

ELDER AND DEACON TRAINING

Part 1: Elders and Deacons

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Part 1: Elders and Deacons

Structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Session

The Session is the governing body of the particular church. It is made up of the elders elected by the congregation to serve in three-year rotating terms and the pastor (or co-pastors) serves as the moderator. The Session has responsibility for a wide range of duties in governing the particular church and in relating that church effectively to its community.

In addition, the Session chooses an elder to represent the particular church at meetings of the Presbytery. The pastor is automatically a member of the Presbytery. The Session has the responsibility for overseeing the work of the Deacons. The Session usually meets monthly and can organize itself in a variety of committees. The names of the committees vary from church to church, but they cover the various responsibilities listed in the Constitution.

The Presbytery

The Presbytery is made up of ministerial members and elder representatives from the churches in a geographic area. The number of churches varies from Presbytery to Presbytery as does the frequency of meetings. First Presbyterian Church of Baldwin is a member of the Presbytery of Long Island.

The responsibilities of the Presbytery include providing pastoral care, oversight of the churches, ordaining ministers, caring for candidates planning to be ordained, organizing new churches, reviewing Session records and electing elders and ministers to represent the Presbytery at meetings of the Synod and the General Assembly.

The Synod

The Synod is made up a number of Presbyteries in a geographical area. Its task is to coordinate and guide the work of the mission of the Presbyteries within its bounds. Meeting schedules and organization vary most among synods. As with the Presbytery and General Assembly, the Synod serves as a part of the judicial system when there are disputes. The Presbytery of Long Island belongs to the Synod of the North East.

The General Assembly

The General Assembly convenes Bi-annually with commissioners from all the Presbyteries — equal numbers of elders and ministers. The General Assembly has responsibility for the world-wide mission programs of the Presbyterian Church, coordinates the placement services for Presbyteries and many other services and ministries for all areas of the church. As the highest governing body of the church, changes in the Constitution are approved here and ratified by a majority of the Presbyteries.

The actions of the General Assembly cover a broad range and are designed to challenge and sensitize the members of the church to the proclamation of the Gospel as well as to social and justice matters. Those actions may also speak to government and elected officials as well as commercial interests about matters of ethics and human dignity.

Elders in the Scriptures

Church Elders are mentioned in 13 different passages or verses in the New Testament. In addition, there are 125 references to Elders in the Old Testament, who participated in the government of the people of Israel.

Age and maturity were among the characteristics that qualified Elders to exercise authority. The Greek word for Elder, used in the New Testament, is ‘*Presbyteros*’. It is from this root that the name Presbyterian comes, meaning a Church governed by Elders according to the Biblical pattern.

Elders participated with the apostles in the government of the very first Church in Jerusalem as indicated by Acts 11:30, 15:2-5, 16:4 and 21:18. The apostolic missionaries, such as Paul and Barnabas, appointed Elders to govern the congregations they founded in other sites, as indicated by Acts 1:23 and Titus 1:5. The apostles Peter and John also referred to themselves as Elders (I Peter 5:1, II John 1 and 11, 1 John 1).

It is evident from Titus 1:5-9 that Elders were also called Bishops. The Greek word for bishop, ‘*episkopos*’, simply means overseer or supervisor and describes the function of elders in the Church. Bishop later came to refer to a single individual who served as overseer of all the Christian churches in a large city or a district. In the New Testament Church, however, the words "elder" and "bishop" were used interchangeable to refer to the same office.

Other **qualifications for Elders** are given in **I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.**

“The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way-- for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.”

“ I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent

or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.”

The **duties and functions of Church Elders** are mentioned in several places in the New Testament such as: **Acts 20:28-31, and I Peter 5:1-3.**

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."

"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed; Shepherd the flock of God, which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."

Deacons in the Scriptures

The title “deacon” comes from the Greek word for “servant” or “slave.” This points to their role as servants, as pictured in **Acts 6:1-7.**

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”

The **expectations of a Deacon** in terms of character and qualification are similar to that of an elder. Paul writes in **1Timothy 3:8-13;**

“Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

Elders and Deacons in the Book of Order - G-6.0000 THE CHURCH AND ITS OFFICERS

The Church has three categories of Officers: Ministers, Elders and Deacons.

"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 governing and ministry."

Elders

Elders are chosen by the people. Together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, they exercise leadership, government, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a particular church as well as the church at large, including ecumenical relationships. They shall serve faithfully as member of the session. (G-10.0102) When elected commissioners to higher authority as ministers of the Word and Sacrament and they are eligible for any office.

Elders should be persons of faith, dedication, and good judgment. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel, both within the church and in the world. (G-6.0106)

It is the duty of elders, individually and jointly, to strengthen and nurture the faith and life of the congregation committed to their charge. Together with the pastor, they should encourage the people in the worship and service of God, equip and renew them for their tasks within the church and for their mission in the world, visit and comfort and care for the people, with special attention to the poor, the sick, the lonely, and those who are oppressed.

