In public worship, God's people draw near to their God unitedly as his covenant people, the body of Christ.

- a. For this reason, the covenant children should be present so far as possible, as well as adults. Families should be taught and encouraged to sit together as families.

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- b. For the same reason, no favoritism may be shown to any who attend. Nor may any member of the church presume to exalt himself above others as though he were more spiritual, but each shall esteem others better than himself.
 - c. The unity and catholicity of the covenant people are to be manifest in public worship. Accordingly, the service is to be conducted in a manner that enables and expects all the members of the covenant community—male and female, old and young, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, healthy and infirm, people from every race and nation—to worship together.
 - d. Because God’s people worship, not as an aggregation of individuals, but as a congregation of those who are members of one another in Christ, public worship is to be conducted as a corporate activity in which all the members participate as the body of Christ.
5. The triune God assembles his covenant people for public worship in order to manifest and renew their covenant bond with him and one another. The Holy Spirit engages them and draws them into the Father’s presence as a living sacrifice in Christ. God himself has fellowship with them, strengthening and guiding them for life in his presence and service in his kingdom.
- a. Public worship should be conducted in a manner that reflects God’s initiative in the covenant itself, making clear that God establishes and renews his covenant with his people, assuring God’s people of those things which they so easily forget unless Christ crucified is portrayed before their eyes week after week, cultivating the expectation that God himself meets his people in Christ as the Holy Spirit works through the public ordinances, always keeping central the persons and works of the triune God.
 - b. Consequently, it is well that public worship be so conducted that it is apparent that God summons his church to assemble in his presence, that he assures his people of his receiving and cleansing them through Christ the Mediator, that he consecrates them to himself and his service by his Word, that he communes with them and gives them grace to help in time of need through his means of grace, and that he sends them out to serve with his blessing.
6. The triune God reveals the way of knowing and worshiping him in his Word, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.
- a. The principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible—either as they are expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture—and from no other source.

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- b. God may not be worshiped according to human imaginations or inventions or in any way not prescribed by his Word, nor may the church require her members to participate in elements of worship that God's Word does not require. Only when the elements of worship are those appointed in God's Word, and the circumstances and forms of worship are consonant with God's Word, is there true freedom to know God as he is and to worship him as he desires to be worshiped.

7. The end of public worship is the glory of the triune God. To that end, Christ builds his church by perfecting the saints and adding to its membership such as are being saved—all to the glory of God.

- a. Through public worship on the Lord's Day, God calls his people to serve him all the days of the week in their every activity, and enables them, whether they eat or drink or whatever they do, to do all to the glory of God.
- b. God's people are to be led to engage in all the elements of worship with a single-minded focus on God's glory and with a humble and dependent expectation that the exalted Lord Jesus Christ himself will edify them and build his church through his appointed means of grace—all to the glory of God.

C. The Parts of Public Worship

1. Because a service of public worship is in its essence a meeting of the triune God with his chosen people, a worship service consists of two principal parts: those elements which are performed on behalf of God (through a representative voice) and those elements which are performed by the congregation (through their own or a I, C.2 representative voice).
 - a. By his Spirit working through the ministry of the Word, God addresses his people in the call to worship, in the salutation and benediction, in the reading and preaching of the Word, and in the sacraments.
 - b. His people, enabled by the Holy Spirit, address God in prayer, in song, in offerings, in hearing the Word, in confession, and in receiving and partaking of the sacraments.
 - c. It is advisable that these two parts be made to alternate.
2. The triune God is not a passive spectator in public worship, but actively works in each element of the service of worship. Neither are the people of God to be passive spectators in public worship, but by faith are to participate actively in each element of the service of worship.
 - a. Public worship should be conducted in a manner that enables and expects God's people by faith actively to embrace the blessing of the Lord in the salutation and benediction; to pray with him who leads in prayer, so that the

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prayer being uttered aloud becomes their prayer; to attend, in the reading of God's Word, to what God reveals of himself, his redeeming actions for them, and his will for their lives; to confess together with all the people the faith of the church; to heed the Word of truth as the sermon is preached and to appropriate it to their lives as God, through his servant, proclaims and applies it; to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to the praise of God and the edification of one another; to offer their posBody of Elders and themselves together as a living sacrifice to the Lord.

- b. Accordingly, it is appropriate that worshipers at times respond with brief spoken or sung expressions of praise or affirmation such as "hallelujah" or "amen." The former is a heartfelt declaration that the living God alone is worthy of adoration. The latter grows out of the responsibility of God's people to affirm solemnly and earnestly the truthfulness of his Word and the permanence of his character. It is especially fitting for the congregation to join in an "amen" at such times as a response to a blessing, a Scripture reading, a psalm or hymn, a confession of faith, or a prayer. When believers sing or say "amen," they are testifying to their wholehearted agreement with what has been spoken as being in harmony with God's permanently valid Word.

3. The Lord Jesus Christ has not prescribed a set order for public worship; rather, he has given his church a large measure of liberty in this matter. It may not be forgotten, however, that there is true liberty only where the rules of God's Word are observed and the Spirit of the Lord is, so that all things are done decently and in order, and God's people approach him with reverence and in the beauty of holiness.

- a. While Christ has not prescribed a set order for public worship, this does not mean that it is fitting to ignore proper and scriptural patterns of worship that have been historically observed by the church, particularly in the Reformed tradition. The order of worship should be so structured that there will be an enlightened movement on the part of the congregation from one element of the service to the next. When each act of worship is full of meaning, the order of the elements will assume a coherent, edifying form.

- b. Worship should be conducted with regard to the time, taking care that neither reading, singing, praying, preaching, nor any other ordinance be disproportionate, one to the other, nor the whole rendered either too short or too tedious.

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4. The Body of Elders does well to ensure that the public worship assembly space is so arranged as to reflect and reinforce God's initiative in drawing near to and gathering his people through the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

a. Because the pulpit, baptismal water, and communion table facilitate the part of worship which is performed on behalf of God, it is fitting that they be positioned so as to draw the focus of the congregation upon the Word and sacraments, and that they be easily accessible and visible to the entire congregation throughout the worship service. Because the Word is primary and the sacraments serve to seal the Word, it is fitting that the pulpit be in the position of prominence.

b. Because musicians and musical instruments serve the part of worship that is performed by the congregation, it is fitting that they be positioned with or behind the congregation.

D. The Oversight and Conduct of Public Worship

1. Public worship is Christian, not only when the worshipers consciously recognize that Christ is the Mediator by whom alone they can come unto God, but also when they honor the exalted Christ as the living and only Head of the church, who rules over public worship.

- a. He rules over public worship by his Word and Spirit, not only directly, but also through the ministry of officers in their ruling and teaching his church.
- b. The exalted Christ thus applies himself and his benefits to the elect through his Spirit working in human hearts by and with his Word, especially in its public reading, its preaching, its sealing by the sacraments, and as it is received in faith by prayer.

2. For this reason:

- a. The Body of Elders is responsible to give immediate oversight to the conduct of public worship in the local church.
- b. Public worship is ordinarily to be conducted by those who have been ordained to represent the Lord Jesus Christ in the administration of his Word and sacraments. The pastor of the church is ordinarily responsible to plan and conduct public worship.
- c. Men who have been licensed by a presbytery to preach the gospel may plan and conduct worship as probationers in order that the churches may form a better judgment respecting the fitness of those by whom they are to be instructed and governed. They may not, however, pronounce the salutation or the benediction or administer the sacraments.
- d. When the Body of Elders deems it fitting, ruling elders may lead the congregation in prayer, read the Scriptures to the congregation, lead unison or antiphonal readings

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- of Scripture by the congregation, lead congregational singing, or, on occasion, exhort the congregation as part of public worship. They may not, however, pronounce the salutation or the benediction or administer the sacraments.
- e. On occasion, with the approval of the Body of Elders and under the close supervision of a minister, exceptions may be made for other men being prepared for the gospel ministry in Christ's church who are either members of the congregation governed by that Body of Elders or are ministerial interns under that Body of Elders. They may not, however, pronounce the salutation or the benediction or administer the sacraments.
 - f. No others should take such leadership in overseeing or conducting public worship.

