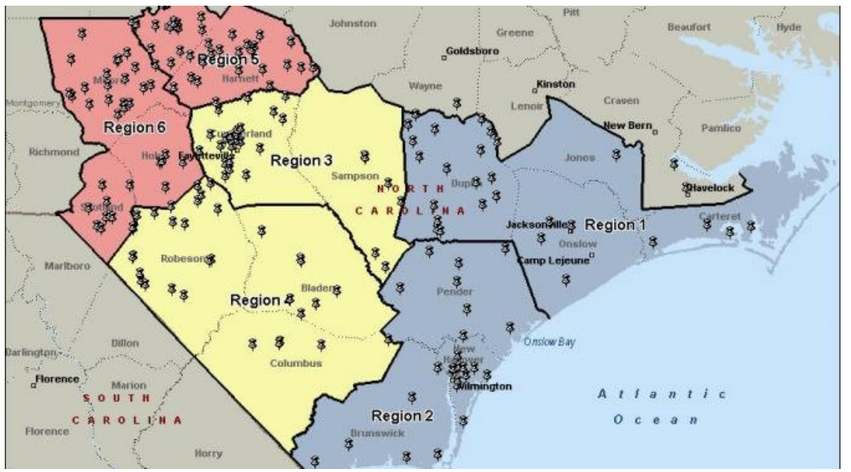
Officer Training Packet



Resources for use by the churches of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

Questions Confirming Our Calling as Church Members & Officers

Membership Questions

- Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure, and without hope save in his sovereign mercy?
- Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and depend upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the Gospel?
- Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
- Do you promise to serve Christ in his Church by supporting and participating in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
- Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to further its purity and peace?

Ordination Questions

- Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?
- Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
- Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?
- Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Work and Spirit?
- Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?
- Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
- Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- **(For elder)** Will you be a faithful ruling elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?
- **(For deacon)** Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

As Presbyterians, we are called to work for the "peace, unity and purity of the Church" (Book of Order) as we seek to be faithful to God's work in the world. However, disagreements and conflicts are inevitable in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as we try to be faithful. They exist within committees, congregations, presbyteries, synods, at General Assemblies and in the national life of the denomination.

Conflicts are inevitable in all of life and certainly in the church. The history of the church is filled with conflicts and disagreements. Several of Paul's letters address the conflicts which were common in the early church. There have been and are going to be disagreements as Christian attempt to discern God's work in the world and as we interpret scripture.

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

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

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

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

Adopted by the 204[1]/' General Assembly (1992) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Twelve Ground Rules for Working through Conflict

1. Speak for yourself, not for others.
2. Challenge other's behaviors or ideas, not their motives or their worth.
3. No blaming.
4. No labeling.
5. No threats.
6. Send "I" messages rather than "You" messages!
7. Propose the change you want rather than just talking about what you don't like. Be specific and descriptive.
8. Acknowledge your share in creating the conflict or tension.
9. Respect and explore differing experiences of the same event.
10. Evaluate in terms of "costs and benefits" rather than "good and evil."
11. No interrupting. Care enough to listen before you respond. Respond to show understanding of the other before stating your position.
12. Describe feelings rather than acting them out or trying to disguise them.

Seeking to be Faithful Together

Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement

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

Give them a hearing... listen before we answer John 7:51 and Proverbs 18:13	1 2 3	Treat each other respectfully so as to build trust, believing that we all desire to be faithful to Jesus the Christ; we will keep our conversations and communications open for candid and forthright exchange, we will not ask questions or make statements in a way which will intimidate or judge others. Learn about various positions on the topic of disagreement. State what we think we heard and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to be sure we understand each other.
Speak the truth in love Ephesians 4:15	4 5 6	Share our concerns directly with individuals or groups with whom we have disagreements in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with Jesus' teachings. Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence or integrity; we will not engage in name-calling or labelling of others prior to, during, or following the discussion. Share our personal experiences about the subject of disagreement so that others may more fully understand our concerns.
Maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace Ephesians 4:3		Indicate where we agree with those of other viewpoints as well as where we disagree. Seek to stay in community with each other though the discussion may be vigorous and full of tension; we will be ready to forgive and be forgiven. Follow these additional guidelines when we meet in decision-making bodies: • urge persons of various points of view to speak and promise to listen to these positions seriously; seek conclusions informed by our points of agreement; be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of those who do not agree with the majority and respect their rights of conscience; • abide by the decision of the majority, and if we disagree with it and wish to change it, work for that change in ways which are consistent with these Guidelines. Include our disagreement in our prayers, not praying for the triumph of our viewpoints, but seeking God's grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly, and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all.

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

Examination of Church Officers

Come Prepared for the Following

- Share briefly how you came to know Christ as Savior and Lord and have experienced the presence of Christ in your ongoing life. (Note: This is not an outline of your church involvement; it is an outline of your faith development!) (3 minutes)
- Name one Scripture verse or passage that is meaningful to your life. Read the scripture, say a word about what it means, and explain why it holds special significance to you. (2 minutes)
- Identify one essential tenant of the reformed faith as identified in the Book of Order or Book of Confessions. Explain why it is significant either to your faith or to the church as a whole. (2 minutes)
- Identify any questions, concerns or disagreements you may have regarding reformed theology and doctrine, church polity, or denominational issues. Discuss your questions/concerns. (2 minutes)
- Write and share a brief Statement of Faith in which you speak about the beliefs that stand at the core of your personal faith, about the significance of the Church of Jesus Christ in your life, and about the sense of calling to service you experience as an officer in this church. (5 minutes)

Most of this will take place in small groups with 2 or 3 current elders.

How To Write Faith Statements

We need to be able to express what we believe. Think of ways we can express our faith.

- The statement could be in the form of a prayer.
- You could write a hymn that states your faith.
- You could draw your faith -- put it in pictures or symbols.
- You could write a statement

Writing a Personal Statement of Faith - One Possible Outline

1. Who is God?
2. Who is Christ?
3. Who is the Holy Spirit?
4. What is my relationship with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit?
5. What does it mean for Jesus to be my Savior and Lord?
5. What is the Church and what does it mean to me?
6. What is the Scripture for me?
7. How do I experience the call of God to serve the church?
8. How does my relationship with the living God affect my relationship with the following:
   - My family
   - My friends
   - My community
   - My community of faith
   - Strangers
   - Enemies
   - All of creation
9. How has God gifted me for ministry and mission?
10. What is my hope and vision for the Church and the Kingdom in this time and place?

THE ROLE OF OFFICERS IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (as outlined in the Book of Order of the PCUSA)

QUALIFICATIONS

G-2.0104 Gifts and Qualifications
a. To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders—God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God's people and the concurring judgment of a council of the church.
b. Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

DESCRIPTIONS

G-2.0201 Deacon Defined
The ministry of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion, and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry.

G-2.0301 Ruling Elder Defined
As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God's Spirit and governance of God's people. Accordingly, congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit. Ruling elders are so named not because they "lord it over" the congregation (Matt. 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Ruling elders, together with teaching elders, exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationships. When elected by the congregation, they shall serve faithfully as members of the session. When elected as commissioners to higher councils, ruling elders participate and vote with the same authority as teaching elders, and they are eligible for any office.

RESPONSIBILITIES

G-3.0201 Composition and Responsibilities
…the session has responsibility and power to:
a. *provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.* This responsibility shall include providing a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, education, and spiritual nurture; providing for regular preaching of the Word by a teaching elder or other person prepared and approved for the work; planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world with the message of salvation and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship; planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community in accordance with the prophetic witness of Jesus Christ; and initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to the love and grace of God.
b. *provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received.* This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate, in accordance with the principles of the Directory for Worship; and exercising pastoral care among the congregation in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the congregation may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.
c. *nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.* This responsibility shall include receiving and dismissing members; reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership; providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship; training, examining, ordaining, and installing those elected by the congregation as ruling elders and deacons; encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources; managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission; directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation; employing the administrative staff of the congregation; leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

During This Meeting We Will:

Taken from *Revised Church Officer Preordination Curriculum*

Six Step Planning Guide

1. WHAT is to be accomplished?
   - Primary task
   - Supporting tasks
2. HOW is it to be accomplished? (Methods)
   - A.
   - B.
   - C.
   - D.
3. WHEN is it to be accomplished?
   - Preparation phase
   - Execution phase
   - Follow – up phase
4. WHO will accomplish it?
5. CONTROL measures
6. COMMUNICATION measures

Examples of Procedure

1) No motion
   Discussion
   Chaos
2) Motion
   No Second
   No discussion
   (Motion dies)
3) Motion
   Second
   No objection, so ordered
4) Motion
   Second
   Discussion
   Vote
5) Motion
   Second
   Discussion . . .

a. Call for the Question
   Second (no discussion)
   Vote to call for the question (2/3)

b. Amendment
   Second to amendment
   Discussion on amendment
   Vote on amendment
   Discussion on motion as amended
   Vote on motion as amended

c. Motion to refer to committee
   Second
   Discussion
   Vote to refer to committee (Original motion goes to committee for further discussion)

d. Motion to table
   Second (no discussion)
   Vote to table
   Original motion is tabled, no further discussion (Motion may be “taken off the table at any time by a majority vote)

e. Motion to adjourn
   Second (no discussion)
   Vote to adjourn (Meeting ends)

THE JOB OF ALL CHURCH OFFICERS

A. To Study

II Peter 3:18 says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Jesus said in Matthew 11:29, "Take My yoke upon you, and team from Me." Paul prayed for the Christians in the city of Colossae (Colossians 1:9) that they would "be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." And God said through the prophet Hosea (4:6), "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (This last criticism was aimed at the religious leaders, who had defaulted on their responsibility in this area.)