They should inform the pastor and session of those persons and structures which may need special attention. They should assist in worship. (See W-1.4003, W-2.3011-3012, W-3.1003, W-3.3616, and W-4.4003.) They should cultivate their ability to teach the Bible and may be authorized to supply places which are without the regular ministry of the Word and Sacrament. In specific circumstances and with proper instruction, specific elders may be authorized by the presbytery to administer the Lord's Supper in accord with G-11.0103z. Those duties which all Christians are bound to perform by the laws of love are especially incumbent upon elders because of their calling to office and are to be

fulfilled by them as official responsibilities.

(Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church - Section G-6.0300 Form of Government, Chapter VI, Section 3: "Elders")

4. Deacons

The office of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of sympathy, witness, and service after the example of Jesus Christ. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, of exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, warm sympathies, and sound judgment should be chosen for this office.

It is the duty of deacons, first of all, to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith. They shall assume such other duties as may be delegated to them from time to time by the session, such as leading the people in worship through prayers of intercession, reading the Scriptures, presenting the gifts of the people, and assisting with the Lord's Supper.

The deacons of a particular church shall be organized in one or both of the following ways.

- a. They may be organized as a board, of which the pastor, co-pastors, and associate pastors shall be advisory members. The board of deacons shall elect a moderator and a secretary from among its members. The secretary shall keep a record of the board's proceedings.
- b. They may be individually commissioned by the session to particular tasks consistent with the responsibility of their office. The session shall ordinarily conduct an annual review of their service, at which time their commission may be renewed, altered, or terminated

As the whole church is under the jurisdiction of the session, the board of deacons shall be under its supervision and authority. The records of the board of deacons shall be submitted to the session at least annually and at other times upon the request of the session. The session may void or amend any action of the board of deacons, or direct the board to reconsider such action.

The board shall meet regularly, or upon the call of its moderator, or when directed to meet by the session, but it shall meet at least quarterly. The board shall determine its own quorum. A joint meeting of the session and board of deacons shall be held at least annually to confer on matters of common interest, with the moderator of the session presiding. No binding decision may be reached in such joint meeting, but the session and the board may act separately on matters committed to their care.

(Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church - Section G-6.0400 Form of Government, Chapter VI, Section 4: "Deacons")

Part 2: Presbyterian Documents

Two Documents Guide our Belief and Polity

The Book of Confessions

The Book of Order

We'll take a look at them both!

1. Introduction to the Book of Confessions

The first two documents come from the earliest centuries of church history and are held in common by many churches world-wide.

The Nicene Creed

In the first three centuries, the church found itself in a hostile environment. On the one hand, it grappled with the challenge of relating the language of the gospel, developed in a Hebraic and Jewish-Christian context, to a Graeco-Roman world. On the other hand, it was threatened not only by persecution, but also by ideas that were in conflict with the biblical witness.

In A.D. 312, Constantine won control of the Roman Empire in the battle of Milvian Bridge. Attributing his victory to the intervention of Jesus Christ, he elevated Christianity to favored status in the empire. "One God, one Lord, one faith, one church, one empire, one emperor" became his motto.

The new emperor soon discovered that "one faith and one church" were fractured by theological disputes, especially conflicting understandings of the nature of Christ. Arius, a priest of the church in Alexandria, asserted that the divine Christ, the Word through whom all things have their existence, was created by God before the beginning of time. Therefore, the divinity of Christ was similar to the divinity of God, but not of the same essence.

Arius was opposed by a bishop called Alexander, together with his associate and successor, Athanasius. They affirmed that the divinity of Christ, the Son, is of the same substance as the divinity of God, the Father. To hold otherwise, they said, was to open the possibility of polytheism, and to imply that knowledge of God in Christ was not final knowledge of God.

Constantine convened a council in Nicaea in A.D. 325. A creed reflecting the position of Alexander and Athanasius was written and signed by a majority of the bishops. The two parties continued to battle each other. In 381, a second council met in Constantinople. It adopted a revised and expanded form of the first creed, known as the Nicene Creed.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) joins with Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and most Protestant churches in its affirmation (though the Orthodox have a slightly different

understanding of the role of the Spirit)

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed reflects the theology of the first century church. It is based on Jesus' command to 'make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'. In the pre-literary age of the earliest church repetition of statements such as the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, helped transmit the faith.

Sometime before 180 AD there arose a teacher in Rome called Marcion. Marcion wanted to make a distinction between the God of the Old Testament, whom he saw as cruel and unfair, and the God revealed in Christ who was loving and merciful. He proposed jettisoning the Old Testament and only keeping certain books we have in our New Testament. The Apostles Creed was formulated partly as an answer to his claims.