Chapter II

Elements of Ordinary Public Worship

A. The Part from God to the People

1. The Call to Worship
 - a. God having summoned his people to assemble in his presence to worship him on the Lord's Day, there ought to be a call to the congregation, in God's own words, to worship him. He who performs this element serves as God's representative voice; accordingly, it ordinarily should be performed by a minister of the Word.
 - b. It is fitting that the congregation respond to the call to worship in words of Scripture, or with singing, or with prayer, or with all of these.
2. The Public Reading of God's Word
 - a. Because the hearing of God's Word is a means of grace, the public reading of the Holy Scriptures is an essential element of public worship. He who performs this serves as God's representative voice. Thus, it ordinarily should be performed by a minister of the Word. Through this reading, God speaks directly to the congregation in his own words. For this reason, the reader should refrain from interspersing the reading of God's Word with human comments. He should use an accurate, faithful translation in the language of the people. He should read clearly and with understanding, and the congregation should attend to the reading with the deepest reverence.
 - b. It is desirable that portions from both the Old and the New Testaments be read each Lord's Day. It is also well that the law of God be read frequently.
 - c. The public reading of the Scriptures to the congregation is to be distinguished from the unison or antiphonal reading of certain portions of Scripture by the minister and

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the congregation together. In the former, God addresses his people; in the latter, God's people address their God, expressing in the words of Scripture their own contrition, adoration, gratitude, and other holy sentiments. The Psalms of Scripture are especially appropriate for this purpose.

3. The Preaching of God's Word

- a. The preaching of the Word, the power of God unto salvation, is indispensable in the public worship of God. It is therefore a matter of supreme importance that the minister preach only the Word of God, not the wisdom of man, and that he handle the Word of God correctly, always setting forth Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. In the sermon, God addresses the congregation by the mouth of his servant, and through his Spirit opens the ears of his people.
- b. The preacher shall prepare each sermon prayerfully and diligently. He may not use a text merely as a point of departure, but must take pains to expound the chosen text, bringing in other texts as applicable, carefully explaining the meaning, and diligently applying the particular text(s) for the salvation and edification of his hearers. He should take care in preaching that his exposition and application of the Scriptures be clear and simple, having regard to the capacity of the hearers, in demonstration of the Spirit and power, with fervor and zeal, and that he not divorce Christian duty from Christian faith.
- c. The preacher must, as Christ's ambassador, seek to build up the saints in the most holy faith and beseech the unconverted to be reconciled to God. Nothing is more necessary than that the gospel of salvation by grace be proclaimed without any adulteration or compromise, in order that the hearers may learn to rely for salvation only on the grace of God in Christ, to the exclusion of their own works or character, ascribing all glory to God alone for their salvation. The preacher is to instruct his hearers in the whole counsel of God, exhort the congregation to more perfect obedience to Christ, and warn them of the sins and dangers that are around them and within them. A preacher fails to perform his task as a God-appointed watchman on Zion's walls who neglects to warn the congregation of prevalent soul-destroying teachings by enemies of the gospel.
- d. The Body of Elders is to give diligence that no person enter the pulpit concerning whose soundness in doctrine and life, or knowledge of Scripture, there is reasonable doubt.

4. The Sacraments

- a. The sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, as visible signs and seals of the Word of the covenant, are important elements of public worship. They represent

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Christ and his benefits, confirm his people's participation in him, visibly mark off from the world those who belong to his church, and solemnly bind them to covenant faith and loyalty.

- b. Because the sacraments are ordinances of Christ for the benefit of the visible church, they are to be administered only under the oversight of the government of the church. Moreover, in ordinary circumstances they are properly administered only in a gathering of the congregation for the public worship of God, baptism being a sacrament whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church, and the Lord's Supper signifying and sealing the communion of believers with Christ and with each other as members of his mystical body. Nevertheless, if a Body of Elders judges that circumstances require otherwise, the sacraments may be administered elsewhere; but, in any event, the church must be represented in the service.
 - c. Although the efficacy of the sacraments does not depend upon the piety or intention of the person administering them, they are not to be administered by any private person, but only by a minister of the Word.
5. Blessings
- a. The salutation and the benediction are blessings pronounced in God's name and in his own words. Accordingly, they are properly used only in a gathering of Christ's church and by a minister of the Word.
 - b. A salutation is the greeting from God to his people who have gathered to worship him. It is fittingly pronounced immediately before or after the call to worship. Words of salutation from Scripture are to be used, such as the opening greeting from one of the New Testament epistles, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."
 - c. A benediction is the pronouncement of God's blessing upon his people at the conclusion of the worship service. Words of benediction taken from Scripture are to be used. The high priestly benediction, "The lord bless [you], and keep [you]: the lord make his face shine upon [you], and be gracious unto [you]: the lord lift up his countenance upon [you], and give [you] peace" (Num. 6:24-26), or the Trinitarian apostolic benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14), are distinctly appropriate. If, however, the minister deems another benediction taken from Scripture more fitting for a particular occasion, he may use it.

B. The Part from the People to God

1. Public Prayer

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- a. Prayer is an essential element of public worship. In order to be accepted by God, prayer is to be by faith, in the name of the Son of God, by the help of his Spirit, and according to God's will.
- b. In preparation for the service, the Body of Elders should provide circumstances conducive to the people adopting an attitude appropriate to worship. It is highly advisable that each person prepare by engaging in silent prayer prior to the beginning of the service.
- c. He who leads in public prayer serves as the voice of the congregation. For this reason, he should pray in such a way, in clear words and in the plural, that the entire assembly of God's people can pray with him; and it is the duty of the members of the congregation, not only to hear his words, but also to pray them in their hearts. To these ends, he who leads should diligently prepare himself for public prayers, so that he may perform this duty with propriety and with profit to the worshipers.
- d. It is particularly appropriate that public prayer be led by a pastor of the congregation, because in it he both guides the people in their corporate prayer to God and teaches them how to pray biblically. Accordingly, every minister should, by a thorough acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures, by the study of the best writings on prayer, by meditation, and by a life of communion with God, endeavor to acquire both the spirit and the skill of prayer, as should ruling elders. When a guest minister is present, it is well that a pastor or ruling elder, as one who knows the congregation, lead in the prayers of intercession.
- e. Near the beginning of the service, there should be a brief prayer of approach to God in response to his call to enter his presence for worship. It may express humble adoration, confess unworthiness and inability to worship aright, seek his merciful acceptance through Jesus Christ, and invoke the gracious working of the Holy Spirit.
- f. During the service, there should be comprehensive prayer, which may be offered as more than one prayer throughout the worship service. Such prayer should include adoration of God's perfections, thanksgiving for all his mercies, confession of sin, supplication for forgiveness through the blood of the atonement and for renewal by the Holy Spirit, lamentation in times of distress or crisis, and intercession for the needs of God's people and others. It is fitting that the congregation intercede for the whole of mankind; for civil rulers; for the church universal; for Christian missions at home and abroad, Christian education, and other Christian activities; for our whole Church; for churches in ties of like faith with us; for the welfare of the local congregation itself, including its officers, its ministries, and its members, pleading for their growth in sanctification and remembering the daily needs and care of the people—the families, the singles, the rising generation, the elderly, the poor, the sick, the dying, the mourning, the erring, and unsaved loved ones; and for whatever else may seem particularly suitable.

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- g. It is fitting that a prayer of confession of sin precede or follow any reading of the law of God to the congregation.
- h. It is appropriate that there be a brief offertory prayer either immediately preceding or immediately following the worship of God with offerings. Such prayer may thank God for his gifts, devote the offering and the worshipers to his service, and invoke his blessing on its use and on those who give.
- i. It is fitting to pray at the time of the reading and preaching of the Word. Such prayer may petition for the Holy Spirit to grant illumination and to apply the Word preached to the minds, hearts, and lives of the people and give thanks for the Word received. Ordinarily, such prayer should be by the one preaching the Word.
- j. While public prayer must always be offered with deep humility and holy reverence and be free from vain repetition or display of words, it can be fitting at times for the entire congregation to pray vocally in unison. The form of prayer that our Lord Jesus taught his disciples, commonly called “the Lord’s Prayer,” is particularly appropriate for this use by the congregation. Great care should be taken, however, to guard against allowing this practice to become a mere formula or ritual.
- k. It is fitting to encourage the congregation to join vocally in a corporate “amen” at the conclusion of a prayer.

2. Congregational Singing

- a. Congregational singing is a duty and privilege to be practiced and cultivated in all the churches. Let every member of the church take part in this act of worship. God’s people should sing, not merely with the lips, but with understanding and with grace in their hearts, making melody to the Lord.
- b. As public worship is for the praise and glory of God and the building up of the saints, not for the entertainment of the congregation nor the praise of man, the character of the songs used therein is to befit the nature of God and the purpose of worship.
- c. Congregations do well to sing the metrical versions or other musical settings of the Psalms frequently in public worship. Congregations also do well to sing hymns of praise that respond to the full scope of divine revelation.
- d. In the choice of song for public worship, great care must be taken that all the materials of song are fully in accord with the Scriptures. The words are to be suitable for the worship of God and the tunes are to be appropriate to the meaning of the words and to the occasion of public worship. Care should be taken to the end that the songs chosen will express those specific truths and sentiments which are appropriate at the time of their use in the worship service.

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e. Musical gifts are properly used in public worship to assist the congregation in its worship of God. They may not be used for the praise or applause of men. No person may take a special part in the musical service unless he is a professing Christian who adorns his profession with a godly walk, or who is a baptized covenant child whose conduct is appropriate to his status.

