

1 **REPORT OF THE AD-INTERIM COMMITTEE**
2 **ON REVISION OF THE**
3 **DIRECTORY FOR WORSHIP**
4 **TO THE FIFTY-THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY**
5 **OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

6
7 March 26, 2026
8

9 **INTRODUCTION**

10 The revised Directory for Worship is a carefully framed proposal, the fruit of committee labors
11 over the past year including multiple meetings for study, discovery, discussion and principled
12 compromise, and in our judgment each of the parts is integral to the whole.
13

14 Thus, we are recommending that, after extensive opportunity for Assembly discussion and
15 deliberation, the revised Directory for Public Worship be adopted without amendment or be
16 recommitted to the Committee for further study and recommendation.
17

18 Throughout our study we sought counsel from a wide spectrum of leaders from across the
19 denomination. Their insight and recommendations proved to be a significant aid to our efforts.
20 The Committee does not now suppose that its work is perfect, and our procedural
21 recommendation is not grounded in any such presumption. We note that if approved at the
22 54th General Assembly that any future amendments to improve upon our labors may be
23 submitted to any subsequent Assembly.
24

25 The committee took the opportunity to produce chapters that would be readable and reflect
26 the breadth of our denomination’s practice. In some instances that required small changes, and
27 in other instances more substantial revisions of paragraphs. The committee nonetheless
28 unanimously approved all revisions, and in that same spirit of unity we now submit them to
29 the commissioners of the 53rd General Assembly with the hope that this Directory for Worship
30 will honor our Triune God and edify this church.
31

32 Unanimously signed,

- 33
34 Gabe Fluhrer
35 Nathan Partain
36 Adriel Sanchez
37 Jim Sheppard
38 Nate Shurden (Chairman)
39 Joel St. Clair (Secretary)
40 John Wingard
41 Chad VanDixhoorn (Advisory Member)
42

1 **RECOMMENDATIONS**
2

- 3 1. Motion to consider the revised Amendments to the *Book of Church Order* at the 53rd
4 General Assembly without amendment from the floor. NOTE: when sent down to the
5 Presbyteries and again voted on at the 54th General Assembly the prescribed process
6 will be followed (*BCO* 26-2,3)¹
7
8 2. Motion to approve the proposed Amendments to the *Book of Church Order* as a whole,
9 resulting in full constitutional authority.

10
11 **BACKGROUND**

12 The preface to the *Book of Church Order* of the Presbyterian Church in America states the
13 conviction that the Reformed faith is characterized by a doctrine and piety, a government and
14 discipline, and a view of worship. There we are told that “all of” these “are either expressly
15 set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom.”
16

17 Since the beginnings of the Reformation it has been the privilege of Reformed churches to
18 enjoy the guidance of an authoritative directory for worship. “Three Forms of Unity” churches
19 have had even more forms, for they adopted authoritative guides for worship and government
20 also. For the same reason those churches in the tradition of the *Westminster Standards* enjoyed
21 five constitutional texts rather than three. The Westminster Assembly, continuing in the
22 tradition of the sixteenth century Scottish Kirk and the church of Geneva, completed a
23 Directory for Public Worship in 1645. From its beginning the historic presbyterian church (of
24 which the PCA is a continuation) used the assembly’s Directory.² In 1787 the synod
25 determined that it would “revise the Westminster Directory for Public Worship,” completing
26 the work the following year.³ The directory, along with other constitutional texts, was printed
27 in 1789, and thereafter was considered part of the standards of American presbyterianism.⁴

¹ Procedural motion with historic precedent especially when significant revisions to the BCO and/or RAO are recommended. See M24GA p.73.

² See Guy S. Klett, ed., *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America 1706-1788* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1976), p. 105, and the 1729 minute which declares, “The Synod do unanimously acknowledge and declare that they judge the Directory for Worship, Discipline and Government of the Church commonly annexed to the Westminster Confession to be agreeable in substance to the word of God, and founded thereupon, and therefore do earnestly recommend the same to all their Members to be by them observed as near as Circumstances will allow, and Christian prudence direct.” Understanding the ‘Directory’ as inclusive of the assembly’s Directory for Church Government and its Directory for Public Worship, in 1734 the Synod required that every new minister be “required . . . to adopt the Westminster Confession and Catechisms with the Directory” (p. 121). In 1736 it insisted that “the Synod have adopted and still do adhere to the westminstr. [sic] Confession Catechisms and Directory without the least variation or alteration” (141). Continued use of and adherence to the Directory is urged elsewhere in the minutes (see for e.g., pp. 116, 122, 187, 274, 288, 323, 326, 334, 335, 391, 412, 413, 478, 519, 604). One of the reasons why the (temporary) division of the presbyterian church into ‘Old’ and ‘New Side’ factions in the eighteenth century grieved both parties, and could not be continued, is that both sides enjoyed a shared commitment to the directory for worship (e.g., p. 190, 229, 231, 235, 269, 286, 324, 325, 341). The same logic is applied when a presbytery wished to secede from the denomination in 1787 (p. 620).