It affirms that the God of Creation is the Father of Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, was buried and raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven, where he rules with the Father. It also affirms belief in the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the resurrection of the body.

Candidates for membership in the church, having undergone a lengthy period of moral and doctrinal instruction, were asked at baptism to state what they believed. They responded in the words of this creed. A debate later arose regarding those who under persecution renounced their faith. Should they be readmitted to the church? The phrase was added, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."

In the fourth and fifth centuries, North African Christians debated the question of whether the church was an exclusive sect composed of a heroic few or included all who confessed Jesus Christ. This led to the phrases "holy" (belonging to God) and "catholic" (universal) being added. Finally, in the fifth century, In Gaul, the phrase "he descended into hell" attempted to settle questions that were being asked about those who were born before Christ had come into the world.

Three documents from the period of the Reformation are included in the Book of Confessions, each originating in a different country: Scotland, Germany, and Switzerland.

Scots Confession

The Scots Confession was written at a turning point in the history of Scotland. In 16th century England, the first great Protestant Queen Elizabeth was on the throne. Scotland, under the rule of Queen Regent Mary of Guise, was under Catholic control and had strong alliances with France, not least because in August 1548, when she was six years old, the rightful heir to the Scottish throne Mary Stuart (Elizabeth's 1st cousin) had been sent to France both for protection and to strengthen the alliance between the two Catholic nations.

John Knox was born around 1514 in Haddington, on the East coast of Scotland. He studied theology and became a Catholic priest before coming under the influence of Reformation preachers and converting to the Protestant faith, taking the position of chaplain to a group of renegade priests.

The French invaded and John Knox was taken into slavery in the French fleet. The English government intervened and he was released and became a preacher on the Scottish border. Arousing hostility by his opposition to Catholicism, he had to flee to Geneva, where he was befriended by, and studied under John Calvin.

Returning to England he was such a threat to the regent Queen Mary of Guise that she ordered him tried for heresy and burnt an effigy of him in Edinburgh as a warning of what would become of those who embraced Protestant ways. Revolution was in the air. In 1560 Mary of Guise died and Scotland's links with France... and Catholicism... were severed.

The Scottish Parliament, declared Scotland a Protestant nation, and asked the clergy to frame a confession of faith. Six ministers, including John Knox, completed their work in four days. In 1560, the document was ratified by Parliament as "doctrine grounded upon the infallible Word of God." It remained the Creed of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland until 1647 when the Westminster Confession was adopted.

The first eleven chapters of the Scots Confession tell of God's providential acts in biblical history. The Kirk (*Scottish word for church*) of the present and future is continuous with the Kirk of God's people going back to Adam. The Scots Confession sees the Scriptures as a sacred history in which the present day church, through the Holy Spirit, participates until the end of time. God's providential deliverance is a continuing, not merely a past, reality.

The Scots Confession is best known for setting forth the three marks of a true and faithful church:

- "The true preaching of the Word of God,"
- "The right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus,"
- "Ecclesiastical discipline . . . whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished."

The Heidelberg Catechism

On Reformation Sunday we sometimes describe how the Protestant Reformation began the day Martin Luther of Germany posted his ninety-five theses on the Wittenberg Cathedral door. The truth is that the Reformation was not a singular movement, but many streams that broke out throughout Europe. The different movements did not always agree.

Tension between Lutherans and Reformed Christians was particularly intense. Lutherans taught that Christ was bodily present in the bread and wine every time communion was celebrated. The Reformed Christians, following the teachings of Freidrich Zwingli strongly disagreed!

Things came to a head in Heidelberg were a bitter feud broke out between a High Lutheran pastor, Tilemann Hesshus and a Zwinglian pastor Wilhelm Klebitz. Hesshus was principal of the theological School. He went away for a few days and in his absence the college awarded a theological degree to Klebitz. On his return, Hesshus preached a sermon denouncing Klebitz as a ‘Zwinglian devil’ demanding that he be exiled from the church and the region! He was ignored.

The following Sunday, Klebitz was administering the sacrament at church. When he raised the cup, Hesshus ran towards him and wrenched it from his hands. An astonished congregation looked on as the two pastors grappled in the chancel! Needless to say they were both dismissed.

Frederick the Elector was ruler of the Palatinate area of Germany where all this took place. Anxious to restore peace, he asked two young men of Heidelberg—Zacharias Ursinus, professor of theology, and Kaspar Olevianus, preacher to the city—to prepare a catechism acceptable to both Zwinglians and Lutherans. Completed in 1562, the Heidelberg Catechism, a series of questions and answers, was published in January of the following year and enabled the churches to work together.

The peaceful tone of the catechism reveals nothing of the controversy that called it forth. On the vexing communion question, the catechism denies that the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ but affirms that “*by this visible sign and pledge . . . we come to share in his true body and blood through the working of the Holy Spirit . . .*” (paragraph 4.079).