Being an effective Church officer means continually studying in order to acquire an increasing knowledge of the purposes of God, of the needs that He wants us to meet, of the resources that He provides, and of the principles according to which He wants us to work. The most effective way to gain this knowledge is to study and learn as you work at your job.

The only way to keep learning effectively is to set aside definite times for study, and include them in your daily and weekly schedule. There are three main subjects on which you will need to concentrate your study. In order of priority, they are:

I. The Bible. No matter how much you have read and studied it up to now, the Bible still contains vast treasures of knowledge, insight and inspiration waiting for you, and specifically to guide you in your work as a Church officer.

2. The people of your Church and community. Make a point to learn the names and faces, the relationships and circumstances, the personalities and needs, of the people you work with and serve. The Church is people.

3. Your office, and its place in the over-all structure of the Church. Learn what the responsibilities of your office are, according to the national Church constitution, and your own congregational by-laws. Learn what traditions exist in your own Church regarding your office. (Of course, traditions can, and often should, be changed; but first it is wise to learn what they are, and why they exist.)

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ANSWER:

I. How much of the Bible have you read up to now? All of it? Have you read it through more than once?

2. Do you now practice daily Bible reading? Will you?

3. Do you, or will you, regularly attend a Bible study class or group?

4. Have you made a serious effort to learn the names and faces of most of the members of your congregation?

5. Do you have a membership list or directory of your congregation? What percentage of the names can you identify with their faces? What percentage do you know more about (such as where they live, etc.)?

B. To Pray

God says in Jeremiah 33:3, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things, which you have not known." Jesus said in Matthew 7:7, "Ask, and it will be given you." The English poet Tennyson wrote, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.".

All Christians are called to Pray, but Church officers are called to Pray specifically for the people and programs for which they have special responsibility. The Apostle Paul exemplified this kind of prayer as we see from the many references to it in his letters, usually near the beginning of each letter (for example, I Thessalonians 1:2, "...constantly mentioning you in our prayers..." Colossians 1:9, "...we have not ceased to Pray for you..." etc.). Again, in the Old Testament, the prophet Samuel said to the people of Israel, “Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to Pray for you..." II Samuel 12:23).

Every Church officer should establish (if they have not already done so) a regular schedule of daily private prayer, and let nothing pre-empt or interfere with it. Note: wisdom is often required to schedule such a regular prayer and Bible study tine while still fulfilling your responsibilities to your family, your secular job, etc. Ask God to give you the wisdom to do this, and He will. If something must be sacrificed in order to make time for prayer and Bible study, let it be something selfish, perhaps time spent in entertainment and amusement. Anyone can rearrange their schedule to include at least a half-hour of prayer and Bible reading each day, if they are willing to follow God's priorities. Also, when emergencies or unexpected crises sometimes occur, as they will, it is often possible to adapt one's devotional activities to fit the situation that day, by praying and recalling memorized scripture passages while engaged in other activities, such as waiting in a hospital waiting room, riding in a vehicle, etc.

In your prayers, be sure to Pray for your Church regularly. Pray for your pastor or pastors, and their families. Pray for your fellow officers. Pray specifically for the programs and needs of the Church. Ask God for wisdom, strength and guidance to do your job effectively and contribute to the growth of His kingdom. He will answer!

In addition to private prayer, a Church officer should be prepared to Pray aloud with other people when needed, both individually and in groups, leading in prayer if necessary. This does not necessarily mean reading a written prayer or reciting a memorized prayer, but often praying spontaneously from the heart, lifting up the need or the concern at hand before God.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ANSWER:

I. What kind of a personal prayer schedule do you now follow?

2. What experience have you had praying with other individuals for special needs, such as healing, financial provision, guidance, strength, etc?

3. What experience have you had leading groups in prayer, such as to open meetings, pray for guidance or help, etc.?

C. To Work

By work, we mean to carry out the mission of your office, to fulfill the responsibilities of your job. This may involve a wide variety of activities such as: attending meetings, giving talks, gathering information, making visits and telephone calls, keeping records, writing reports, making purchases, recruiting volunteers, preparing lists, rosters or schedules, teaching classes, counting money, washing dishes, preparing meals, raking leaves, replacing light bulbs, carrying supplies from place to place, etc.

At first, you may be told what work you are supposed to do, perhaps following the example of your immediate predecessor in your office, and being guided by the Pastor(s) and/or your fellow officers who are more experienced. The best way to begin doing it is by making a written schedule for several months ahead, and keep updating it every week. In fact, one of the first tasks you should put on your schedule is the task of up-dating your future calendar for the coming weeks and months, making sure that you write on it everything growing out of the discussions and decisions at the most recent meetings you have attended. Your schedule should, of course, include all the board or committee meetings that you are expected to attend, as well as any smaller conferences with perhaps one or two of your fellow workers or officers. It should also include set times for doing any preparatory work for meetings, such as gathering information, writing a report, recruiting volunteers, making up a list or roster, etc. some churches provide officers with printed Planning Calendars on which they can make additional notations of their activities.

As you gain experience in your job, start to exercise initiative to meet needs or fulfill responsibilities that may not have been included in the initial instructions you, were given or the pattern set by your predecessor. (This does not necessarily imply criticism of your predecessor; situations constantly change in the life of the Church, so that needs and opportunities which you discover may not even have been present a year earlier; or, if they were, more urgent priorities at that time may have pre-empted them.) Be a self-starter. Don't limit yourself to doing only the jobs you are told to do. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in developing ways to fulfill more needs, more effectively, and to accomplish more for God. However, exercise wisdom, prudence and balance in this; don't try to run ahead of God, and smother your colleagues in more new suggestions than they can handle at one time. Also, don't over-commit yourself beyond what you can realistically be expected to do in the coming months.

God deserves the best. In all the tasks you do, endeavor to perform the mat the highest level of quality of which you are capable, spending the necessary time, and engaging in the necessary preparations and care.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ANSWER:

1. What kind of written schedule do you now keep and follow?

2. What are some of the tasks you will be expected to do, and what kind of preparations will they require?

D. To Lead

Judges 5:2 says, "That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the Lord!" People will offer themselves more willingly for the service of God's kingdom, when their leaders take the lead. People need and want leadership, so that they and the Church may grow and advance spiritually.

To exercise leadership means to recognize that the purpose of the Church is not just to maintain the status quo. Unfortunately, one of the deadly traps that the Church often falls into is the trap of inertia and eventual vegetation and stagnation. All change is sometimes viewed as unnecessary and undesirable. And sometimes Church officers come to regard their main priority as the preservation of the ways of the past or the status quo, rather than running "the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith ..." (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Transforming Church Boards

Here is my vision of a prototype board that earnestly discerns the Spirit:

1. Every member of the board is daily working at discerning God's will in his/her own life. Daily prayer and silent listening are on the spiritual menu. Occasional retreats are taken to quiet the inner voices and ego demands. Each member joined the board only after a thorough examination of the invitation to serve as a call from God through the voice of the people.

2. The board has bonded as a community through the stories they have told and their common experience of the grace of God. They are a diverse group but have grown to have deep respect for one another and for one another's vocations.

3. The meetings are conducted in the framework of worship. Members pray openly with and for one another.

4. Several significant issues or opportunities are before them. They have agreed on the priority matter at hand and are willing to take six months to study, reflect and pray toward a decision.

5. The moderator of the group is fair and sensitive – especially to the need to consider each person's wisdom and to look into some connecting Bible passages.

6. The decisions made are not necessarily the most convenient, cheap, politically palatable or agreeable to the pastor's wishes. They have agreed upon one consideration: that God is leading and calling out this particular form of obedience and mission.

7. In response to the leading, every member works for its completion, all the while trusting that God will accomplish more than they ever imagined.

8. The board maintains a playful spirit, not taking itself too seriously. It is open to celebrate at the drop of a hat what God is doing.

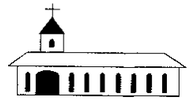
From Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders, by Charles M. Olsen, The Alban Institute, Herndon, VA (800) 486-1318, www.alban.org

The Four Congregational Sizes

Patriarchal/Matriarchal
Under 50 at worship

1. A family with patriarchs/matriarchs.
2. High ownership for survival.
3. Want clergy for traditional care.
4. Clergy succeed when consulting P/M's
5. Very high pastor turnover.
6. Survive by not taking clergy seriously.
7. Assimilate new members by adoption.
8. May grow if one clergy stays long time.
9. Judicatories try to merge/disband.
10. Considered "First Call" parishes, yet toughest place for new pastors just out of seminary, therefore...