³ Klett, ed., *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America 1706-1788*, pp. 628, 636-7.

⁴ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from its Organization A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820 inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, [1847]), p. 88

1
2 It is no doubt with an awareness of this long practice that the PCA, soon after its founding,
3 offered a provisional directory for worship. This text was itself a patchwork revision of a
4 directory that found its origin in the 1788 text. As is well known, the directory was understood
5 to need editorial attention, but committees were dismissed without this work being completed.
6 Over the years important parts of the directory came to bear full constitutional authority, but
7 the whole did not.

8
9 Recognizing this long lineage of Reformed directories and sympathetic revisions, your
10 committee decided to fulfill its remit by rewriting the current directory rather than adopting
11 or adjusting a directory from an earlier time, or from elsewhere in the Reformed tradition.
12 Various Reformed directories were consulted in the drafting process, but these three historic
13 texts (1645, 1788, and the current directory of the PCA) were given special weight as we
14 considered topics to include in this new directory and the points to consider under each head.⁵
15

16 A historically sensitive rewrite, rather than a mere revision, was considered necessary for three
17 principal reasons. First, while it was recognized that previous directories offered excellent
18 guidance, your committee thought it desirable that the privilege of Reformed worship be
19 presented in a more positive manner. As we saw it, the current directory offers some
20 instruction with a frown that a revised directory could communicate better with a smile. Thus,
21 the rewritten directory presents biblical indicatives that lie beneath biblical imperatives,
22 thereby highlighting truths about God and his gospel that inform the manner in which we
23 worship. As another aspect of a more positive presentation of Reformed worship, the
24 committee thought it important that greater emphasis be given to the Triune God whom we
25 worship, to the mediation of Christ by whom we worship, and to the power of the Spirit by
26 which we worship. In the same vein, we sought to bring to the fore the heavenly nature of
27 what the church anticipates—and participates in—when we worship. Necessarily, these
28 emphases led us in the direction of a directory more devotional in tone than the directory we
29 are seeking to replace.

30
31 Second, the committee wished to include more biblical and confessional language in the
32 directory, as well as cross references to scriptural passages, paragraphs of the *Confession*,
33 answers in the *Catechisms*, and relevant sections of the *Book of Church Order*. There is an
34 organic connection between our worship, doctrine, piety, and discipline, and we hope that
35 these references will help to make this point.

36
37 Third, the committee wished to recognize that there are norms to biblical worship which we
38 should want to observe, as well as freedoms purchased by Christ which we should want to
39 enjoy. This is not a new emphasis in a Presbyterian directory for public worship, nor a fancy

(for printing), pp. 89, 91, 103, 303, 701 (for its continued authority), as well as *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from A.D. 1821 to A.D. 1835 inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, [N.D.]), e.g., pp. 295, 297, 372 which discuss a lack of conformity related to the Directory's instructions regarding the reading of the Scriptures. Later minutes continue to treat the Directory for worship as authoritative, and other smaller, often older Presbyterian churches in America did the same.

⁵ Like the PCA's current directory, our final list of topics is closer to that of the Westminster Assembly's 1645 directory than the 1788 American revision.

1 way of saying that we in our day cannot rise to the level of biblical faithfulness characteristic
2 of the church in earlier days. On the contrary, Presbyterian directories have sought to give
3 guidance with an appropriate liberty at least since the time of the Westminster Assembly. The
4 Westminster Assembly's deliberations addressed almost all of the topics your committee
5 considered, and it too struggled to offer unified advice over some of the same issues, such as
6 the public reading of the Word.⁶ At other times a point of conscience or practice could be
7 more easily accommodated, such as the relationship between Sabbath keeping and the needs
8 of heavy industry.⁷ Recognizing these differences, the preface to the Assembly's directory
9 carefully explains how the gathering sought both to avoid an overbearing prescription of
10 particular forms, and an unhelpful abandonment of Reformed principles.⁸ In giving the
11 guidance for worship that both ministers and members need, we attempted the same balance.
12 We also sought to address changes in our context that deserve comment and offer leadership
13 for the good of the church.