The Second Helvetic Confession

Whilst the Heidelberg Catechism did receive wide acceptance in the Reformed churches, it was still outside acceptance of some amongst the Lutherans. They demanded that Frederick the Elector, governor of the Palatinate, (the motivator for its production) be brought to trial for heresy. Not a theologian himself, Frederick turned to a renowned Reformed pastor of the day called Heinrich Bullinger, who offered Governor Frederick the ‘Second Helvetic Confession’ as the basis for his defense.

The confession was already composed, as Bullinger intended to attach it to his last will and testament to the Zurich church, but events in Germany brought it into the public arena. When the Imperial Diet, the ruling body of Germany, met for trial in 1566, Frederick was exonerated. Meanwhile, the churches of Switzerland adopted Bullinger’s confession as their new confession of faith. (*The word “Helvetic” is Latin for “Swiss.”*)

The Second Helvetic Confession affirms the authority of the Scriptures for the church’s government and reformation. At the same time, the confession details matters of worship, church order and conflict, ministry, the sacraments, and marriage and it served as a guidebook for worship.

A rising influence within the reformed movement were the ‘anabaptist’ sects (The fore-runners of the Baptist movements) who taught that infant baptism was not a true

sacrament. Whilst the confession is generally mild in tone, some of the strongest words are against the Anabaptists!

“We condemn the anabaptists, who deny that newborn infants of the faithful are to be baptized. For according to evangelical teaching, of such is the Kingdom of God, and they are in the covenant of God. Why, then, should the sign of God’s covenant not be given to them? Why should those who belong to God and are in his Church not be initiated by holy baptism? We condemn also the Anabaptists in the rest of their peculiar doctrines which they hold contrary to the Word of God. We therefore are not Anabaptists and have nothing in common with them.” (5.192)

As a church we have two sacraments. The Heildeberg Confession helps clarify our position on Communion, the Second Helvetic our understanding of baptism.

The Westminster Standards

In 1643, the English House of Commons adopted an ordinance calling for the *“settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of England (in a manner) most agreeable to God’s Holy Word and most apt to procure the peace of the church at home and nearer abroad.”* After the ordinance passed the House of Lords, an assembly to accomplish this work convened in Westminster Abbey.

The Parliament nominated one hundred fifty-one persons to the assembly. Thirty were members of Parliament; the others were “learned, godly, and judicious divines.” Five Scottish clergymen were in attendance and had the right of discussion but not vote. Churches in Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and the American colonies were invited to send delegates, though none came. The assembly held 1,163 sessions, finally concluding in 1649.

The Westminster Assembly conducted its work in an atmosphere of crisis. Internal conflicts were tearing apart both England and the English church. Political and religious problems were inseparable. Who should rule the church? Who should rule the state? What power should the king have? What power had Parliament, local councils, and assemblies?

- The Anglican party stood for royal rule in England with the sovereign also head of the church’s government.
- The Presbyterian party sought to vest authority in elected representatives of the people, both in Parliament and in church presbyteries.
- An emerging third party, soon led by Oliver Cromwell, wanted local autonomy for churches and limited powers for both king and Parliament.

Even before the assembly met, civil war broke out. But the assembly went to work and eventually completed the “Form of Presbyterian Church Government,” a “Directory of Public Worship,” “The Confession of Faith,” “The Larger Catechism,” and “The Shorter Catechism.” Each document was approved by the English Parliament, which then asked the assembly to add scriptural proofs.

Cromwell's ascendancy precipitated the end of the assembly. In 1648 Presbyterian members were excluded from Parliament. King Charles I was executed in 1649 causing English Puritanism to split into two; "Presbyterians," (who protested against Cromwell) and "Independents," who aligned themselves with Cromwell.

In 1647, the Scottish General Assembly adopted the *Westminster Standards* for use in the Kirk, replacing the Scots Confession of 1560 and the Heidelberg Catechism. The standards came to New England with the Puritans (Independents) and to the Middle Atlantic states with the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. In 1729, the standards were adopted as the confessional position of the newly organized Presbyterian synod in the colonies.

The Westminster Confession of Faith

The Westminster Confession affirms God's work from its beginning in creation to its end in resurrection and last judgment. God is first, last, and preeminent in all things. God's people are to understand and bring their lives into accord with God's wondrous ways and magnificent will.

The confession begins with God's self-revelation in Scripture: God is the "*one living and true God, infinite in being and perfection, invisible, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute.*" Out of nothing, God created all that is, including humans, whom God upholds, directs, and governs. Humans, however, did not remain in blessed harmony with God's will. Sin's intervention, which God permitted but did not cause, resulted in corruption of the human condition and of humans' relationship to God.