Pastoral
50 to 150 at worship

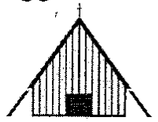


1. Pastor is central, relates to everyone.
2. Expectations high, personal.
3. Most churches this size
4. Growth often depends on popularity of pastor.
5. Communication with leaders important.
6. Near 150, demands on pastor become oppressive, delegate or else.
7. Pastor recruits, shepherds new members through assimilation.
8. Can be hard on spouse and children.
9. Blocks to growth: pastor tries to be on intimate level with all, or people insist on it.

Greener Pastures ⇨

We Want, We Need ◆ Vision of the Future

Program
150 – 350 at worship



1. Several lay members, clergy and lay.
2. Lay leadership vital.
3. Clergy still central, but role shifts.
4. Administration: recruiting, planning, training, evaluating, and coordinating.
5. Pastor helps people arrive at consensus.
6. Pastor-Motivator and trust builder.
7. Pastors need to be very clear about their mission, with consensus.
8. Difficult to move from pastoral size to this size without crisis.
9. Need well-designed computerized system to keep track of members, programs.
10. Careful, intentional program of visitor follow-up, new member assimilation.

Corporate
350 or more at worship

1. High priority on quality.
2. Top notch music.
3. Head of staff spends quality time on sermon preparation and worship planning.
4. Head pastor is unity-stability symbol.
5. Multiple staff collegial, yet diverse.
6. Staff must have fun working together.
7. Leaders generate energy, momentum.
8. Very sophisticated computer system to track members, programs.
9. Visitor follow-up, new member assimilation programs very intentional.
10. Myers-Briggs type variations.

It is important to remember, at the same time, that the Church is not called to pursue change for the sake of change; but rather, to pursue the fulfillment of God's purposes as revealed in the Bible. Some changes are good, and some are not. Suggestions that depart from a church's traditional or existing, programs and policies, must be evaluated with an open mind on the basis of strictly Biblical criteria, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the immediate situation.

The best way to lead is to inspire, by setting an example of positive faith, hope, and vision. If we catch the vision that God sets before us in the Bible, we cannot help but be inspired to move forward ourselves, and to set a challenging, uplifting example for others to do the same.

Leadership in the Church doesn't only mean suggesting and helping to implement innovative policies and programs. Sometimes it means standing firm for Biblical principles in the face of deviant and disruptive influences. The Bible emphasizes the reality of the spiritual warfare in which the Church is engaged. Paul urges Timothy to "wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience" II Timothy 1:18-19). This does not mean that church leaders should be belligerent, eager for a fight; on the contrary, they should strive for peace at all times. But they should also be willing to stand up firmly for the right when wrong is proposed or introduced, because times will come when that is necessary. Of course, the ability to distinguish clearly between right and wrong is acquired by means of the study and prayer that we already discussed as the first two duties of all Church officers. The subject of dealing with conflicts in the Church will be discussed more fully in the last chapter of this manual.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ANSWER:

1. What are some of the steps your Church could take, over and above what it is now doing, to achieve growth in the scope and quality of its ministry? (Make a list for future reference, and keep adding to it.)

2. What could you do to help such steps to be considered?

E. MAKING THE MOST Of MEETINGS

One of the duties you can be sure you will have, usually once a month for ten months of the year, is to attend and participate in meetings of the Board to which you belong (Session, Deacons or Trustees). This can be a stimulating, nourishing, productive experience, or it can be a tiresome, frustrating chore. You will be expected to participate in these meetings in various ways; at times you may have the responsibility of leading them. You can help to make the meetings of your Board most fruitful and satisfying by putting into practice the following suggestions:

1. Make appropriate preparations before the meeting. Be sure it is on your calendar so that you will not forget it. Pray for it, trying to think of the specific issues or topics that it will deal with, on the day of the meeting, arrange your schedule from the morning on so that you will be there early, offer to help set up the meeting room, etc., if that is needed. If you are expected to give any kind of report covering any project or any area of the Church's work, write it out beforehand, at least in outline form, and make a copy to give to the Clerk or Secretary. A week ahead of the meeting, review your responsibilities regarding it, including whether you are supposed to obtain any information or contact any persons about any subject related to the business of the meeting, and plan to take care of these responsibilities well ahead of the meeting.

2. Give notification of your expected absence, whenever that is unavoidable, as far in advance as possible. Also, arrange for any report you are to make, information you are to provide, etc., to be presented by some other person who will be at the meeting. However, never be absent except for the most urgent, unavoidable reasons (personal or family sickness, being out of town on a business trip, etc.).

3. Help the meting get started on time and proceed with efficiency. When the starting time arrives, break off conversation, take a seat, and prepare to begin.

4. Make your own written outline of the meeting as it proceeds. If a printed agenda is distributed prior to the meeting, you can follow and make brief notes on it. otherwise, bring your own paper and make a brief outline of the items of business and their disposition, and keep it for reference.

5. When you speak, keep your comments focused on the subject under consideration at the time; do not interject a comment on some other subject, even though it is important. Wait and bring it up at the appropriate time on the Agenda. If there is no time on the agenda for the subject that you feel is urgent, wait until the end, and then bring it up as New Business.

6. Help to maintain a loving, positive, peaceful atmosphere. If a controversial or emotional subject is under discussion, share your convictions in a way that shows Christian love and respect for those with differing views. If angry emotions erupt, suggest a break for prayer.

10 things ruling elders should know

August 5, 2015 by The Presbyterian Outlook *by Alyson Janke*

In my work as a presbytery stated clerk, I am called upon to help equip ruling elders-elect for their service on the session and in the wider church. As a ruling elder myself, I recognize the need for polity education for those of us who are not seminary-trained church leaders. Here are ten things I think every ruling elder should know.

1. God called you to this service. Sometimes we think of serving on the session of our churches as "taking our turn on the board." Although we responded to a nominating committee's invitation, God was behind it. Being a ruling elder is a ministry to which we are ordained. Ruling elders (and deacons) answer the same questions at ordination as teaching elders (ministers) answer, except those questions specifically related to the duties of the ministry. Ordination is for life, even though terms on the session are limited. When a ruling elder is not serving on the session, he or she is still eligible to perform many of the functions of the ministry, such as being the clerk, assisting in the administration of the sacraments or being a commissioner to one of the more inclusive councils.

2. We are Presbyterian, not congregational or episcopal. Congregational types of churches make decisions in congregational meetings. Episcopal types of churches authorize their bishops to make decisions for the life of the church. Presbyterians come together in groups elected by the people they serve to make decisions. These elected people are called presbyters, ruling elders and teaching elders (also called ministers of the Word and Sacrament). Very few decisions are made by single individuals and very few decisions are made by vote of a congregation. Most decisions for the life of a congregation are made by the session. These range from providing for the worship, education and spiritual nurture of people in the congregation to managing the physical property of the church and adopting a budget.

3. There are four councils, or governing levels, in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The session is the council of the congregation. The congregation elects the persons who serve on its session. There is a moderator or co-moderators and the ruling elders elected for specific terms. The presbytery is all the congregations and teaching elders within a certain district (G-3.0301). The synod is a specific geographic area with at least three presbyteries (G-3.0401). The General Assembly is the council of the whole church (G-3.0501). When presbyteries, synods or the General Assembly meet as deliberative bodies they are composed of commissioners who are ruling elders and teaching elders in numbers as nearly equal as possible.

4. Presbyters are commissioners, not delegates. Whether we are serving on our congregation's session or as a commissioner to presbytery, synod, or General Assembly, we seek to "find and represent the will of Christ," (F-3.0204) not those who elected us. While their opinions and positions inform us, they do not bind us. When we gather together we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, listen to discussion and debate and vote as we are led by the Spirit.

5. When presbyters are gathered as deliberative bodies, decisions are made by voting. After opportunity for discussion and discernment, "a majority shall govern" (F-3.0205). We use the most recent edition of "Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised" (RRONR) as our parliamentary authority (G-3.0105). RRONR is a tool that helps us determine the will of the body. It should never be used as a means of exercising power at the exclusion of fairness. We can understand this by keeping in mind three parliamentary principles which are identified in Marianne Wolfe's booklet, "Parliamentary Procedures in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)":

The rights and the unity of the body shall be preserved;
The will of the majority shall prevail;
The rights of the minority shall be protected.

20. **A Reformed Statement.** Chapter II of the Form of Government in the *Book of Order* embodies six emphases that are characteristic of our Reformed theological heritage. A Brief Statement of Faith affirms each one:
    a. God's sovereignty.
    b. The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation.
    c. God made a covenant with the chosen people.
    d. A faithful stewardship of God's creation.
    e. A recognition of the human tendency toward idolatry and tyranny, which is sin.
    f. People of God are to work for the transformation of society.

    A Brief Statement of Faith tells us something significant about ourselves: that at the most fundamental level of our being, male and female are equal. There is no superior gender or race. For the first time, a confession applies the equality of persons specifically to women.