3. Public Confession of Faith

a. Individual believers are to publicly profess their faith in Christ before God and his people in order formally to pledge their commitment to serve Christ and to be welcomed into all the privileges of full communion with God's people.

b. It is also fitting that the congregation as one body confess its common faith, using creeds that are true to the Word of God, such as the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed.

4. The Bringing of Offerings

a. The bringing of offerings in the public assembly of God's people on the Lord's Day is a solemn act of worship to almighty God. The people of God are to set aside to him the firstfruits of their labors; in so doing, they should present themselves with thanksgiving as a living sacrifice to God. All should participate in this act of worship when God gives opportunity for it. Parents are to instruct and encourage their children by precept and example to give of their substance regularly, purposefully, generously, and joyfully to the Lord through his church.

b. It is the duty of the pastor, since he is to proclaim to the people the whole counsel of God, to cultivate biblical stewardship and the grace of liberal giving in the members of the church. He

should remind them of the admonition in Scripture that everyone is to give as the Lord has prospered him, of the assurance of Scripture that God loves a cheerful giver, and of the blessed example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, became poor, in order that poor sinners through his poverty might become rich.

c. The Body of Elders shall take care that the offerings of the congregation are used only for biblical purposes, such as the maintenance of public worship, the preaching of the gospel throughout the world, the ministry of mercy in Christ's name, and other Christian objects. The offering ordinarily should not be used to transmit funds to causes other than the ministries of the Church. If a member of the Church designates a gift to a particular cause, it shall be the responsibility of the Body of Elders to determine, before the gift is accepted, if it is appropriate to support that cause through the Church or if the gift should be returned to the donor.

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d. It is desirable that Christian love be demonstrated by offerings for the use of the deacons in the ministry of mercy on behalf of the church. It is appropriate that a special offering be received for this purpose following the Lord's Supper.

Chapter III

The Administration of the Sacraments

A. General Provisions

1. In order that the sacraments may be observed with discernment and profit, it is imperative that adequate preparation be made prior to their administration. Before observing the sacraments, God's people ought to meditate on the teaching of the Word of God concerning them, particularly as summarized in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms. It is also advisable that from time to time the preaching include suitable instruction on the sacraments. Moreover, when the sacraments are being celebrated, the minister shall always accompany them by the preaching of the Word, and he shall take especial care in that preaching to proclaim Christ and his benefits, so that God's people can understand what the sacrament means. In connection with the administration of the sacraments, he shall set forth a summary of the teaching of the Word of God as to their institution, meaning, and nature.

2. Baptism must await their public profession of faith in Christ.

3. The Lord's Supper is to be celebrated frequently, but the frequency may be determined by each Body of Elders as it may judge most conducive to edification.

4. In the administration of the sacraments, the minister is not required to use the exact language of the indented forms (below), though they are suggested as appropriate. He may employ these or similar forms, using his own liberty and godly wisdom, as he deems best for the edification of the people.

a. The Administration of Baptism

(1) The Institution of the Sacrament

The minister ought to read the words of the institution of the sacrament of baptism from a passage such as Matthew 28:18–20.

(2) The Covenant Commitment of the One Receiving Baptism

At the time of the service at which the person is to be baptized, he shall first profess his faith publicly before the assembled congregation. The minister may address him in these or like words:

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, we thank our God for the grace that was given you, in that our Savior has sought and found you and through faith you have become a partaker of the

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covenant of grace. We rejoice that in his grace he has brought you to this congregation and given you the desire to profess your faith before us and to unite with us. We ask that you testify before us to the faith that you profess by giving assent to the following questions.

To this end, the minister shall require the person to profess publicly his Christian faith by answering these or equivalent questions in the affirmative:

- (1) Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?
- (2) Do you believe in one living and true God, in whom eternally there are three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—who are the same in being and equal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son, come in the flesh?
- (3) Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, that you repent of your sin, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?
- (4) Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord, and do you promise that, in reliance on the grace of God, you will serve him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?
- (5) Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church’s worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?

If the Body of Elders deems it appropriate, it may also ask him to bear brief testimony to his faith in his own words.

After answers to the above questions in the affirmative, the minister shall proceed to the baptism.

(3) The Meaning and Nature of the Sacrament

The minister shall then summarize before the congregation the teaching of the Word of God and the Confession and Catechisms of this church as to the meaning and nature of the sacrament of baptism. He may use these or like words:

The Lord Jesus Christ instituted baptism as a covenant sign and seal for his church. He uses it not only for the solemn admission of the person who is baptized into the visible church, but also to depict and to confirm his ingrafting of that person into himself and his including that person in the covenant of grace. The Lord uses baptism to portray to us that we are conceived and born in sin and need to be cleansed.

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He uses it to witness and seal to us the remission of sins and the bestowal of all the gifts of salvation through union with Christ. Baptism with water signifies and seals cleansing from sin by the blood and the Spirit of Christ, together with our death unto sin and our resurrection unto newness of life by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ. Because these gifts of salvation are the gracious provision of the triune God, who is pleased to claim us as his very own, we are baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

In our baptism, the Lord puts his name on us, claims us as his own, and summons us to assume the obligations of the covenant. He calls us to believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and to walk humbly with our God in devotion to his commandments.

(4) Exhortation to the Members of the Congregation to Improve Their Baptism

Then the minister may exhort the congregation in these or like words:

As solemn vows have been made before you, and baptism is now to be administered, you who are baptized will do well to take this occasion to reflect on your own baptism. Christ has put his name and claim on you. He calls you to be repentant for your sins against your covenant God, to confess your faith before men, and to live in newness of life to God, who sealed his covenant with you by the blood of his own Son.

(5) Prayer

Thereupon the minister shall pray for the presence and blessing of the triune God, that the grace signified and sealed by baptism may be abundantly realized.

(6) The Baptism

Then, calling the person by name, he shall baptize him with water, without any other ceremony, saying:

[Name of person], I baptize you into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

(7) The Covenant Commitment of the Congregation

It is appropriate that the minister exhort the congregation in these or like words: *As [name] is baptized into Christ and becomes a member of his visible church, the whole congregation is obligated to receive (him/her). For “we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body,” and therefore are members of one another. Christ claims this (brother/sister) as his own and calls you to serve (him/her) in love. Therefore, you ought to commit yourself before God to assist [name] in (his/her) Christian nurture by godly example, prayer, and encouragement in our most precious faith and in the fellowship of believers.*

(8) Welcome and Charge

Adapted from the Westminster Standards (London, 1645)

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It is then fitting that the minister address the baptized person in the following or like words:

Beloved, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I welcome you to all the privileges of full communion with God's people, and in particular to participation in the sacrament of the Holy Supper. I charge you to continue steadfastly in the confession that you have made, humbly relying upon the grace of God in the diligent use of the means of grace—especially the Word of God, the sacraments, and prayer. Rest assured that if you confess Christ before men, he will confess you before his Father who is in heaven. May the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, perfect, establish, and strengthen you. To him be the glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

(9) Prayer

The whole service of baptism shall be concluded with prayer. It is well in such a prayer to thank the Lord for his covenant of grace, rejoice that this brother has been included, and to ask the Lord to graciously enable him to be a covenant keeper, daily dying to sin and walking in newness of life in Christ.

C. The Lord's Supper

1. The Institution of the Sacrament

The minister shall read the words of the institution and instruction of the Lord's Supper as found in 1 Corinthians 11:23–29 or one of the Gospel accounts (Matthew 26:26–29, Mark 14:22–25, or Luke 22:14–20). In addition, he may read words of instruction from passages such as John 6 and 1 Corinthians 10.

2. The Meaning and Nature of the Sacrament

The minister shall then summarize before the congregation the teaching of the Word of God as to the meaning and nature of the sacrament in the following or like words:

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper as an ordinance to be observed by his church until he comes again. It is not a re-sacrificing of Christ, but is a remembrance of the once-for-all sacrifice of himself in his death for our sins. Nor is it a mere memorial to Christ's sacrifice. It is a means of grace by which God feeds us with the crucified, resurrected, exalted Christ. He does so by his Holy Spirit and through faith. Thus he strengthens us in our warfare against sin and in our endeavors to serve him in holiness. The sacrament further signifies and seals the forgiveness of our sin and our nourishment and growth in Christ. The bread and wine represent the crucified body and the shed blood of the Savior, which he gave for his people. In this sacrament, God confirms that he is faithful and true to fulfill the promises of his covenant, and he calls us to deeper gratitude for our salvation, to renewed consecration, and to more faithful obedience. The Supper is also a bond and pledge of the communion that believers have

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with him and with each other as members of his body. As Scripture says, “For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). The Supper anticipates the consummation of the ages, when Christ returns to gather all his redeemed people at the glorious wedding feast of the Lamb. As we come to the Lord’s Table, we humbly resolve to deny ourselves, to crucify the sin that is within us, to resist the devil, and to follow Christ as becomes those who bear his name.