Yet, God has made a covenant of grace with humans; through Christ, relationship to God is restored. The Christian life—nurtured by prayer, preaching, and the sacraments, prepares for God's predetermined end of mercy and of justice.

The Westminster Catechisms

The Larger Catechism was designed as a preaching resource for the clergy. The Shorter Catechism, was written for the education of children. Both deal with questions of God, Christ, the Christian life, the Ten Commandments, the sacraments, and the Lord's Prayer. Especially famous is the first question and answer of the Shorter Catechism. "*What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*"

The Theological Declaration of Barmen

The Theological Declaration of Barmen was written by a group of church leaders in Germany to help Christians withstand the challenges of the Nazi party and of the so-called "German Christians," a popular movement that saw no conflict between Christianity and the ideals of Hitler's National Socialism.

In January 1933 Adolph Hitler was named chancellor. By playing on people's fear of communism and Bolshevism, he was able to persuade the Parliament to allow him to rule by edict. As he consolidated his power, he abolished all political rights and democratic processes: police could detain persons in prison without a trial, search private dwellings

without a warrant, seize property, censor publications, tap telephones, and forbid meetings. He soon outlawed all political parties except his own, smashed labor unions, purged universities, replaced the judicial system with his own “People’s Courts,” initiated a systematic terrorizing of Jews, and obtained the support of church leaders allied with or sympathetic to the German Christians.

Most Germans took the union of Christianity, nationalism, and militarism for granted. Patriotic sentiments were equated with Christian truth. The ‘German Christians’ exalted the idea of a racially pure nation and saw the rule of Hitler as God’s will for the German people. Some in the churches resisted. Among them the theologian Karl Barth.

Following a number of regional meetings, one hundred and thirty-nine delegates from Lutheran, Reformed and United churches met in Barmen, in the city of Wuppertal from May 29–31, 1934. Among them were ordained ministers, fifty-three church members, and six university professors.

The chief item of business was discussion of a declaration to appeal to the Evangelical churches of Germany to stand firm against the German Christian accommodation to National Socialism. The Theological Declaration of Barmen contains six propositions, each quoting from Scripture, stating its implications for the present day, and rejecting the false doctrine of the German Christians.

The declaration proclaims the church’s freedom in Jesus Christ who is Lord of every area of life. The church obeys him as God’s one and only Word who determines its order, ministry and relation to the state. The Confessing Church, that part of the church that opposed the German Christians rallied around it.

THE CONFESSION OF 1967

The preface to the Confession makes the following comments “*Confessions and declarations are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. No one type of confession is exclusively valid, no one statement is irreformable. Obedience to Jesus Christ alone identifies the one universal church and supplies the continuity of its tradition. This obedience is the ground of the church’s duty and freedom to reform itself in life and doctrine as new occasions, in God’s providence, may demand.*”

The purpose of the Confession of 1967 is to call the church to the unity in confession and mission which is required of disciples today. The Confession is not a “system of doctrine,” nor does it include all the traditional topics of theology. For example, the Trinity and the Person of Christ are not redefined, but are recognized and reaffirmed as forming the basis and determining the structure of the Christian faith. God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the mission of reconciliation to which he has called his church are the heart of this confession.

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH

In 1983 the two largest Presbyterian churches in the United States reunited. The Plan for

Reunion called for the preparation of a brief statement of the Reformed faith for possible inclusion in the Book of Confessions.

This statement is not intended to stand alone, apart from other confessions of the church. It does not pretend to be a complete list of all our beliefs, nor does it explain any of them in detail. It is designed to be confessed by the whole congregation in the setting of public worship, and to serve pastors and teachers as an aid to Christian instruction.

“A Brief Statement of Faith” lifts up concerns that call most urgently for the church’s attention in our time. The church is not a refuge from the world; but rather an elect people chosen for the blessing of the nations.

2. Introduction to The Book of Order

The Book of Order contains the; Form of Government, Directory for Worship and Rules of Discipline.

In the Book of Order:

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

Some Specific Directions

1. Preliminary Principles

G-1.0200

The Great Ends of the Church

The great ends of the church are;

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
- the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
- the maintenance of divine worship;
- the preservation of the truth;
- the promotion of social righteousness;
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world

2. Confessions

G-2.0500

Faith of the Reformed Tradition

a. In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) expresses the faith of the Reformed tradition. Central to this tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, holiness, and providence of God who creates sustains, rules, and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love... Related to this central affirmation of God’s

sovereignty are other great themes of the Reformed tradition:

- (1) The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation;
- (2) Covenant life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God;
- (3) A faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation;
- (4) The 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.

b. Thus, the creeds and confessions of this church reflect a particular stance within the history of God's people. They are the result of prayer, thought, and experience within a living tradition. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers.