14
15 The committee rewrote the PCA's current directory; it also recommends a re-ordering of some
16 chapters and the removal of one. We recommend the removal of the current Chapter 55
17 because the discussion of the topic fits best in Chapter 53-6. We recommend a reordering of
18 other chapters in order to better echo the liturgy commended by the directory itself. Thus, for
19 example, while recognizing that the Word is usually read at various points in a worship
20 service, the committee recommends that the chapter on the reading of the Word be placed
21 prior to the chapter on the preaching of the Word.

22

⁶ For example see the Westminster Assembly's debates over the public reading of the Scriptures in Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God's Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643-1653* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), pp. 63-70.

⁷ Chad Van Dixhoorn, *John Lightfoot's Journals of the Westminster Assembly* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 482, 483.

⁸ *A Directory for the publique worship of God* (London: for Evan Tyler, Alexander Fifield, Ralph Smith, and John Field, 1644 [i.e., 1645]), pp. 1-8; Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., *Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1652* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 118-120.

1 general rules of the Word. In prudence, we ensure that all is done decently and in order (1
2 Cor. 14:40). In humility, we seek simplicity. In wonder, we serve him with reverence and the
3 beauty of holiness (Psalms 29:2, 96:9). In our need, we pattern our worship on the gospel of
4 Christ. In love, the elders heed those circumstances that best promote the worship of God in
5 the flock over which they are placed. And in all our worship we rejoice in the large measure
6 of liberty granted by Christ to His church (*WCF* 20.1).

7
8 **47-6.** As His covenanted people, God calls both believers in Christ and their children to
9 worship, reminding us that the gifts we receive are not only for our good, but for the whole
10 family in Christ (1 Cor. 11:33-34; Eph. 4:7-16). As a redeemed people, all Christians must be
11 welcomed in Christ's church with humility and without favoritism (James 2:1-7), each
12 considering the other better than himself. And because all people are called to worship their
13 Creator, the people of God are encouraged to welcome the strangers home, and to invite them
14 to hear the proclamation of the Word that they might believe and live (Rom. 10:14-15).

15
16 **47-7.** It is only fitting that we enter the worship of God with awe at the majesty of His
17 holiness, with sobriety at the true extent of our sinfulness, and with joy at the magnitude of
18 His graciousness, for ours is a great salvation, and we serve a great God.

19
20
21 **CHAPTER 48**
22 **The Sanctification and Celebration of the Lord's Day**
23

24 **48-1.** In His wisdom and kindness, God patterns the weeks of our lives after His own work
25 of creation and His own day of Sabbath rest (Gen. 2:2). We praise him for giving us work for
26 six days and rest for one, acknowledging that every day belongs to God, but that one day is
27 especially blessed by Him and set apart for worship (Gen. 2:3).

28
29 **48-2.** Because God blessed it, we call this a holy day (Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:8; Deut. 5:12). In
30 honor of the resurrected Christ, we call the first day of the week the Lord's Day, for we
31 celebrate a Christian Sabbath (Rev. 1:10; *WCF* 21.7). With His encouragement, we delight in
32 this day designed for our good (Isa. 58:13). We pray that in sanctifying and celebrating a
33 whole day according to God's appointment we will live so as to invite others into this rest,
34 while avoiding what may hinder them (Ex. 20:8-11; *WSC* 58). Ordering our week, and setting
35 aside unnecessary work, we turn to worship, remembering that the whole of this day is His
36 and is made for our good (Mark 2:27-28; *WLC* 116-117). Encouraged by the pattern of the
37 Old Covenant temple, Christian churches historically have marked the day with both morning
38 and evening services of worship.

39
40 **48-3.** On the Christian Sabbath we set aside our earthly endeavors to better treasure the
41 privileges and taste the power of the age to come (Isa. 58:13-14; Col. 3:1-4; cf. Heb. 6:5). And
42 as we welcome this gift of God for ourselves, we also seek this good for others (Mark 3:1-6).
43 Sabbath love prompts us to pray for our pastors, to open our homes, to visit the sick, and to
44 care for the poor (Matt. 12:1-13). Sabbath wisdom calls us to pray alone and with others, to
45 memorize and meditate (Psalm 119:11), to sing, read, catechize, and fellowship for the good

1 of our own souls and of any others in our household. Sabbath hope summons us to show forth
 2 Christ's Lordship every day, until we reach the promised rest purchased for us by Jesus our
 3 Lord (Heb. 10:24-25).