3. Invitation and Fencing the Table

The minister shall then declare who may come to, and who are excluded from, the Lord’s Table according to the Word of God. He may use the following or like words:

It is my privilege as a minister of Christ to invite all who are right with God and his church, through faith in the Lord Jesus, to come to the Lord’s Table. If you have received Christ and are resting upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to you in the gospel, if you are a baptized and professing communicant member in good standing in a church that professes the gospel of God’s free grace in Jesus Christ, and if you live penitently and seek to walk in godliness before the Lord, then this Supper is for you, and I invite you in Christ’s name to eat the bread and drink the cup.

At the same time, God’s Word says, “Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth [eats] and drinketh [drinks] unworthily, eateth [eats] and drinketh [drinks] damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor. 11:27–29). If you are not trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior, if you are not a member of a faithful Christian church, if you are not living penitently and seeking to walk in godliness before the Lord, then I warn you in the name of Christ not to approach the Holy Table of the Lord.

This warning is not aimed to keep the humble and contrite from the Table of the Lord, as if it were for those who were free from sin. In fact, it is for sinners that our Lord gives this Supper as a means of grace. Through the elements of bread and wine, our Lord graciously gives himself and all his benefits to everyone who eats and drinks in a worthy manner, discerning the body of the Lord. It is one thing to eat and drink in a worthy manner. It is very different, however, to imagine that we are worthy to eat and drink. We dare not come to the Lord’s Table as if we were worthy and righteous in ourselves. We come in a worthy manner if we recognize that we are unworthy sinners who need our Savior, if we consciously discern his body given for our sins, if we hunger and thirst after Christ, giving thanks for his grace, trusting in his merits, feeding on him by faith, renewing our covenant with him and his people. Let us examine our minds and hearts to determine whether such discernment is ours, to the end that we may partake to the glory of God and to our growth in the grace of Christ. Come

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then with joy and thankfulness to the Lord's Table. The Lord's Supper is medicine for poor, sick souls. Come to Jesus and find rest, refreshing, and nourishment for your weak and weary soul.

4. Exhortation

If desired, the minister may exhort the people of God, in the following or other words, to embrace in the sign the thing that is signified:

Beloved congregation, lift up your hearts from these visible elements even to heaven itself, where Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, from where we look for him to return and perfect our redemption. All the promises of God are yes and amen in him. Every spiritual blessing is found in him. With joyful hearts, in Christian love, partake of his Table, giving thanks for the great love that he has shown to us.

5. Prayer

The distribution of the elements shall be preceded by prayer. It is well in such prayer to praise God for his mighty power and grace in bringing salvation; confess our unworthiness to come to the Table because of our own utter lack of righteousness; reaffirm our trust in God's grace and in Christ's righteousness and mediation; plead for the Lord to grant the gracious, effectual working of his Spirit in us; thank God for the elements, request him to use them for their intended purpose; and ask him to grant that by faith his people may feed upon Jesus Christ, crucified and raised for them, so that, being strengthened by grace, they might live in him and for him.

6. Partaking of the Elements

After prayer and thanksgiving, the minister shall take the bread, saying in the following or like words:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, as I, ministering in his name, give this bread to you.

The minister shall then break the bread and give it to the people. The bread may be eaten either upon reception of it, or in unison when all have been served, as the Body of Elders may judge most conducive to edification. The minister may continue, before the bread is eaten, saying: *Our Lord Jesus said, "Take, eat, this is my body, which is for you; this do in remembrance of me."*

Having given the bread, the minister shall take the cup and give it to the people, saying in the following or like words:

In the same manner, our Savior also took the cup, and having given thanks as has been done in his name, he gave it to his disciples, as I ministering in his name give this cup to you.

The minister shall then give the cup, as in the distribution of the bread. The minister may continue, before the cup is drunk, saying:

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Our Lord Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins; drink of it, all of you."

7. Response of Thanksgiving and Commitment

When all have partaken, prayer should be offered. It is well in such prayer to give thanks for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, through whom we have the forgiveness of sins; recommit God's people to Christ and to each other; present them as a living sacrifice to God; and plead that the Holy Spirit will make the sacrament effectual to the edifying and strengthening of God's people.

It is well that the congregation respond by singing a psalm or hymn that focuses on the benefits of Christ's death and the triumph of the gospel, bringing forth gratitude and joy and renewed commitment of the believer to his Lord, and that an offering be taken for the relief of the poor or for some other sacred purpose.

8. Blessing

The following benediction is particularly appropriate when the Lord's Supper has been celebrated:

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

IV Public Reception of Church Members

A. General Provisions

1. Only those may be admitted to full communion in the church who have been baptized and have made public profession of faith in Jesus Christ.
2. In order to aid those who contemplate making public profession or reaffirmation of faith in Christ to understand the implication of this significant act and to perform it meaningfully, the pastor or someone approved by the Body of Elders shall conduct classes in Christian doctrine and life, both for the covenant youth and for any others who may manifest an interest in the way of salvation.
3. Before permitting anyone to make profession of his faith in the presence of the congregation, the Body of Elders shall announce his name to the congregation on a prior Lord's Day in order that the members of the church may have opportunity to acquaint the Body of Elders with such facts concerning him as may appear to be irreconcilable with a credible profession. In order for the Body of Elders to assure itself so far as possible that the candidate makes a credible profession, it shall examine him to ascertain that he possesses the doctrinal knowledge requisite for saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, relies on the merits of Christ alone, and is determined by the grace of God to lead a Christian life.

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4. In the public reception of church members, the minister shall follow the directions prescribed in this chapter, but he is not required to use the exact language of the indented forms (below), which are suggested as appropriate. He may employ these or similar forms, using his own liberty and godly wisdom as he deems best for the edification of the people.

5. The Body of Elders shall always take special care to preserve the full meaning of membership vows. If the Body of Elders modifies the vows, it shall record those vows and its rationale in its minutes and report it to the next stated meeting of the presbytery.

6. Unbaptized children of covenant members are considered part of the church family and ought to be disciplined and also lovingly evangelized.

7. Baptized children ordinarily shall be received as non-communicant members when their parents are received as communicant members.

8. Noncommunicant members of the congregation may be received into communicant membership only by confession of faith.

9. The following provisions are designed to assist ministers and Body of Elders to receive members in accordance with the Book of Discipline, Chapter II, Section B.2, which provisions should always be followed.

B. Reception into Full Communion of Noncommunicant Members by Profession of Faith

1. When a noncommunicant member is received into full communion, that reception is effective at the time of his public profession of faith. On the occasion of that person's public reception, it is highly advisable that the minister remind the people that he is already a member of the church, albeit a noncommunicant member, and has been receiving the blessings of Christ as a member of the church, and that those blessings have resulted in this day wherein, having given evidence of conscious saving faith in Christ, he is now about to confess that faith and become a communicant member of the congregation. The minister may then address him in these or like words:

2. The minister shall then require the person to profess publicly his Christian faith by giving assent to these or equivalent questions:

(1) Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?

(2) Do you believe in one living and true God, in whom eternally there are three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—who are the same in being and equal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son, come in the flesh?

(3) Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, that you repent of your sin, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?

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(4) Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord, and do you promise that, in reliance on the grace of God, you will serve him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?

(5) Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church's worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?

If the Body of Elders deems it appropriate, it may also ask him to bear brief testimony to his faith in his own words.

3. It is appropriate that the minister exhort the congregation in these or like words:

From the time [name] was baptized, the whole congregation has been obligated to love and receive (him/her) as a member of the church. As (he/she) is received into full communion, the congregation is reminded of these obligations. For in Christ we are members of one another. Christ claims this (brother/sister) as his own and calls you to receive (him/her) in love and commitment. Therefore, you ought to commit yourself before God to assist [name] in (his/her) Christian nurture by godly example, prayer, and encouragement in our most precious faith and in the fellowship of believers.

4. When anyone has publicly professed his faith in this way, it is fitting that the minister address him in the following or similar words:

Beloved, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I welcome you to all the privileges of full communion with God's people, and in particular to participation in the sacrament of the Holy Supper. I charge you to continue steadfastly in the confession that you have made, humbly relying upon the grace of God in the diligent use of the means of grace—especially the Word of God, the sacraments, and prayer.

Rest assured that if you confess Christ before men, he will confess you before his Father who is in heaven.

May the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, perfect, establish, and strengthen you. To him be the glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

This part of the service shall be concluded with prayer.

Chapter V

Special Occasions of Public Worship

Under the gospel, we are commanded to keep no other particular day holy, except the Lord's Day. Nevertheless, God's people may observe special occasions as the dispensations

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of God's providence administer cause and opportunity. Such observance is both consonant with Scripture and pastorally appropriate.