3. *Mission*

G-3.0300 The Church's Calling

c. The Church is called to be Christ's faithful evangelist

- (1) going into the world, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all he has commanded;
- (2) demonstrating by the love of its members for one another and by the quality of its common life the new reality in Christ; sharing in worship, fellowship, and nurture, practicing a deepened life of prayer and service under the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
- (3) participating in God's activity in the world through its life for others by
 - (a) healing and reconciling and binding up wounds,
 - (b) ministering to the needs of the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the powerless,
 - (c) engaging in the struggle to free people from sin, fear, oppression, hunger, and injustice,
 - (d) giving itself and its substance to the service of those who suffer,
 - (e) sharing with Christ in the establishing of his just, peaceable, and loving rule in the world.

4. *Unity*

G-4.0302 Presbyterian Unity

The nature of Presbyterian order is such that it shares power and responsibility. The system of governing bodies, whether they have authority over one or many churches, sustains such mutual relationships within the structures as to express the unity of the church.

5. *Members*

G-5.0102 Membership as Ministry

A faithful member accepts Christ's call to be involved responsibly in the ministry of His Church. Such involvement includes;

- a. proclaiming the good news,
- b. taking part in the common life and worship of a particular church,
- c. praying and studying Scripture and the faith of the Christian Church,
- d. supporting the work of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,
- e. participating in the governing responsibilities of the church,
- f. demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church,
- g. responding to God's activity in the world through service to others,
- h. living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,
- i. working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment.

6. *Directory for Worship- 7 Chapters*

DIRECTORY FOR WORSHIP

(From the PREFACE)

A Directory for Worship is not a service book with fixed orders of worship, a collection of prayers and rituals, or a program guide. Rather it describes the theology that underlies Reformed worship and outlines appropriate forms for that worship. This directory suggests possibilities for worship, invites development in worship, and encourages continuing reform of worship. It sets standards and presents norms for the conduct of worship in the life of congregations and the governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). As the constitutional document ordering the worship of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), this Directory for Worship shall be authoritative for this church.

7. *Rules of Discipline 14 Chapters*

D-1.0101 Church Discipline

CHAPTER I – PREAMBLE

Church discipline is the church's exercise of authority given by Christ, both in the direction of guidance, control, and nurture of its members and in the direction of constructive criticism of offenders. Thus, the purpose of discipline is to honor God by making clear the significance of membership in the body of Christ; to preserve the purity of the church by nourishing the individual within the life of the believing community; to correct or restrain wrongdoing in order to bring members to repentance and restoration; to restore the unity of the church by removing the causes of discord and division; and to secure the just, speedy, and economical determination of proceedings. In all respects, members are to be accorded procedural safeguards and due process, and it is the intention of these rules so to provide.

Reading Guide to the BOOK OF ORDER

1. Who is the head of the church? G-1.0100
2. What are the great ends of the church? Where did they come from? G-1.0200
3. What does it mean that God alone is Lord of the conscience"? G-1.0301
4. What do the radical principles of Presbyterian church government have to say about majority rule? G-1 .0400
5. In our confessional statements what does the church declare to its members and to the world? G-2.0 100
6. What are our confessional statements subordinate to? G-2.0200
7. What are the 3 "Protestant watchwords"? G-2.0400
8. What is the church called to do? G-3.0200-G-3.0401 (List 3 or 4 of the ones listed)
9. Are presbyters simply to reflect the will of the people? G-4.0301d
10. How does one become an active member of the church? What are the visible signs of entrance into the active membership of the church? G-5.O1O1a
11. Is the age at which a young person should make a public profession of faith fixed? G-5 .0101 c
12. What sorts of things do faithful members do? G-5.0102
13. What are inactive members prohibited from doing? G-5 .0203
14. Can non-members take part in the Lord's Supper? G-5.0301b,c
15. How do ordained officers differ from members? G-6.0102
16. The government of this church is _____ and the right of God's people to elect their officers is _____. G-6.0107
17. What is the pastor responsible for? G-6.0202a
18. What are the duties of elders? G-6.0304
19. What business may be transacted at a congregational meeting? G-7.0304
20. What is the quorum of a congregational meeting? G-7.0305
21. Can we sell our church property? G-8.0501
22. Look at the duties of elders in G-10.0102a-s
23. Look at the questions in G-14.0207

Part 3: Essential Tenets

1. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
2. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as God's Word to you?
3. Do you sincerely receive and adopt *the essential tenets* of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our Church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
4. Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?
5. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?
6. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?
7. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
8. Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
9. Will you be a faithful elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in governing bodies of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL TENETS?

(Based on "Dr Jack Rogers – Essential Tenets")

Confessing our faith = stating the things we most essentially believe.

In order to become a member we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Elders and Deacons take on a particular responsibility. Amongst the Constitutional Questions – “Do you accept the ‘Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith’” (G-14.0207). What does that mean?