The Belhar Confession
21. The Justice of God as the basis for true Peace. As the confession deals with apartheid in the 1980's, it offers a strong statement affirming that peace between peoples—and nations—can only be present when justice is present. The statement is a call to justice leading to reconciliation, unity, and peace.

Summary of Our Confessional Statements
Every confession is helpful to the extent that it clearly addresses issues current in tis own time and culture. Insofar as it is relevant to one time period, it also runs the risk of being dated and not as directly relevant at a later time. That should not be cause for dismay. Historical confessions keep us from "faddish" theology. These confessions give us perspective on our current situations. The confessions help us as we return to the Scriptures in every generation to find direction and guidance for the problems that are current.

You do not need to accept every word in every confession and catechism, but you are expected to "receive and adopt" these essential tenets of the faith.

Westminster Confession and Catechisms

12. **The authority and interpretation of Scripture.** Such authority is dependent on God, the inspirer of Scripture. Note that the Westminster Confession speaks about Scripture before it speaks about God. Why do you think it does so? Because it is through Scripture that we learn about God. The confession placed primary emphasis on two motifs or themes: the Holy Spirit's relationship to Scripture (first five sections) and the interpretation of Scripture in light of its purpose of bringing us to salvation in Christ (last five sections).

    For the members of the Westminster Assembly, the Bible was a book that told one unified story: the saving grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

13. **The Sovereignty of God.** God is in charge. The sovereignty of God in the Westminster Confession of Faith is a doctrine of comforting confidence, not one of dictatorial determinism.

Barmen Declaration

14. **The sin of idolatry.** In Reformed theology, atheism is not the problem. Idolatry is. An idol is any humanly created thing to which people give their ultimate allegiance. Idolatry is giving our total commitment to something in the creation rather than to the Creator alone. The church honors government. The attitude expressed here is the same as that in the Scots Confession: obey legitimate government, but resist illegitimate tyranny (*The Book of Confessions*, 3.24).

15. **The Lordship of Christ.** Jesus Christ was proclaimed to be the one Word, or revelation of God, to the church and to the world.

    The declaration speaks of living from Jesus' comfort. Comfort, in the Reformed theological sense, as was true in the Heidelberg Catechism, means "strength." The comfort that Christ gives is not ease and an absence of problems. God in Christ gives us strength to meet whatever problems we have to encounter in the world. Reformed theology declares that there is no comfort in conforming to the world. Only in reliance on the Lordship of Jesus Christ is there strength.

The Confession of 1967

16. **Reconciliation.** Reconciliation is at the heart of the Christian message, and it was what Americans most needed to hear in the mid-sixties. The biblical passages from which the theme of reconciliation was drawn are *2 Cor. 5:19* and *Matt. 5:24*. These passages demonstrate the two movements of reconciliation: God comes to humanity in forgiveness, and people are to be peacemakers with their fellow human beings.

17. **The equality of persons.** The confession explicitly addresses four contemporary social problems:
    a. Racial discrimination. Discrimination has taken new and more subtle forms.
    b. Peace among nations. As *shalom*, God's peace heals, comforts, strengthens, and frees. Only in God's covenant can the church and the world experience wholeness, security, and justice.
    c. Enslaving poverty in a world of abundance. Economic justice. "Enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God's good creation."
    d. Relationships between women and men. The working out of the full equality of women and men. More is said about this under A Brief Statement of Faith.

A Brief Statement of Faith

18. **Commitment to God in Three Persons.** This serves as the framework for A Brief Statement. The clear intent of A Brief Statement of Faith is to affirm Presbyterian commonality with all Christians – Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox – who trust in one triune God.
    Presbyterians share also with all Christians the conviction that we are not alone. God has come to be one of us for our salvation.

19. **A Protestant Statement.** It affirms both justification by grace through faith and the authority of Scripture.

We bear in mind that Christ is the head of the church (F-1.02) and all of the business we conduct should be done in a way that builds up the body of Christ.

6. "Ruling" in the title of ruling elders is about measuring, not flexing power (G-2.0301). It is their role to measure the spiritual health of the congregation entrusted to their care and make decisions that equip and strengthen the congregation's discipleship. Ruling elders follow the example of Christ and lead by service while working with moderators of session and pastors.

7. Compassion is one of the characteristics of ruling elders. In many Presbyterian churches there are deacons who carry out ministries of compassion, witness and service (G-2.0201). In the Presbyterian churches that have chosen not to have deacons, "the function of this ordered ministry shall be the responsibility of the ruling elders and the session" (G-2.0202). In either case, part of the role of the session is to be a compassionate witness in the congregation and community.

8. We sometimes disagree. Occasionally people on church councils avoid disagreement in order to be "nice" or more "Christian." As far back as 1788, Presbyterians recognized that "there are truths and forms with respect to which men (people) of good character and principles may differ" and that we then need to exercise "mutual forbearance" (F-3.0105). Disagreement is not a bad thing when it is expressed in ways that do not disturb the "peace, unity, and purity of the church" (W-4.4003g).

9. We are a constitutional church. *Presbyterians* believe that our life together is best when lived with "a disciplined concern for order …" (F-2.08). Our constitution is more than a set of rules. Part 1 of the Constitution is the Book of Confessions, consisting of 12 documents whose origins span 1,800 years of church history. Part 2 of the constitution is the Book of Order with four sections describing the way we order our life together. It is important to remember that part 1 is the Book of Confessions, reminding us that the foundation of our polity is what we believe. Our specifications of order grow out of that foundation. Even the Book of Order begins with a three-chapter synopsis of what we believe (called The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity) before it launches into the other three sections: The Form of Government, The Directory for Worship and The Rules of Discipline. These living documents are changed by a specified method as often as every two years.

10. We are a connectional church. Each congregation is part of a web of relationships in our Presbyterian family. In part, this means that each congregation and each session is accountable to the larger church through the presbytery. This accountability is expressed in requirements for annual reporting and review of session records. Presbyteries and synods are likewise accountable to the council above. We're all in this together. The decisions of one council influence the work of another. Persons ordained by one presbytery or session are ordained in the whole church. We support and pray for each other. Those elected as ruling elders to serve on their sessions may also be called upon to serve as commissioners to presbytery, synod, or General Assembly.

Understanding these basic principles of Presbyterian polity can help us to be more comfortable in our roles as ruling elders and to serve and lead more effectively.

ALYSON JANKE is a ruling elder with varied experience in using and interpreting Presbyterian polity, including 20 years as the stated clerk of John Knox Presbytery; 7 years on the General Assembly's Advisory Committee on the Constitution; and 17 years teaching Presbyterian polity at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary

My Pilgrimage of Faith

10 Significant Events, Persons, Experiences in My Life Story:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Notes to myself for sharing my life story:

Heidelberg Catechism

7. **Stewardship.** Stewardship, in the Reformed tradition, means more than giving money; it means an attitude toward all of life. We are given a special mandate as stewards, or servants, to care for all that God has made.

   The Heidelberg Catechism is structured to deal with the tree principal themes of the Christian life: sin, redemption, and thankfulness. Reformed Christians have emphasized the Ten Commandments as a guide and encouragement to Christians in righteous living. We do not have to earn our salvation. It is a free gift. The Law then serves as a pattern by which to show our gratitude for grace.

8. **The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.** "Sacrament" stood for an oath, a life-and-death commitment. The Protestant Reformers argued that, biblically, there were only two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. A sacrament had to be instituted by Christ. Note that these two sacraments are distinguished by three factors:
   a. Each has an external sign: Baptism – water; the Lord's Supper – bread and wine.
   b. Each points to a particular reality: Baptism – the new birth; the Lord's Supper – the presence of Christ.
   c. Each is proclaimed in Scripture.

Second Helvetic Confession

9. **Covenant.** Although not specifically mentioned in the Confession, the concept was in Heinrich Bullinger's theology. (Bullinger wrote the Second Helvetic Confession after forty years as a pastor.)

   For reformed Christians, there is just one covenant in the Bible. Although the covenant takes on many forms (that with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, and the "new covenant" fulfilled in Jesus Christ), the essence or substance of the covenant remains the same. The promise is always the same: "I will be your God and you shall be my people" (*Ex. 6:7; Jer. 31:33; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10; Rev. 21:3*).

   This covenant is a covenant of grace. The important thing to keep in mind is that God initiates the relationship, invites us into an enduring fellowship with God, and commits Godself in love and grace to an unworthy people, who are then to respond in gratitude and love.

   God's covenant people are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (*1 Peter 2:9a*). This does not make us members of a private club or an elite group, or superior in any way. It is the Lord of history who determines the scope and bounds of the covenant.

10. **The three C's of Presbyterianism:** confession, constitution, and connection.
    a. Confession. Presbyterians are a covenant people who make confession of their faith. We believe in doctrine.
    b. Constitution. Presbyterians believe in an orderly representative process.
    c. Connection. Presbyterians act out their faith connectionally. We believe in mission. Our being connected with other congregations through our governing bodies enables us to serve in more ways than we could manager by ourselves.