A. Prayer and Fasting

1. When great and notable calamities come upon or threaten the church, community, or nation, when judgment is deserved because of sin, when the people seek some special blessing from the Lord, or when a pastor is to be ordained or installed (Form of Government, Chapter XXIII, Section 7), it is fitting that the people of God engage in times of solemn prayer and fasting.
2. Prayer and fasting may be observed by private individuals and families at their discretion or by the Church at the discretion of the appropriate judicatory. If the civil authority calls for a time of prayer and fasting that the judicatories of the Church deem to be in harmony with the Scriptures, they should consider issuing such a call to their members.
3. Public notice is to be given before the time of prayer and fasting comes, to enable persons to order their temporal affairs so that they can participate.
4. It is especially appropriate on days of prayer and fasting called by the Church that the people of God gather for a time of prayer, the singing of psalms and hymns, and the reading and preaching of the Word of God. Let them lament their distress or unworthiness before the Lord, confess their sins, humbly implore the Lord for deliverance from the judgment present or imminent or for the blessing sought, and commit themselves anew to the faithful service of the Lord their God. It is fitting on such days that God's people abstain from food and from such activities as may distract from their solemn engagement in prayer.

B. Thanksgiving

1. When God's blessings on the church, community, or nation are particularly evident, it is fitting that the people of God engage in special times of thanksgiving.
2. Special times of thanksgiving may be observed by private individuals and families at their discretion or by the Church as called by the appropriate judicatory. If the civil authority calls for a time of thanksgiving that the judicatories of the Church deem to be in harmony with the Scriptures, they should consider issuing such a call to their members.
3. Public notice is to be given before the day of thanksgiving comes, to enable persons to order their temporal affairs so that they can participate.
4. It is especially appropriate on special days of thanksgiving called by the Church that the people of God gather for prayer, testimony to God's blessings, joyful singing of psalms and hymns, and the reading and preaching of the Word of God. Let them give thanks to God for his goodness to his people and especially for the greatness of his mercies to them in Christ. And let them commit themselves anew to the faithful service of the Lord their God in

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gratitude for his blessings. It is fitting on such days that God's people spend the day in expressions of Christian love and charity toward one another, rejoicing more and more in the Lord, as becomes those who make the joy of the Lord their strength. Also, they may feast together before the Lord with joy and thanksgiving.

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MINISTERIAL GUIDE IV:

Suggested Forms For Use in Connections With The Book of Discipline

I. CHARGE AND SPECIFICATIONS

_____ [here insert the title of the trial judicatory] of this Church charges _____ with _____ [here name the alleged offense]: _____ [here give references to applicable portions of the Word of God, and, where pertinent, to relevant provisions of the constitution]. Specifications: That on or about _____ the said _____ did _____ [here set forth briefly the place and circumstances of the alleged offense].

Witnesses and/or Documents: _____ [here set forth the names of witnesses and/or the titles of documents to be produced in support of the charge and specifications].

_____ [Moderator]

_____ [Clerk] Date: _____

II. CITATION OF ACCUSED

To _____:

You are hereby cited to appear before _____, meeting on _____ at _____ o'clock at _____, then and there to hear and receive certain charges and specifications which have been preferred against you by _____ [here insert the title of the trial judicatory] of this Church.

[In the case of a second citation, add the appropriate warning prescribed by Chapter IV, Section A.1.e, of the Book of Discipline.] By order of _____ [here insert the title of the trial judicatory] of this Church.

_____ [Moderator]

_____ [Clerk] Date: _____

III. CITATION OF WITNESS

To _____:

You are hereby cited to appear before _____, meeting on _____ at _____ o'clock, at _____, then and there to give evidence in the trial of _____ [here insert the name of the accused].

[In the case of a second citation of a witness who has failed to appear after a first citation, add the warning prescribed in Chapter IV, Section A.4.e, of the Book of Discipline.]

By order of _____ [here insert the title of the trial judicatory] of this Church.

_____ [Moderator]

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_____ [Clerk] Date: _____

IV. THE PUBLIC IMPOSITION AND REMOVAL OF CENSURES

(This document was prepared for the use of Body of Elders of local congregation.)

A. The Manner of Imposing Censure

The power which the exalted Christ gives the rulers of his church is for edification, not destruction. Therefore, when a member is found guilty of a fault deserving censure, the Body of Elders shall proceed with all tenderness and in the spirit of meekness, each considering himself lest he also be tempted, with the hope of reclaiming or gaining the offender. They should impose censure with great solemnity, so that all might fear, so that it may be a means of impressing the offender's heart with a proper sense of his sin, and so that by God's gracious blessing it may lead him to repentance. They should do all this in accordance with the provisions of the Book of Discipline.

B. Indefinite Suspension

1. When the judicatory has passed sentence, indefinitely suspending an officer or a member of the church from privileges, it is fitting that when the sentence is announced, it be in a gathering of the congregation.
2. The one making the announcement may begin by setting forth the teaching of Scripture concerning God's fatherly discipline (cf. Heb. 12:7–11), the church as God's instrument in discipline (cf. Matt. 18:17ff.), and the obligation upon the church to fulfill this role (1 Cor. 5:1–13).
3. He may then announce the censure using the following or similar words:

Whereas [name] has been found guilty by (his/her) own confession, or by sufficient proof (as the case may be), of the sin of [here name the particular offence], we have suspended (him/her) from the privileges of church membership [and/or, as appropriate, the privileges of his office], until (he/she) gives satisfactory evidence of repentance.

4. To this the judicatory shall add such advice, admonition, or rebuke, as it may judge necessary; and it shall conclude the whole with prayer to almighty God, that he would accompany this act of discipline with his blessing.
5. The indefinite suspension of an officer or other member of the church shall be announced to the church in which membership or office is held.
6. After a person has been thus suspended, the minister and elders should frequently converse with him, as well as pray for him in private, that it would please God to grant him repentance. And, especially in connection with celebrating the Lord's

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Supper, they should offer up public prayers for any who have shut themselves out from this holy communion.

7. When the judicatory is satisfied as to the reality of the repentance of any such suspended member, it shall permit him to profess his repentance, and restore him to fellowship (and/or, as appropriate, the privileges of office) in the presence of the church.
8. If a suspended person fails to manifest repentance for his offence, and continues in impenitence, it may become the duty of the judicatory to excommunicate (and/or, as appropriate, depose him from office) without further trial.

C. Excommunication and Deposition

1. When the judicatory has passed sentence imposing excommunication, with or without previous suspension, it is fitting that when the sentence is announced, it be in a gathering of the congregation.
2. The minister should then make a brief statement of the several steps which have been taken, with respect to the offender, announcing that the Body of Elders has found it necessary to excommunicate him. He should begin by showing from Scripture (for example, Matthew 18:15–18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1–5) the power of the church to cast out unfaithful members. He should briefly explain the nature, use, and consequences of excommunication.

3. He shall then announce the censure. He may use the following or similar words: Whereas [name] has by (his/her) own confession, or by sufficient proof (as the case may be), been found guilty of [here name the particular offense], and after much admonition and prayer refuses to hear the church and manifests no evidence of repentance; therefore, in the name and by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, (he/she) has been excluded from the communion of the church.

4. He may instruct and warn the congregation in the following or similar words: Beloved congregation, [name] may no longer use the sacraments. (He/she) has no part any more in the spiritual blessings and benefits which Christ bestows upon his church. As long as (he/she) persists in sin, let (him/her) be to you as an unbeliever. We exhort you, beloved Christians, do not wash your hands of (him/her). On the contrary, pray for (him/her) with lamentation. Try to evangelize and warn (him/her) as you would a lost sheep. But do not associate with (him/her) as a fellow believer, that (he/she) may be ashamed and be brought to repentance. This excommunication, beloved, is a warning for us all. Let us fear the Lord and be cautious, for he who thinks he stands must take heed lest he fall. Continue in the true fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, and also with all faithful believers, so that we may obtain eternal salvation. “Let us lay aside every weight, and the

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sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.”

5. He should then lead the congregation in prayer for the conviction and reclaiming or gaining of the excommunicated person, and for the establishment of all true believers.

6. When an officer is to be deposed, these provisions should be appropriately modified.

D. Readmission of an Excommunicated Person

1. When an excommunicated person is so affected by his state that he is brought to repentance and desires to be readmitted to the privileges of the church, the Body of Elders of the church which excommunicated him, being satisfied of the evidence of his repentance and contrition, shall proceed to readmit him. It is fitting that the sentence of restoration be openly pronounced by the minister in a service of public worship on the Lord’s Day.