The essential tenets are our foundational convictions, contained in our creeds and confessions, which bear witness to God’s grace in Jesus Christ. *“They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation.”* (G-2.0100(b))

The Reformed Faith

The term ‘the Reformed Faith’ is a technical one that describes religious movements that have their roots in history and geography. In Germany - the Lutheran church. In England, the Anglican Church. In Switzerland, the Reformed. We have a family heritage we seek to affirm.

There are many different viewpoints in our tradition. Luther’s principle was; “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it. If scripture doesn’t forbid something, then it’s O.K to do it.” Calvin on the other hand felt that faith should “Only include those things scripture explicitly demands”. The Book of Confessions covers a variety of views!

We don’t have to cross every ‘t’ and dot every ‘i’... our calling is to know what the essential tenets are. Problem is... where do we find those? We find help in our Book of Order section titled “The Church and it’s Confessions” (Chapter 2). This helps us answer question such as ‘What makes us ‘catholic’? What makes us ‘Protestant’? What makes us ‘Reformed?’

TEN DOCTRINES WHICH WE TAKE TO BE ESSENTIAL AND NECESSARY

1. The mystery of the **Trinity**
2. The **Incarnation** of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ
3. **Justification** (Grace alone, Faith Alone)
4. **Scripture** as the final authority for salvation and the life of faith
5. God’s **Sovereignty**
6. God’s **Election** of people for salvation and service
7. **Covenant** life of the church, ordering itself by the Word of God
8. Faithful **Stewardship** of God’s creation
9. The **Sin** of **idolatry**
10. Seeking Justice and living in **Obedience** to the Word of God

Firstly, We are just Christians, part of the one catholic (universal) church. (1 -2)

1. The mystery of the **Trinity**
2. The **Incarnation** of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ

All Christians believe in God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as this is the way scripture has revealed God to us. God has come in a person, and that person is Jesus Christ who teaches us that we are not alone! In-carn-ation = In the Flesh.

Secondly, We are Protestants (3-4)

3. **Justification** (Grace alone, Faith Alone)
4. **Scripture** as the final authority for salvation and the life of faith

We have benefited from the insights of the 16th Century reformation. The bumper sticker on Martin Luther’s Volkswagen reads “**Justification by Faith**”. We cannot earn our salvation through works but God offers us salvation in Jesus Christ. **Scripture** is our authority in all matters relating to salvation, how to be right with

God and each other, and how to live the Christian life.

Thirdly, We are Reformed (5-10)

5. God's **Sovereignty**
6. God's **Election** of people for salvation and service
7. **Covenant** life of the church, ordering itself by the Word of God
8. Faithful **Stewardship** of God's creation
9. The **Sin of Idolatry**
10. Seeking Justice and living in **Obedience** to the Word of God

Sovereignty indicates the belief that ultimately God is in charge.

Election indicates that it is God who has chosen us. God has reached out to us. In an election booth you choose whom you want to govern you, so God has chosen us to 'govern' His world.

Covenant is the idea that God taken the people He has called together and drawn them together as a community. Just as we don't choose our relatives, we don't choose who is part of the church. We covenant with them to be the people of God by following the directions God has given us in Scripture.

Stewardship isn't all about money. Stewardship means that we exercise our responsibility to care for one another and the world in which God has placed us.

The **Sin of Idolatry** can be defined as an 'Ultimate commitment to any idea, person thing other than the ultimate God who is alone worthy of that final all embracing commitment'. We try and avoid that!

Seeking justice and living in **obedience** to God's Word. Our task is not to be successful, but faithful. We seek to transform society into the way we believe God would like it to be.

This Top 10 list is a good place to start! It's not all embracing but it provides a guide as to what to concentrate upon.

Why do we need to know these things?

Through our confessional statements our church declares to the world:

- Our Identity - Who and What we are
- Our Convictions - What we believe
- Our Mission - What we resolve to do.

The Confessions are a kind of 'Cliff Notes' to the Scriptures. They show us how historically the Church has understood the faith. They direct us towards actions that we can take in line with that understanding.

The Confessions:

- Guide the church in its study and interpretation of Scripture
- Summarize the essence of Christian tradition
- Direct the Church in maintaining Sound Doctrine
- Equip the church for the work of proclamation.

G-2.0200 : The Confessions are Subordinate Documents

The confessions are standards subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God as the Scriptures bear witness to Him. Whilst subordinate, they are nonetheless standards.

Confessions are not changed. We can write new ones... but it would take a decade at least to get them in the Book of Confessions. Why? Because we believe the confessions that we have are “**authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do**”

That’s why we ask elders and deacons to sincerely receive and adopt these confessions. Are you willing to follow the guidance the church has given in the past as to what the main things in scripture are that we should be paying attention to? Such are the essential tenets you are asked to assent to.