    There is another important aspect of connectionalism that we often overlook. When a congregation elects elders, for example, and the session ordains and installs them, such action is done on behalf of the whole church. That elder, having been ordained and installed by your session, can move to another Presbyterian congregation anywhere in the world and be elected an alder there and serve without having to be ordained again. (It is also true that when your congregation baptizes an infant or adult, it does so on behalf of the whole church.)

11. **The Sacrament of Baptism.** Baptism is a sign of entrance into the Christian community, either as an infant or an adult. The emphasis throughout the Reformed understanding of Baptism is on what God does, not on what we do. It further stresses the fact that we belong to a community rather than that we are isolated individuals in our relationship to God.

Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith within the Confessions

One of the questions officers are asked as part of ordination is, "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and lead by those confessions as you lead the people of God?" (G-14.0207c.)

The "essential tenets" are found in the different confessions in *The Book of Confessions*. And since the officers-elect need to know what they are in order to be able to answer this particular question with some understanding and knowledge, they are listed here. We have indicated in which creed each may be found.

Nicene Creed

1. **The personhood of Jesus Christ.** What is Jesus' relationship to God and to us as human beings? Jesus is both human and divine.

2. **The deity of the Holy Spirit and the unity of the Spirit with the Father and the Son.** The emphasis of the Eastern Orthodox Church on the reality and presence of the Holy Spirit in worship and life can add a wholesome balance to Protestantism, insofar as Protestantism has emphasized Christ alone.

Apostles' Creed

3. **One God in three persons.** The focus is on God's person and God's personal activity in human history.
   a. *One God.* The first fact is that God is one.
   b. *Father.* The second fact is that God is a personal and loving parent, in contrast to God as an impersonal substance. Parenthood was what the text of the creed asserted. God is not only the father of Jesus Christ, but our father (parent) as well.
   c. *Almighty,* in the sense of "all-ruling." God is the ruler over all people.

4. **Creator, Maker of heaven and earth.** God is the creator of all things. God is one. God created everything. This also affirms he goodness of God's creation.

Scots Confession

5. **Election.** Election is the Reformed way of saying that we are saved by God's grace alone, not by anything we might do. Election is a doctrine of assurance for us. It tells us that what God has done in mercy we cannot undo, even by our worst sins.

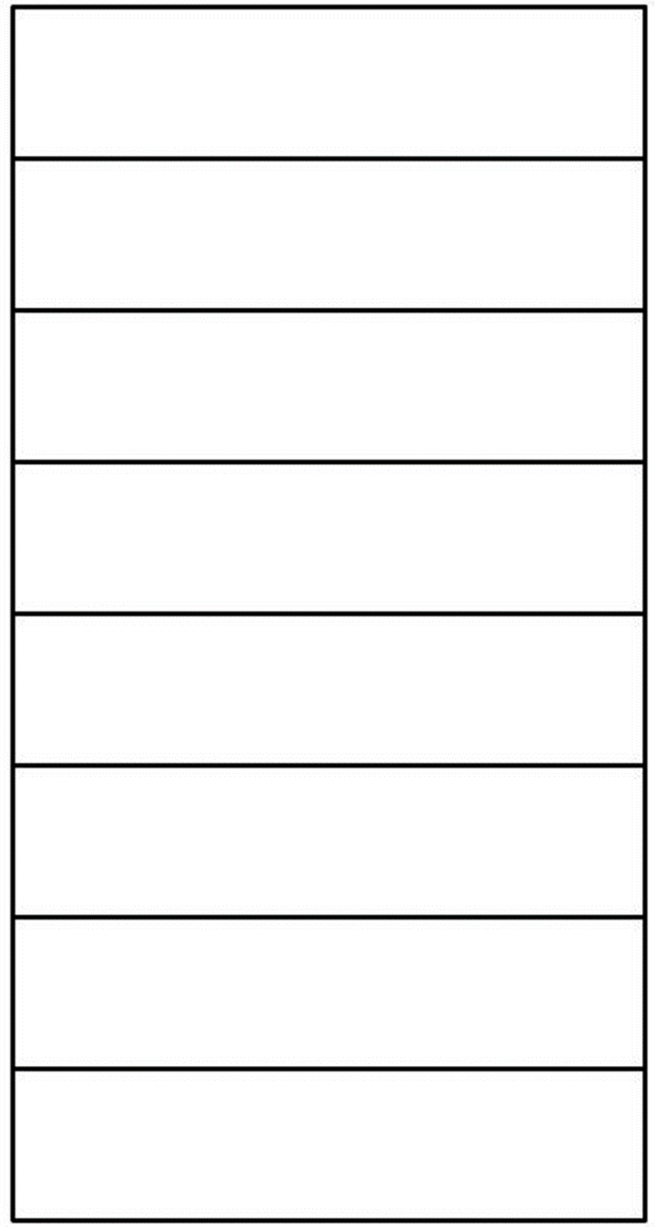
6. **The Church.** The church is both visible and invisible. "Church" means the universal church including all those whom God has graciously touched in all times and all places.

   John Calvin said that there are two marks of the true church. If the Word of God is truly preached and the Sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism are rightly administered, there is the true church. Read W-2.2010 in the Directory for Worship of the *Book of Order.* Note that preaching is not done just by the preacher; hearing on the part of the congregation is an important part of preaching.

   John Knox said that a third mark of the church was "ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered." As members of the visible church called into membership by the grace of God, we are subject to one another. One of the ways we express that oneness and that relationship to one another is through ecclesiastical discipline.

   Because of stories of excesses of church discipline in the past, many Presbyterians are reluctant to do anything with church discipline. And yet, if we are to be responsible church members, we must use it. In the Presbyterian system we do not turn our judgment over to some individual. Elected representatives of congregations, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly have the awesome responsibility of exercising disciplinary judgment both in matters of doctrine and of morals. Without that, we would have no system of Presbyterian government, only a group of people involved in arbitrary activity.
   Our system of discipline is designed to protect the rights of each individual and to ensure the orderly working of the community. It is meant to enable minority voices to be heard and still to allow the will of the majority to function.

SPIRITUAL GRAPH



PRESENT

BIRTH

1. Begin at the arrow and graph your spiritual development from birth to the present.
2. Now look at the high points and the low point; what experiences do you associate with each?
3. Discuss with three or four others the types of experiences that have encouraged spiritual growth, or describe your Spiritual Graph.
4. What have you learned form these experiences? Describe your future hopes.

To Be a Christian

Instructions:
Write out all of your responses in order to help you think through the questions. As a group, go around the room and allow each person to choose one of the questions he/she would like to share with the group. As time allows, keep going around the room, selecting more questions from each member of the group.

1. Why do you call yourself a Christian?

2. How did you become a Christian?

3. Who or what has been the single most influence in your Christian Life?

4. What has been the most important truth about God in shaping your Christian life?

5. What urges to grow do you feel?

6. What anxieties, questions, or resistances do you feel in relationship to growth in your life with God?

From Robert H. Ramey Jr. and Ben Campbell Johnson, *Living the Christian Life: A Guide to Reformed Spirituality* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 163.

Contemporary Declarations

The Theological Declaration of Barmen (1934)
The writers of the Declaration of Barmen were protesting interference in the life of the churches by the Nazi government in Germany and the errors of the Nazi-inspired "German Christian" movement. Their style of clarifying faith in the face of current problems in church and society served as a model to American Presbyterians in the writing of the Confession of 1967.

The basic questions at issue were: Who is Lord – Jesus or Hitler? God or the state? What is the relation of the church to the state? The central doctrines are the sin of idolatry and the Lordship of Christ.

The Confession of 1967
The Confession of 1967 also constituted a new beginning in the expression of Reformed confessional statements. The Confession of 1967 was the first Reformed statement to overtly and explicitly name and confront current social problems of its own era – racial discrimination, peace among nations, enslaving poverty, and the equality of women and men.

The confession is presented in three parts. First is "God's Work of Reconciliation," which is though the Communion of the Holy Spirit. Second is "The Ministry of Reconciliation," which is divided into the "Mission of the Church" (reconciliation in society) and the "Equipment of the Church" (preaching and teaching and the sacraments). Third is "The fulfillment of Reconciliation" in the totality of human life in its environment and in the culmination of God's kingdom. The essential doctrine is reconciliation in church and society.

A Brief Statement of Faith: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (1991)
This confession is a result of reunion in 1983 of the former The United Presbyterian Church, USA, and Presbyterian Church in the United States. In two pages, the statement confesses the faith of the church catholic (universal), Protestant, and Reformed. In 1991, it became our eleventh confession.

A Brief Statement of Faith provided a narrative of Jesus Christ's life and ministry, which was generally omitted from previous creeds. For the first time, women were specifically declared equal to men and called to all of the ministries of the church. As no previous confessional document had done, it derived feminine as well as masculine images from Scripture to illustrate the love and faithfulness of God. The central doctrines are Jesus Christ's life and ministry and human equality.