2. It is well that the elders stand with the minister before the congregation.

3. The minister may address the congregation in the following or similar words:

[Name] was excluded from the communion of the church, but (he/she) has now given satisfactory evidence of repentance to the Body of Elders. Therefore, in the name and by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, we declare (him/her) absolved from the sentence of excommunication, and we do restore (him/her) to the communion of the church, that (he/she) may be a partaker of all the benefits of the Lord Jesus, to (his/her) eternal salvation.

4. The minister may then address the restored believer in these or similar words:

Beloved (brother/sister), be assured in your heart that the Lord himself has received you in grace. Be diligent to guard yourself against the subtleties of Satan, the wickedness of the world, and the folly of the flesh, lest you again become entangled in sin. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit again. I charge you to continue steadfastly in the confession which you have made, humbly relying upon the grace of God in the diligent use of the means of grace—especially the Word of God, the sacraments, and prayer.

5. The minister may then address the congregation in these or similar words:

Beloved Christians, receive this (brother/sister) in love. Rejoice and be thankful, for this (brother/sister) was dead and is alive. (He/she) was lost and is found. Rejoice with the angels, for our Lord Jesus said, “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” (Luke 15:7). Do not look on (him/her) any longer as a stranger, but as a fellow citizen with the saints and a member of the household of God.

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6. The congregation should then be led in prayer. It is well in such prayer to thank and praise God for granting repentance and restoration to the one who has been restored; and to pray that he may grow in assurance and joy; that he may walk faithfully, and that just as he has previously caused grief, so now may he be the cause of great joy and edification; that God may graciously enable us to forgive and receive; and that he would enable us all to persevere in faith, hope, and love.

E. Other Censures

Censures other than indefinite suspension from church privileges, or deposition, or excommunication, shall be imposed in such manner as the judicatory may direct.

THE SOLEMNIZATION OF MARRIAGE

A. Guiding Principles

1. Marriage is an institution ordained by God for the honor and happiness of mankind, in which one man and one woman enter into a bodily and spiritual union, so long as both shall live. It is not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity prohibited by the Word of God.
2. Christians are to marry only in the Lord. Therefore, although it is not required, it is fitting that their marriage be solemnized by a minister of the Word in order that special instruction may be given to them and suitable prayers made, when they enter into this union. It is also well that, prior to the marriage, the minister give Christian counsel to those entering this estate. Ministers are admonished to emphasize the need of spiritual and confessional compatibility in marriage. When husband and wife differ on the essentials of the faith, their lack of harmony endangers the covenant nurture of their children and the unity of a truly Christian home.
3. Marriage is of a public nature. The welfare of civil society, the happiness of families, and the honor of the church are deeply intertwined with it. Therefore, the intent to marry should be sufficiently published previous to its solemnization. It is well that announcement of a planned wedding be made in the church of each of the two parties in each of the three weeks prior to the wedding. All ministers should take care in this matter to transgress neither the laws of God nor the laws of the state. In order that the peace and comfort of families will not be endangered and that no just objection may exist against their marriage, the parties applying should be properly

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certified to the minister. Moreover, the solemnization of marriage must always be performed before at least two or three witnesses.

4. Marriage is not a sacrament; nor is it peculiar to the church of Christ. For this reason, marriage ought not to be solemnized during the Lord's Day assembly for public worship, and it is best that it not be solemnized on the Lord's Day.
5. It is proper that every commonwealth, for the good of society, make laws to regulate marriage, which all citizens are bound to obey, if not contrary to Scripture.

B. Suggested Form for a Wedding Service

The following service is designed for those who are professing members, in good standing, of a faithful Christian church.

At the time and place appointed for the solemnization of marriage, the persons to be married shall take their place before the minister in the following or similar manner, the bridegroom having the bride to his left. The company may be requested to stand or be seated during the ceremony as may seem best in the circumstances.

1. Declaration of Purpose

The minister shall state the purpose of the service. He may use the following or similar words:

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the presence of God and these witnesses to join this man and this woman in holy matrimony.

God himself instituted marriage at the beginning in the Garden of Eden, before sin entered the world. He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him." Thereupon God created woman of man's own substance and brought her to the man. Our Lord Jesus Christ honored marriage by his presence and first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. And he confirmed it as a divine ordinance and as a union not to be severed when he declared, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh'? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Moreover, the Holy Spirit sets forth the sacred and exalted nature of marriage when he likens it to the mystical union that exists between Christ and his redeemed bride, the church, saying, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

Accordingly, God has designed marriage for the enrichment of the lives of those who enter into this estate, for the orderly propagation of the human race, for the generation of a holy seed, and for the avoidance of sexual immorality, all to the glory of the covenant God.

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Husbands and wives thus have responsibilities befitting God's purposes for their relationship. The Holy Scripture says, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for [her]." The husband is to love his wife as his own body, to care for her, and to cherish her. The Holy Scripture says also, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." The wife is to submit to her husband, to respect him, and to entrust herself to his loving care. Both husbands and wives are to be faithful to each other, to assist each other in all good things, to heartily forgive each other their sins and shortcomings, and to love each other as themselves. Thus united in love, they will more and more reflect in their marriage the unity of Christ and his church.

Into this holy estate these two persons, M— and N—, come now to be joined.

2. Public Determination of Lawfulness The minister may say:

If anyone can show just cause why they may not lawfully be married, let him now declare it, or else hereafter forever hold his peace.

If there is no objection, the minister may proceed, saying:

I require and charge you both that, if either of you knows any cause why you may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, you do now confess it.

3. Public Declaration of Consent

Then, if no obstacle appears, the minister shall say to the man:

[Man's first name], will you have this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of marriage? And will you love her as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her, will you comfort her, honor and cherish her, and forsaking all others keep yourself only unto her as long as you both shall live?

The man shall answer:

I will.

Then the minister shall say to the woman:

[Woman's first name], will you have this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of marriage? And will you love him, comfort him, respect and submit to him even as the church submits to Christ, and forsaking all others keep yourself only unto him as long as you both shall live?

The woman shall answer:

I will.

4. Public Transfer of Authority Then the minister may say:

Who gives this woman to be married to this man?

The father of the woman (or someone in his stead) may say,

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I do.

Her father (or someone in his stead) shall place her right hand in the hand of the bridegroom, and be seated.

5. Invocation

The minister may pray, in these or like words:

Most holy and most merciful Father, at once the God of nature and of grace, Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer of mankind, fountain of life, of love, and of joy and peace, whose presence is the happiness of every condition; we beseech you to be present and favorable to these, your servants, and to fill them with a sense of the solemnity of the vows they are about to make. Enable them, we pray, to remember and to keep these vows, looking to you for your assistance, and help them to enter into these sacred obligations in humble dependence upon your enabling grace. Grant this, O Father, with the forgiveness of our sins, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

6. Homily

At this time it is fitting for the minister to give a brief message from the Word of God appropriate to the occasion.

7. Exchange of Vows

Then the bridegroom shall say (after the minister, if desired):

I, M—, take you, N—, to be my wedded wife, and I do promise and covenant before God and these witnesses to be your loving and faithful husband in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, as long as we both shall live.

The bride shall say (after the minister, if desired):

I, N—, take you, M—, to be my wedded husband, and I do promise and covenant before God and these witnesses to be your loving and faithful wife in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, as long as we both shall live.

8. Exchange of Rings (if desired)

The minister may ask the bridegroom:

What symbol do you give as a pledge that you will faithfully perform these vows?

The bridegroom shall put a ring on the bride's left hand and say (after the minister, if desired):

This ring I give you as a token and pledge of constant faith and abiding love.

If this is a double-ring ceremony, the minister may then ask the bride:

What symbol do you give as a pledge that you will faithfully perform these vows?

The bride shall put a ring on the bridegroom's left hand and say (after the minister, if desired):

This ring I give you as a token and pledge of constant faith and abiding love.

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9. Prayer

The minister may pray in these or like words:

Most merciful and gracious God, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, we beseech you, set the seal of your approval upon the marriage into which our brother and sister have entered this day. Grant them your fatherly blessing. Work in them the grace of your Holy Spirit. Enable them to fulfill with pure and constant affection the vow and covenant made between them. Guide them in the way of righteousness and peace, that, loving and serving you with one mind and heart all the days of their life, they may be abundantly enriched with the tokens of your everlasting favor in Christ Jesus our Lord. In all of life's experiences, lift up your countenance upon them, that they may be thankful in prosperity and patient in adversity. May their marriage be fruitful for this life and for the life to come. Grant them wisdom and strength to build a home that will be to the glory of your name and the coming of your kingdom. May they live together many years, and in the hour of death may they part in the blessed hope of celebrating forever with all the saints of God the marriage of Christ and the church he loved. Hear our prayer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

10. Declaration

The minister shall say:

By virtue of the authority committed unto me as a minister of the church of Jesus Christ, I now pronounce you husband and wife, according to the ordinance of God and the law of the State, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Then joining their hands, he shall pronounce:

What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.

11. Kiss

The minister may say:

You may now seal your commitment with a kiss.