We believe that we have ‘latitude within limits.’ With no margins you cannot produce documents! Confessions provide margins. We cannot act decisively till we know what our focus should be.

We are ‘**reformed and always reforming**’, or at least ‘always willing to be reformed.’ The Confessions do not lock us in. They can be amended by the Word of God and should the Spirit of God cause us to see things we have missed, then we are called to act upon those things.

So now you know what you are being asked to assent to!

As officers in the church we have resources to draw upon.

- We have the authority of Jesus Christ;
- Whom we know through the Scriptures;
- Which we understand through the Confessions.

Presbyterians are people of 3 Books

The **Bible** is clearly our authority.

To help us understand the Bible we have the **Book of Confessions**.

In order that we should act on our beliefs we have a **Book of Order**.

Appendix I
TOP TEN LIST FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

1. PRAY
Pray for the church, pray for the pastors, pray for your fellow elders and deacons.
Pray for shut-ins, college students, folk in the hospitals & nursing homes.
Pray for our Presbytery, Synod and our denomination
2. READ THE BIBLE
Read every day.
Find a plan that enables you to read through the Bible in a given period.
Use a devotional or get a copy of the Mission YearBook.
3. ATTEND WORSHIP EVERY WEEK
Church officers need to set an example.
Don't come when you're sick, but otherwise plan to be there every week. Even when you're on vacation, you can still attend worship. You'll be able to find another Presbyterian Church. Or visit a church from another denomination or with another style of worship. Study their bulletin, look at their bulletin boards, and ask people what they like about their church and/or their pastor.
4. TITHE : GIVE 10% OF YOUR INCOME (BEFORE TAXES) TO THE CHURCH
It's very biblical.
5. ATTEND SUNDAY SCHOOL EVERY WEEK (Or Adult Forum in our case!)
See #3 above.
6. TALK TO CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE/TEENAGERS
Learn their names.
Ask them about school, about camp, about their vacation, about their sports.
Don't complain about their clothes or their hair or their music.
7. VISIT SOMEONE FROM THE CHURCH IN THE HOSPITAL/NURSING HOME EVERY MONTH
They truly will appreciate it!
8. SEND A NOTE OF APPRECIATION EVERY MONTH
Thank a Sunday School teacher, a choir member, the secretary or treasurer, someone who works with the youth or works in the food bank... or even the pastor!
9. BE ABLE TO ANSWER THESE 3 QUESTIONS:
A) What difference does Jesus Christ make in my life?
B) Why do I attend First Presbyterian Church of Baldwin?
C) Where do I see God at work in the world today?
Being able to answer these questions will help you to share your faith and provide a good reason for inviting someone to church.
10. READ PRESBYTERIANS TODAY OR THE PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK
Keep informed about the work of the wider church.

Appendix II
Responsibilities of Session

The Book of Order Section G-10.0102 lists 18 responsibilities of the Session, in sub-sections lettered (a) through (r). The following checklist presents a brief summary of the responsibilities and functions of the Session as detailed in the relevant sections of THE BOOK OF ORDER. (Letters after each line refer to the appropriate sub-section of Section G-10.0102):

1. GOVERNMENT, ADMINISTRATION AND LEADERSHIP OF THE CONGREGATION

Including the maintenance of required records and rolls. (B, i through n, and r)

2. SHEPHERDING AND PASTORAL CARE, including;

-----Admission of persons to membership (a)

-----Dismission of persons from membership (r)

-----Nurture and Pastoral Care of members (d)

-----Discipline of members in cases of necessity (q)

3. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION --To equip Christ's disciples with the full gamut of knowledge, skills and experience that they need in order to fulfill their ministry, and His purpose in their life. (d, e)

4. WORSHIP - including administration of the Sacraments. (c)

5. EVANGELISM (b, f)

6. STEWARDSHIP (g, h)

7. MISSION OUTREACH SUPPORT ----to support the mission of Christ beyond the immediate neighborhood of the local congregation (b, f, p)

8. LIAISON WITH HIGHER JUDICATORIES, especially the Presbytery. (o)

Appendix III
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BALDWIN
BOARD OF DEACONS DUTIES

It is the duty of Deacons, first of all, to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who are in distress. They shall assume such other duties as may be delegated to them from time to time.

1. To visit the sick at home or in the hospital, to comfort them, to show concern for their welfare, and to bring them flowers.
2. To provide comfort to the family of a very ill member and offer our willingness to help in any way.
3. To set aside time to visit the lonely and the elderly
4. For a family who has had a death, to attend the funeral service, if possible, and to offer a lunch for them and their friends after the funeral or memorial service.
5. To bring church members together in fellowship by providing luncheons and/or a trip per year as warranted by the needs of the congregation.
6. To welcome new and familiar faces on Sunday mornings.
7. To perform any other Christian service as needed.