The Belhar Confession (2016)
This confession was originally adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. It addressed the issue of apartheid specifically, and emphasizes the justice of God as the basis for all human relationships. It speaks to the need for unity among God's people that transcends racial, ethic, or class distinctions, and emphasizes the Church's ministry of reconciliation through Christ.

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A Summary of the Creeds and Confessions of the Church

Ancient Creeds

The Nicene Creed (Fourth Century A.D.)
The Nicene Creed was the first official doctrinal statement of the whole Christian church and is the only creed accepted and used by all three major branches of Christendom: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant. The central Doctrines of the Nicene Creed are the personhood of Jesus Christ and the reality of the Holy Spirit. This creed is often used as part of the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The Apostles' Creed (Second to Ninth Centuries A.D.)
This is the most widely used confessional statement in the Western church. It is certainly the best known. The Sacrament of Baptism was the context from which the creed was further developed. It was probably in question and answer form originally. The central doctrines are one God in three persons and God as Creator of heaven and earth.

Reformation Confessions

The Scots Confession (1560)
The Scots Confession is the first Reformed confession in the English language. The Scots Confession has been called the charter of the Church of Scotland and of world Presbyterianism.

The Scottish parliament, at the conclusion of the civil war of 1560, invited John Knox and five colleagues to prepare a confession of faith for the church and the nation. They did their work in four ways. The central doctrines are election and the church.

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)
The Heidelberg Catechism was the first reformed confession to appear in America. Of all the reformed confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism is the most personal. The catechism was written in three main sections. The first deals with sin and guilt (Questions 3-11). The second and longest part discusses redemption and freedom (Questions 12-85). The final section treats thankfulness to God in obedience and prayer (Questions 86-129). The central doctrines are stewardship and the Lord's Supper.

The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)
The Second Helvetic Confession is longer than any of the other Reformed creeds. It creates an ecumenical spirit. It has two major sections: the first on theology and the second on the church, ministry, and sacraments. The central doctrines are covenant and baptism.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)
The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms are the best known of the Reformation era creeds among Presbyterians. The central doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the catechisms are the sovereignty of God and the authority and interpretation of Scripture.

The Shorter Catechism (1647)
The Shorter Catechism is perhaps the most famous Protestant confession or catechism in the English language. It is a simple summary statement for young people of what is contained in the Larger Catechism, which its structure parallels. Questions 1 through 38 deal with what Christians are to believe while Questions 39 through 107 are concerned with the duties of the Christian life.

The Larger Catechism (1647)
The Larger Catechism provides guidance for preachers in dealing with the doctrines stated in the confession.

Your Spiritual Diet

Preparation for a Spiritual Life

Three major areas impact our preparation for a deeper spiritual life. Identify how you might better prepare for developing an enriched spiritual life through:

A. Quiet (Removing distractions)

B. Location (Finding a place conducive to attentiveness)

C. Habit (Establishing regularity and routine)

The Four Spiritual "Food" Groups

There are four classic ways of investing in the spiritual life. Consider how you will develop each of these areas so that you might grow in your spiritual life.

A. Scripture Reading/Studying

B. Prayer/Reflection

C. Worship/Praise

D. Devotional Reading (seeking the wisdom of the saints past and present)

Claiming the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralistic World

Jesus Christ is Lord **Romans 10:5-17**

Read the passage below. The key verse is in bold typeface.

> [5] Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." [6] But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "do not say in your heart, 'who will descend into the heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down). [7] "or 'Who will descend into the heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [8] but what does it say?
>
> "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart"
>
> (that is the word of faith that we proclaim: [9] **because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** [10] For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. [11]The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." [12] For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek: the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. [13] For, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."
>
> [14] But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? [15] And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim Him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news! [16] But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" [17] So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do Christians mean when they say that Jesus Christ is "my Lord and Savior"?

2. How does proclaiming Jesus as Lord make Christianity unique among other religions?

3. What is God's plan for those who do not call upon the name of the Lord?

4. How might God in Christ be at work among followers of other religions?

5. What is the Church's role in proclaiming the good news of Jesus?

4. The preached word must inform the study of the written word – the search for truth includes the life of public prayer and worship.
5. In the immediate situation when controversy arises, locate areas of agreement and disagreement.
   a. Is there agreement as to what biblical passages are relevant to the contemporary issue?
   b. Is there agreement to the meaning of those texts in their original setting?
   c. Is there agreement as to how these texts should be applied to the present situation?
   d. Is there agreement as to what the Christian tradition in general and the Reformed tradition in particular have taught concerning this issue?
6. In potentially long-term controversies, covenant together to study the Bible in regard to the issue – ensuring openness to differing opinions.
7. Together try to determine the range of options that are open to the church for speech and action in regard to the contemporary situation.
8. Rely on the democratic process of the denomination in assemblies. Use the established channels of communication and the process of voting to express conviction, either as part of the majority or the minority. Be willing to accept decisions and welcome the continuing advocacy of minority view.

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

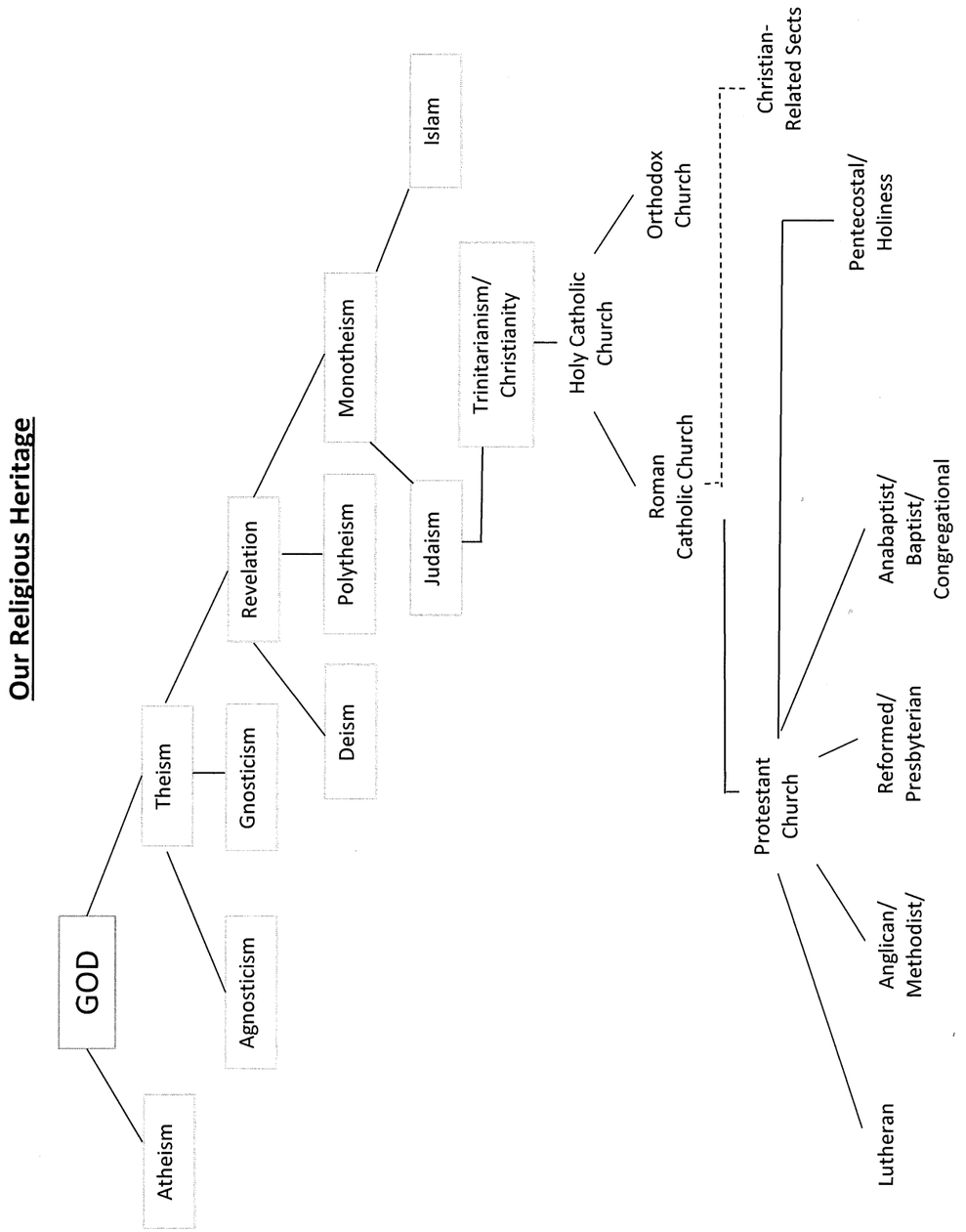
Guidelines for Holy Scripture*

For the Understanding and Use of Scripture

1. Determining what the text says
    a. Use of the original languages
    b. Employment of the best manuscripts
    c. Priority of the plain sense of the text
        i. Definition of literary units
        ii. Recognition of the cultural conditioning of language
        iii. Understanding of social and historical circumstances
2. How the text is rightly used
    a. Purpose of holy scripture
    b. Precedence of holy scripture
        i. Priority of holy Scripture
        ii. Use of knowledge
        iii. Use of experience
    c. Centrality of Jesus Christ
    d. Interpretation of Scripture by Scripture
    e. The rule of love
    f. The rule of faith
    g. Fallibility of all interpretation
    h. Relation of word and spirit
    i. Use of all relevant guidelines