The husband and wife may exchange a discreet kiss.

12. Blessing

The minister may say:

The Lord our God fill you with his grace, and grant that you may long live together in all godliness and holiness. Amen.

13. Presentation

The minister may then conclude the service, saying:

It now gives me great pleasure to present to you, for the first time, Mr. and Mrs. [name].

THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

Adapted from the Westminster Standards (London, 1645)

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A. Guiding Principles

1. For the sake of convenience and pastoral care, a funeral service may be held at a time other than that of burial.
2. Circumstances attending specific cases differ so entirely that ministers must use their own discretion as to what mode of conducting this service will most promote the honor of God and the edification of the people. It should be observed that the Scriptures and the prayers in the following service have been arranged with the burial of believers or their children primarily in mind. When other persons are to be buried, the service should be modified accordingly. The following principles, however, should be followed as general rules:
 - a. Care should be taken that it be evident that the ultimate goal of the service is to exalt God, not to exalt man. Personal reference may have some place, but the entire service should emphasize the reading of Scripture and acts of direct worship.
 - b. The minister should never declare the deceased to have died finally impenitent. God alone is the Judge. The inference in many cases, suggested by the facts, will be plain and terrible enough.
 - c. The minister should always be careful not to imply, by use of Scriptures or otherwise, the salvation of persons whose lives and deaths have possessed no grounds for such a hope.
 - d. The minister ought always to point the living to the grace of God in Christ Jesus as their sole ground of confidence.
3. From the reference to the minister in this service it is not to be inferred that only a minister may officiate. However, it would be well if a minister of the Word, normally the deceased person's pastor, were to do so.

B. Suggested Form for the Burial of the Dead

1. The Funeral Service

a. Opening Scripture Sentences

When the people have assembled, the minister may begin the service with several of these or other appropriate sentences from the Holy Scriptures:

“Our help is in the name of the lord, who made heaven and earth.” Ps. 124:8

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” Ps. 103:13–14

“Precious in the sight of the lord is the death of his saints.” Ps. 116:15

“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die,

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we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living." Rom. 14:7-9

"To live is Christ, and to die is gain ... to depart, and to be with Christ ... is far better." Phil. 1:21, 23

"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." 1 Tim. 6:7

"The lord gave, and the lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the lord." Job 1:21

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." Job 19:25-27

"I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." John 11:25-26

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." 2 Cor. 1:3-4

b. Prayer

Then the minister may lead the people in the following, or a similar, prayer, and ending, if desired, with the Lord's Prayer:

Almighty and gracious God, our Father in heaven, you are our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Lead us, we pray, to put our trust entirely in you. We come to you in the name of your only begotten and well-beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, who died for our sins and rose from the dead. Grant us, we beseech you, through his precious blood, peace and pardon, and joy in the Holy Spirit. And seeing that we have in him an high priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, may we come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help us in this time of our need. We thank you for the precious promises of your Word. We praise you for the light of the gospel. We acknowledge your sovereign will and your infinite compassion. Be pleased, therefore, to look upon our sorrow, and for the sake of your dear Son to grant us the consolation of your Holy Spirit. And we pray that you will enable us to hear your holy Word, so that through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we may have hope. Grant to us, too, that we may hold fast our confidence in your forgiving mercy and the blessed assurance of eternal life. We ask these blessings of you, our Father, through him who bore our sins in his own body on the tree, who rose from the dead, and who is exalted at your right hand, even Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

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c. Psalm or Hymn

A psalm or hymn may then be read by the minister or sung by the people.

d. Scripture Reading from the Psalms

Then the minister may read one or more of the following or other appropriate psalms:

“The lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the lord for ever.” Ps. 23

“The lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the lord, and to enquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.” Ps. 27:1–5

“Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Return, O lord, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord

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our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.” Ps. 90

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.” Ps. 103:13–18

Psalm 39:4–13 and Psalm 130 may also be found appropriate.

e. Scripture Reading Presenting the Gospel Message of Salvation

The minister may then wish to address those assembled in these or other appropriate words:

Hear now the promises of the gospel given to those who are found to be in Christ Jesus.

Then let the minister read one or more of these, or similar, passages presenting the gospel message of salvation by God’s grace in Christ:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” John 3:16–17

“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.” John 10:9–11, 27–30

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his

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blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” Rom. 5:1–11 Romans 8:1–11 may also be found appropriate.

f. Scripture Reading Addressing Particular Needs

Then, if it is deemed fitting, the minister may read one or more Scripture passages addressed to particular needs.

Selections relating to the death of children:

“And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” Gen. 17:7

“For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Acts 2:39

“Thus saith the lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.” Jer. 31:15

“And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.” Mark 10:13–16

“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” Matt. 18:10

“Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” Matt. 18:14

“While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue’s house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe. And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.” Mark 5:35–39

“Jesus ... said ... Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of

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God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.” Mark 10:14–16

“And the lord struck the child that Uriah’s wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead? But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the lord, and worshiped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” 2 Sam.

12:15–23

“The lord gave, and the lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the lord.” Job 1:21

Selections relating to the sudden death of youth or middle-aged persons:

“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” 1 Pet. 1:24

“Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” Prov.

27:1

“For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” James 4:14

“[Man] knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.” Eccl. 8:7–8

“One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet.... And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them.” Job 21:23–26

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“Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.... For ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.” Mark 13:33–37

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.” Luke 12:35–36

Selections applying to the death of the elderly:

“We spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” Ps. 90:9–10

“And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.” Gen. 47:9

“The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.” Prov. 16:31

“The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to shew that the lord is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.” Ps. 92:12–15

Selections concerning a notably useful and fruitful Christian life:

“But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” Prov. 4:18

“Then they that feared the lord spake often one to another: and the lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” Mal. 3:16–18

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Heb. 10:23–25

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and

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fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” Matt. 25:34–40

“And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.” Dan. 12:3

“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” James 5:19–20

g. Psalm or Hymn

Then another psalm or hymn may be read or sung.

h. Scripture Reading Concerning the Resurrection and the Life Everlasting

Then let the minister read one or more of these or other appropriate Scripture passages giving the gospel promise of the resurrection and the life everlasting:

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all... But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and terrestrial bodies: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The

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first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” 1 Cor. 15:20–28, 35–58

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.... If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. On that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.... These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” John 14:1–3, 15–20, 25–27

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be

Adapted from the Westminster Standards (London, 1645)

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revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” 1 Pet. 1:3–9

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.... And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Rev. 21:1–4, 22–27

“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” Rev. 22:1–7

2 Corinthians 4:16–18; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:13–18; 5:1–11; and Revelation 7:13–17 may also be found appropriate.

i. Sermon

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If it is desired, an address may be given here. It is appropriate that it be brief, and it should direct the hearers to the grace of God in Christ.

j. Psalm or Hymn

Then another psalm or hymn may be read or sung.

k. Prayer

Then the minister may lead the people in this, or other, prayer:

Almighty and most merciful God, we come again to you in prayer, acknowledging your sovereign power, and right as our Creator, both to give and to take away as seems good unto you. We remember all your mercies, and your saving grace revealed to us in Christ, your Son, our Redeemer. We thank you for your favor shown to our beloved friend in bringing (him/her) to a knowledge of your redeeming love, granting (him/her) faith in Christ, the Savior.

We humbly pray for your bereaved servants that you will give to them meek and trustful submission to your will. May they have divine comfort through joy in the presence of our risen Christ and the enlightenment of your Holy Spirit. We pray that you will fill their sorrowing hearts with your love, that they may wholly rest in you to bring eternal joy out of grief, and life from death, through the power of your resurrected Son, who now sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us.

We pray that you will grant grace to us who remain, to imitate the righteous dead in faith and in loving service. Give us, we pray, perseverance to continue faithful to the end, following Christ our Lord, so that we may finally be received unto heaven through his sacrifice for us and in our place, and, with all your elect, adore you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

2. The Interment

a. Scripture Sentences

At the place of burial, if it seems desirable, let the minister say:

“I am the resurrection, and the life,” saith the Lord; “he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” John 11:25–26

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” 2 Cor. 5:1

b. Committal

Then, if it seems desirable, earth or flowers may be scattered upon the casket, while the minister may say:

Forasmuch as it hath pleased almighty God, in his wise providence, to take out of this world the soul of our (brother/ sister), we therefore commit (his/her) body to the ground: earth

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to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose coming in glorious majesty the earth and the sea shall give up their dead; and the mortal bodies of those who sleep in him shall be changed, and made like unto his own glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.

c. Affirmation

Then the minister may say:

“I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” Rev. 14:13

Or, if the spiritual condition of the deceased is uncertain, he may use the following or other Scripture passages:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” John 5:24

d. Prayer

Then the minister shall offer the following, or a similar prayer:

O almighty and merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, grant that we may realize the shortness and uncertainty of human life, that we may live before you in godly fear all our days, looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

We humbly beseech you to comfort the sorrowing, and to support them in their grief. Raise us up each one, we pray you, from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, so that we too, when we depart this life, may rest in Christ, and at the resurrection be found acceptable in your sight, through the mediation and merits of him who died on the cross and rose again. Amen.