For Interpreting Scripture

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



Our Presbyterian Heritage

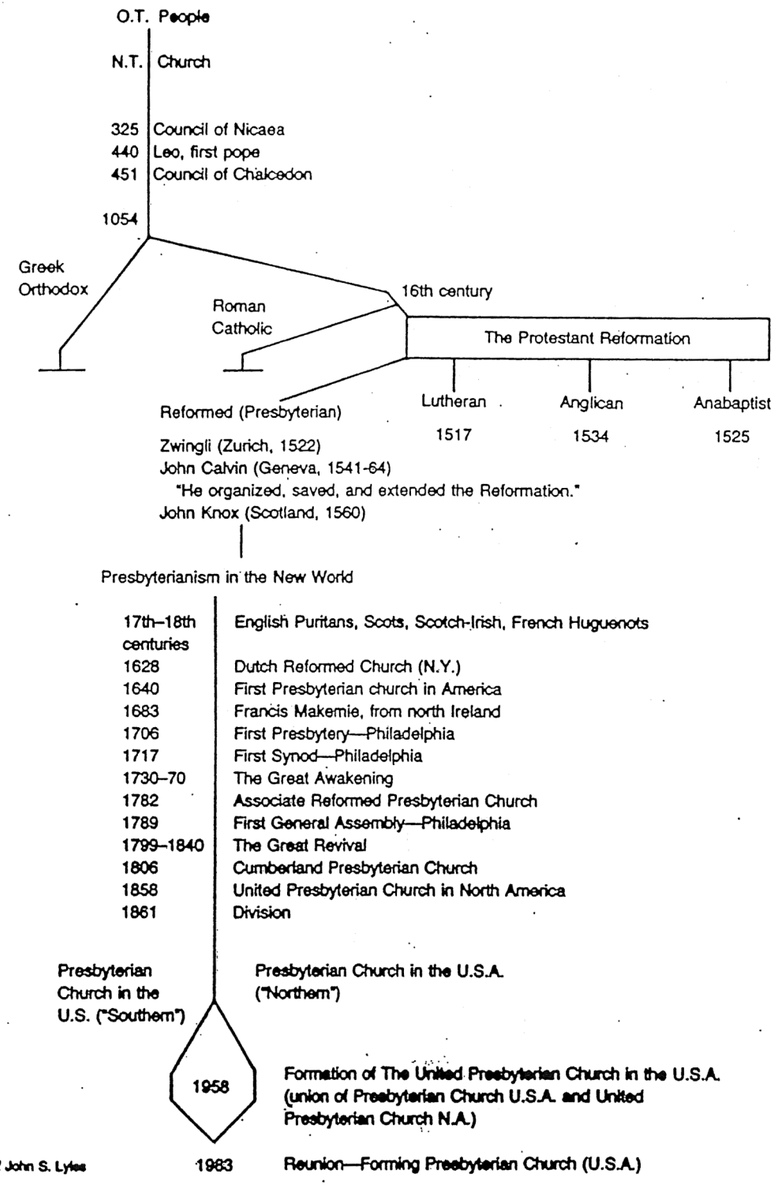


Chart by permission of John S. Lyles

*The Declaration of Faith**

Chapter Six – The Word of God

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

Led by the Spirit of God
the people of Israel and of the early church
preserved and handed on the story
of what God had said and done in their midst
and how they had responded to him.
These traditions were often shaped and reshaped
by the uses to which the community put them.
They were cherished, written down, and collected
as the holy literature of the people of God.
Through the inward witness of the same Spirit
we acknowledge the authority of the Bible.
We accept the Old and New Testaments as the canon,
or authoritative standard of faith and life,
to which no further writings need be added.
The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments
are necessary, sufficient, and reliable
as witnesses to Jesus Christ, the living Word.
We must test any word that comes to us
from church, world, or inner experience
by the Word of God in Scripture.

We are subject to its judgment
all our understanding of doctrine and practice,
including this Declaration of Faith.
We believe the Bible to be the Word of God
as no other word written by human beings.
Relying on the Holy Spirit,
who opens our eyes and hearts,
we affirm our freedom to interpret Scripture
responsibly.
God has chosen to address his inspired Word to us
through diverse and varied human writings.
Therefore we use the best available methods
to understand them in their historical and cultural settings
and the literary forms in which they are cast.
When we encounter apparent tensions and conflicts
in what Scripture teaches us to believe and do,
the final appeal must be to the authority of Christ.
Acknowledging that authority,
comparing Scripture with Scripture,
listening with respect to fellow-believers past
and present,
we anticipate that the Holy Spirit
will enable us to interpret faithfully
God's Word for our time and place.

* ***The Declaration of Faith*** is not an officially adopted confession but was commended to the Church in 1976 for study.

The Bible in Our Confessional Tradition

The Westminster Confession of Faith

Chapter 1—Of the Holy Scripture

6.001—1. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

6 6.002—2. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments...
All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.

6.004 - 4. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

6.007 —7. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

6.009 —9. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

The Confession of 1967

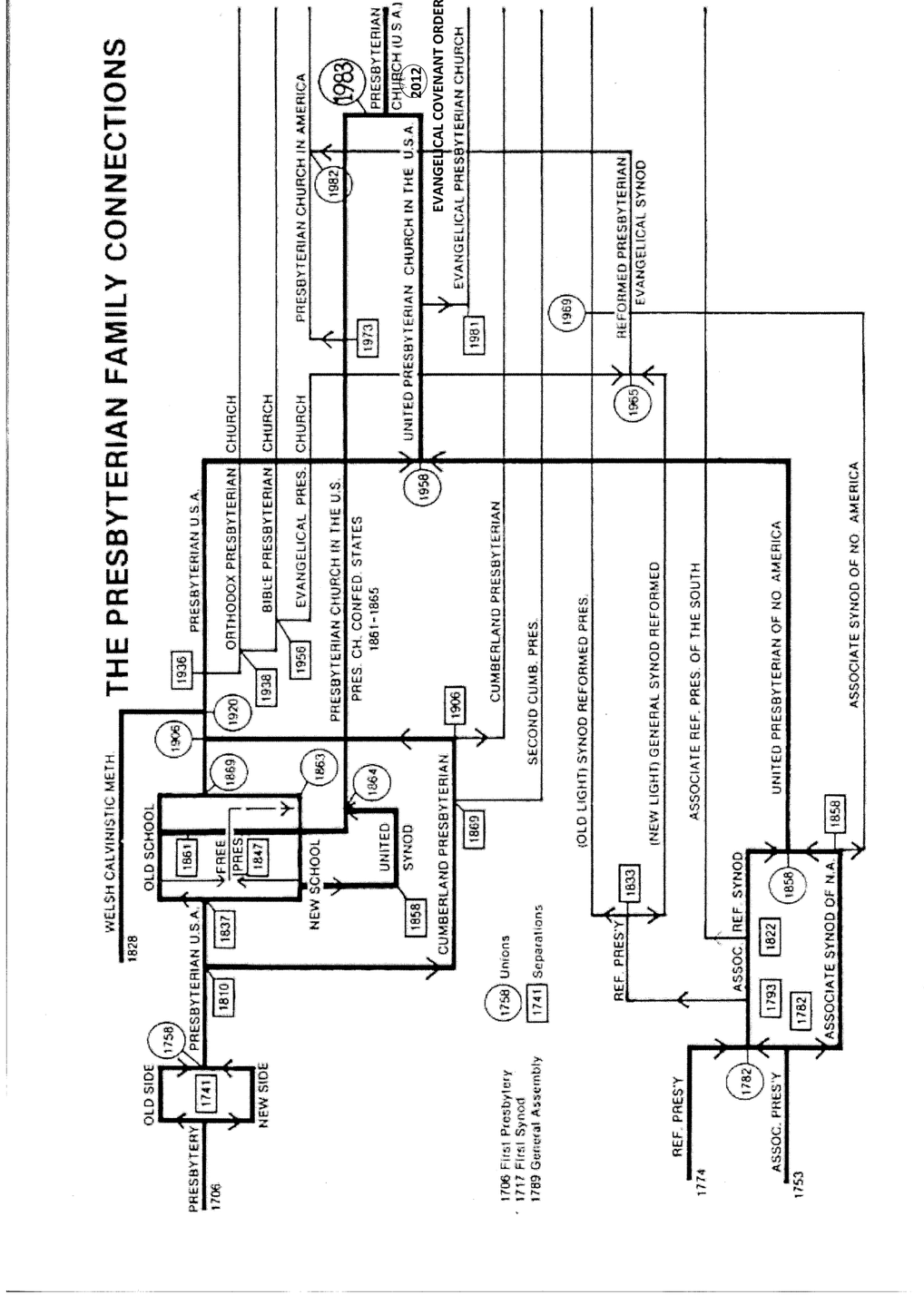
The Bible

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

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

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

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



Meet the Presbyterians

Early History

1. The Church began as one, universal, holy, _____ Church
2. Protestant churches grew out of what great event which occurred in 1517? _____
3. Who is considered to be the Father of Presbyterianism? _____
4. John Knox, a great Presbyterian leader who greatly affected the future of American Presbyterianism, lived and worked in what country? _____
5. The earliest and most basic confessions written by Presbyterians are the _____ Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter _____.
6. The "Presbyterian Rebellion" is another name for the _____ Revolution.
7. What social issue caused the division between the Northern and Southern Presbyterian churches in the 1800's?_____

   What theological issue?_____
8. What is the full name of our denomination now? _____.