As soon as the service comes to an end, the minister should move to speak a personal word of comfort to the bereaved, after which the others who have gathered will be free to do so.

III THANKSGIVING FOR A CHURCH BUILDING

A. Guiding Principles

1. Under the gospel, the worship of God is no longer localized in a holy site on this earth. The living God is rather worshiped in spirit and in truth in the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ the Mediator is. It may nevertheless be expedient to set aside a place for



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worship assemblies and the service of God's people. When God provides such a place, it is fitting for a congregation corporately to thank him, to ask his special blessing on its use, and to commit itself to using the place for his glory, especially for the advancement of the gospel.

2. Such thanksgiving may be given a special occasional service on the Lord's Day or another suitable time.

MINISTERIAL GUIDE V:
The Recommend Curriculum
For Ministerial Preparation in this Church

For men who desire to labor in ministering the word of God, the following curriculum is recommended as a guideline. Further supplementation of a candidate's course work through individual guided study, supervised ministry experience, or other means are also encouraged.

SCRIPTURE

I. Bible Content

A. Study of the English Bible

1. The candidate should be required to read through the Bible in English.
2. Course work should include areas such as archaeology, history and geography, emphasizing the significance of these disciplines for the grammatico-historical interpretation of Scripture.

B. Required comprehensive examination on Bible content

Goal: The candidate should have a thorough knowledge of the content of the English Bible and an ability to communicate it.

II. Biblical Languages

A. Hebrew

1. Grammatical forms
2. Syntactical principles
3. Exegetical procedures
4. Required readings in the Hebrew Scriptures

B. Greek

1. Grammatical forms
2. Syntactical principles
3. Exegetical procedures
4. Required readings in the Greek New Testament

Goal: The candidate should be able to exegete the Scriptures from the original languages in the preparation of sermons and Bible lessons, using lexical and grammatical tools.

III. Hermeneutics (or, Principles and Methods of Interpretation)

A. Principles of Interpretation

B. Biblical Theology

C. History of and Issues in Biblical Criticism (Higher and Textual)

Adapted from the Westminster Standards (London, 1645)

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D. Special Hermeneutical Issues

1. Old Testament
2. New Testament

Goal: The candidate should understand the principles, procedures and problems involved in the interpretation of God's Word, and should demonstrate a growing proficiency in the faithful exposition of Scripture. He shall be able to read the Bible as God intended it, in its organic unity and its historical diversity. The centrality of Christ, the covenant and the kingdom in the Scriptures determines our understanding of the Scriptures as a whole and as individual texts. The Bible is the progressively unfolding history of the redemptive acts and words of God, climaxing in the coming of Christ and his kingdom, ushering in the new age, the last days.

Christ has accomplished this through his death and resurrection, and the sending of his Spirit to the church on the day of Pentecost. The Bible also holds out the blessed hope to Christ's church that this new covenant kingdom, which is not yet consummated, will appear in the fullness of God's glory with Christ's return on the last day.

IV. Use of the Bible in Ministry

- A. The candidate should be required to prepare advanced exegetical papers on assigned Old Testament and New Testament passages.
- B. The candidate should be required to use his interpretive skills and tools in the preparation of sermons and Bible lessons/courses.

Goal: The candidate should be able to faithfully explain Scripture for the building up of God's people, moving from a careful study in the original languages through the interpretive process, and arriving at a clear exposition of the text's meaning and application for the church today.

DOCTRINE

I. Church History

A study of the history of the church since the New Testament period, in all eras, with particular emphasis on the heritage and uniqueness of this Church

Goal: The candidate should understand the flow of history, the historical development of Christian theology and the influence upon it of secular history and philosophy, and the progress of ecclesiastical development; and he should have an awareness of the relation of the cultural context to the history of the church.

II. Apologetics

- A. Introduction to Apologetic Methodology and Practice including (1) the school of Van Tilian presuppositionalism as the most biblically faithful expression of Reformed apologetics, and (2) a survey of positions held by other Reformed apologists

Adapted from the Westminster Standards (London, 1645)

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B. Survey of Non-Christian Thought (including the history of humanistic thought and its contemporary manifestation in various worldviews and spheres of intellectual and aesthetic activity—philosophy, literature, drama, popular arts, scientific methodology—as well as a survey of non-Christian religions and cults)

C. Survey of Contemporary Theology (including the old liberalism, neoorthodoxy, liberation theology, etc.)

Goal: The candidate should gain a sound intellectual basis for the positive presentation of the Christian faith from a Reformed perspective, and should be equipped to deal with anti-Christian systems of thought in their various contemporary manifestations.

III. Theology and Ethics

A. Systematic Theology: Study of the whole system of doctrine revealed in Scripture as one organic body of truth, basic to all theological disciplines, with emphasis upon the centrality of doctrine in the proclamation of the Word in all the witness and work of the church: prolegomena, theology proper, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology, including a specific study of the secondary doctrinal standards of this Church, the Confessions of Faith and Catechisms.

B. Ethics: Study of the goal, motive and standard of the Christian way of life set forth in God's Word (the two "great commandments," the ten commandments, the sermon on the mount, etc.)

Goal: The candidate should obtain a knowledge of and commitment to the Reformed faith (including such distinctives as the inerrancy of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, covenant theology, the five points of Calvinism, etc.); and he should become proficient in communicating this faith. He should manifest an understanding of and commitment to a biblical lifestyle in both personal and social ethics.

IV. Polity

A. Biblical Church Government: Study of the biblical foundations of the principles and practice of church government

B. Church Order

Goal: The candidate should gain an understanding of the biblical teaching on the nature and structure of the church, as well as a working knowledge of the contents and application of The Book of Church Order of this Church (containing the standards of government, discipline, and worship) and Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised.

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

I. The Pastor's Personal Life

A. Spiritual Life

1. Growth in godliness

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2. Call to the ministry of the Word
- B. Communication and Interpersonal Relations
 1. With his family
 2. With the church
 3. With the community

Goal: The candidate should learn how to develop his personal relationship to God through the study of Scripture and through prayer, and how to express his devotion to God through developing and maintaining godly relationships with those of his own household, with others in the household of faith and with those outside the faith. Growing out of this, the candidate should be guided in determining the genuineness of his sense of call to the gospel ministry.

II. Worship

- A. Biblical Principles of Public Worship: Study of the biblical standards which should govern the public worship of God and of their implementation in the worship life of a congregation, including special attention to the OPC's Directory for the Public Worship of God
- B. The Preaching of God's Word
 1. Theology of preaching
 2. Principles and practices of preaching
- C. The Sacraments

Goal: The candidate should understand the regulative principle of public worship and its application to the specific elements of a congregation's worship services, and the centrality of preaching within the biblical pattern of public worship. He should demonstrate increasing proficiency in preaching the Word and in leading a congregation in public worship.

III. Evangelism

- A. Theology of Reformed Evangelism
- B. The Pastor's Role in the Practice of Evangelism

Goal: The candidate should be able to express the bearing of the Reformed faith on the practice of announcing the gospel to nonChristians. He should develop methods for bringing the message of Christ to others and should implement those methods by engaging in evangelism and by training others to do so.

IV. Missiology

- A. Reformed Theology of Missions
- B. Strategy of Missions, both within one's own culture and cross-culturally

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Goal: The candidate should gain an understanding of the issues and practices involved in the planting and extension of the church both within a single culture and cross-culturally, including such areas as linguistics, indigenization, the use of anthropological perspectives, the use of printed and electronic media, and the relation of missions to political and social reforms.

V. Pastoral Care

A. Theology of Pastoral Care and Counseling

B. Practice of Pastoral Counseling

Goal: The candidate should understand the biblical principles which govern his shepherding of God's people and should gain practical experience in counseling (e.g., through the use of case studies and through the observation of and/or participation in actual counseling Elders).

VI. Christian Education

A. Theology of Christian Education

B. History of Christian Education

C. Practice of Christian Education

Goal: The candidate should understand the biblical basis of Christian education and its historical development. He should gain proficiency in the development of a plan for Christian education in the home and in the church, in the training of Bible teachers for church-related ministries, and in the discerning and developing of spiritual gifts within the church.

VII. Pastoral Administration

A. Theology of Administration

B. Practice of Administration

Goal: The candidate should understand the biblical principles of administration and leadership, such as planning and evaluation, strategy and oversight, the stewardship of time, the delegation of authority/responsibility and the harmonious employment of the spiritual gifts of the members of Christ's body (Eph. 4:11- 16).