Church Government

1. _____ is the head of the Church.
2. The Greek word "presbyter" (from which our name comes) translates into what word in English? _____
3. What is the name of the governing body that guides the local church? _____
4. Some local churches also have a Board of _____, which helps carry on the visitation.
5. Some local churches also have a separate Board of _____ to manage legal issues, property and/or finance. (If not a separate board, the Session assumes this function.)
6. There are three higher governing bodies above the level of the local church. They are called the _____, _____ and _____.
7. Presbyterians are considered to have a _____ form of government, as opposed to a congregational or hierarchical form.
8. Presbyterians always do things _____ and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:40)
9. The main book that guides the Church is the _____.
10. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church consists of two parts:

    The rules and guidelines of the government in the Book of _____.

    The historical statements of belief in the Book of _____.

Views on the Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

The Bible has been viewed in many ways by many people. The following descriptions capture some of those basic views. The definitions of words used to express certain views of Scripture vary. But as you descend through the list, you will gain a sense what it means for scripture to be 'inspired', and discover that you are moving toward deeper and deeper levels of the "authority" of Scripture. "Inspiration and Authority" refer to the amount of confidence and trust one can have in the truth of what is written in the Bible.

Which of the descriptions below best fits your view of scripture?

1. Ancient writings.
2. Ancient writings with a spiritual basis.
3. Ancient writings with a spiritual basis and historical basis.
4. Humans writing their story of how they have seen God at work.
5. Humans inspired by God to write their story of how they have seen God at work. (Scripture is a witness to the revelation of God.)
6. Humans inspired by God to write God's revelation of how God has been at work. (Scripture is the revelation of God.)
7. Humans inspired by God to write God's revelation, including everything that is or ever will be necessary to come to salvation. The Bible is therefore perfect in terms of being able to lead us to salvation. (Scripture is the infallible word of God in terms of salvation).
8. Humans inspired by God to write God's revelation, with the original words being perfect in every way (in terms of salvation, history, science, grammar, etc.). (Scripture is the inerrant word of God).
9. Humans inspired by God to write God's revelation, with the original words being the literal words of God given to the human writers. (Scripture is the literal word of God - it is verbally inspired).
10. God writing God's revelation directly through inspired humans, so that the original words are God's exact words written by God. (Scripture is dictated by God.)

Having considered all the views presented above, how would you describe scripture in terms that are meaningful to you and helpful in conveying to others what you believe about the inspiration and authority of scripture?

The Bible Tells Me So

The Understanding of and Use of Holy Scripture

For each of these statements about the Bible, indicate your position using the following scale:

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

(Note: You can change your responses at any time during the discussions)

1. ___ God dictated the words of Scripture to the original authors who recorded them without addition or omission.

2. ___ God inspired the authors of Scripture in such a way as to ensure their writing, shaped by the author's individuality, nevertheless accurately recording God's word.

3. ___ God used the authors of the Scripture, in their own particular historical and cultural contexts, to communicate God's word for that time and place.

4. ___ God has protected the translations of Scripture through the ages so that what we have in our modern Bibles is the same as God's original words.

5. ___ The Bible is inerrant - completely without error of any kind.

6. ___ The Bible may contain errors and inconsistencies, but only in trivial matters.

7. ___ Apparent errors in the Bible are a result of our limited understanding of God's word.

8. ___ The Bible is a human document. As such it is limited and is subject to errors of both fact and history.

9. ___ The Bible contains errors and inconsistencies, but that does not reduce its capacity to communicate truth.

10. ___ The Bible is a collection of interesting myths, stories, and tales - just like other historical writings - that conveys important truths to every age.

11. ___ Modern knowledge and experience may override biblical understandings and invalidate what the Bible says.

12. ___ The Bible contains everything there is to know about God.

Theology

1. God is revealed in "three persons", and therefore referred to as the _____ God.
2. Within this God-head in three persons, Presbyterians tend to focus their theology and worship on the person of God the _____.
3. Because of this focus, our theology is often identified as _____ -centric rather than _____-centric or _____-centric.
4. We place a great deal of importance on the all-powerful nature of God, stressing the _____ of God.
5. We believe that God is constantly at work in the world and in our lives. Therefore our theology cannot be static and is referred to as _____ Theology.
6. Because God is constantly at work in the world, we refer to God as a God of _____.
7. We emphasize very strongly the _____ relationship between God and his people. This relationship was established through Abraham to the Jews and the through Jesus to all believers.
8. We administer two sacraments in the church that confirm God's covenant of grace. They are _____ and _____.
9. We believe that we are justified by _____ through _____ and not by works.
10. According to the first question of the shorter catechism, "the chief end of man is to _____ God and _____ Him forever."
11. Because praising God is so important, we stress the necessity of _____, not only on Sunday mornings, but as a part of everyday life.
12. We believe that loving God involves not only our heart, but our mind. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of Christian _____.
13. Worship, study, fellowship and service are all important aspects of the church. But all of these aspects point to the one reason for the church's existence: The church has a _____ to fulfill.
14. The five basic doctrines of strict Calvinism can be identified by the acronym TULIP. What do the five letters stand for?

    T _____

    U _____

    L _____

    I _____

    P _____

15. Because we emphasize the role of God's election in the salvation of God's people, Presbyterians are often known for their doctrine of _____.

The Presbyterian/Reformed Tradition

Reformed Tradition in Historical Context

- Made in the Image of God
- Covenant Children of God through Abraham (Jews)
- Adopted Children of God through Christ (Christians)
- One Body of Christ (The One, Holy, Universal, Catholic Church)
- Roman Catholic Christians
- Protestant Christian
- Reformed Christians
- Presbyterian Christians PC(USA)

The Protestant Reformation

- Reforming the Roman Catholic Church
- Martin Luther challenged the abuses of the church system
  - ◊ Indulgences - salvation by works
  - ◊ Scriptures interpreted only by clergy
- Church Authority vs. Scriptural Authority
- Return to Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ

The Reformed Reformation

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

Major Beliefs of the Catholic (Universal Church) Tradition

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

Major Beliefs of the Protestant Tradition

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

Four Major Affirmations of the Reformed Faith

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

Six Central Beliefs of the Reformed Tradition

1. Sovereignty of God
   - ◊ There is no part of life that is separate from God
   - ◊ Every human being at every moment has to do with the living God
   - ◊ Human life is rooted in the will and intention of God
   - ◊ The Glory of God and God's purposes in the world are more important than the salvation of one's own soul.
2. The Authority of Scripture
   - ◊ The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule of faith and practice
   - ◊ The Bible is to be interpreted in light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ (*BoC 9.29*)
3. The Lordship of Jesus Christ
   - ◊ Christ alone is deserving of our allegiance and devotion
   - ◊ The presence of God in Jesus Christ makes more sense out of life, and gives more meaning to life than any other revelation
4. Justification by Faith
   - ◊ We are put right with God by grace through faith alone and not by any thing we are, believe, or do
   - ◊ Note: the opposite of justification by faith takes two forms: *works righteousness* (where we earn our salvation by being good) and *beliefs righteousness* (where we earn our salvation by believing the right things) - both of which put the responsibility for salvation in humans, not God
5. The Priesthood of All Believers
   - ◊ All persons have equal access to God
   - ◊ No priest (minister) can answer for any human being
   - ◊ Believers have a right and responsibility to answer for themselves and for their neighbors before God
   - ◊ There is no qualitative distinction between clergy and lay, sacred and secular, Sunday Christianity and work - week life
6. The Fellowship of the Church
   - ◊ You can't be a Christian by yourself; Christianity is corporate as well as personal
   - ◊ Love of neighbor is the truest test of orthodoxy and doctrine

The Reformed Motto

Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda

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

Comparison to Other Traditions

- Polity
  - ◊ Reformed: governance by clergy and elders in representative democracy
  - ◊ Episcopalian: hierarchical authority through bishops
  - ◊ Baptist: Congregational: authority vested in individual congregations
- Lord's Supper
  - ◊ Catholic: bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Jesus
  - ◊ Lutheran: the substance of the bread and wine coexists with the body and blood of Christ
  - ◊ Reformed: bread and wine are unchanged, but we are lifted by the Holy Spirit into the presence of Christ, and share the meal with all the saints.