4
 5 **48-4.** As we surrender our time and submit to God's pattern, the Spirit opens our eyes to
 6 see our lives in the light that only the Lord of the Sabbath can provide (John 8:12). We soon
 7 see how restless we are when we treat each day alike; we find wrongs in our work when we
 8 do not use our week as we should; we grow weary of our foolishness, and tire of our sins. But
 9 we also grow in gratitude for what our Savior has purchased and promised as we perceive the
 10 burdens He lifts, the strength He gives, the work He has finished, and the heavenly rest He
 11 has prepared (Heb. 4:1-11; Matt. 11).

12
 13 **48-5.** We see these realities most clearly, and grow in our faith most deeply, when we follow
 14 the apostolic pattern and gather to worship on the first day of the week, the day of Christ's
 15 resurrection, for the whole of His mission was to give us rest (Acts 20:7; Matt. 11:28; Matt.
 16 28:1; John 20:19; 1 Cor. 16:1; Rev. 1:10).

19 **Chapter 49** 20 **Assembling for Worship**

21
 22 **49-1.** Christ summons us to the privilege of corporate worship. Therefore, we are to prepare
 23 our hearts and plan our day, seeking Him in prayer, and planning to arrive in person at the
 24 place of worship in a timely manner. We must not neglect to meet together (Heb. 10:25). Thus,
 25 personal devotions and private meetings should not replace public worship, and activities and
 26 travel should be avoided or arranged around the church's services of worship (*WLC* 108).

27
 28 **49-2.** The time prior to the worship service is well spent in prayer for ourselves, the church
 29 body, the minister of the Word, any leading in worship, and those unable or unwilling to
 30 attend. As the congregation assembles, it is fitting that we prepare our hearts in anticipation
 31 of being called to worship (Psalm 24:3-4). It is also appropriate for the elders to arrange a
 32 ministry of prayer, Scripture reading, or song to prepare the congregation for worship, and to
 33 inform the congregation of the order of worship in advance of the service.

34
 35 **49-3.** While it is prudent to make provision for the young, families should be encouraged to
 36 worship together. Arrangements should be made to accommodate the needs of all, welcoming
 37 visitors without showing preference to some at the expense of others (Jam. 2:1-7).

38
 39 **49-4.** During the service of worship, our attention should be directed to that part of the
 40 service which is in progress. As God helps us, the congregation should seek to remain in the
 41 whole of the service. Those supporting the church during a worship service should retain a
 42 reverent spirit and participate in worship as fully as their duties may permit.

43
 44 **49-5.** Above all else, those present should seek to worship God with their whole heart, soul,
 45 and mind, reminding ourselves and one another that our loving Father is ready to receive our

1 worship, that His powerful Spirit will assist us, and that our risen Savior will render us, and
2 all that we do, pleasing to God (*WCF* 16.6).
3
4

5 **Chapter 50**
6 **The Public Reading of the Holy Scriptures**
7

8 **50-1.** The reading of the Holy Scriptures in the church is a part of the public worship of God.
9 The Scriptures shall be read in conjunction with the preaching of the Word and, in addition,
10 should ordinarily be read at other points in each service of worship. Other examples of public
11 reading include a call to worship, the reading of the law, an assurance of pardon, the reading
12 of portions of the Old and New Testaments, and the pronouncement of a benediction (*WCF*
13 21.5)
14

15 **50-2.** Through the public reading of Scripture God speaks most directly to his people. That
16 the Word of God may be read powerfully, received readily, and honored for its inherent
17 dignity, the Session must choose one to read who is skilled, godly, and has the respect and
18 trust of the congregation (*WLC* 156, 157). As a function of his teaching office, the duty of
19 public reading should ordinarily be performed by the minister of the Word as God’s servant
20 and ambassador (see 1 Tim. 4:13; *BCO* 8-5). If the minister or elders are not reading, the
21 Session should give careful thought to the suitability of anyone asked to read in this part of
22 the worship service. This reading of the Scriptures is distinct from the unison reading of the
23 decalogue and from responsive reading of the Psalms and other portions of Scripture, by which
24 God’s people give expression to their own praises, petitions, and other holy sentiments.
25

26 **50-3.** It is desirable that substantial passages of Scripture be read in the presence of the
27 congregation, but how large a portion of either or both Testaments shall be read in each service
28 is left to the discretion of the minister.
29

30 **50-4.** The Session must always have regard to the time allotted to Scripture reading so that
31 neither the singing, praying, preaching, or administration of the sacraments will be out of
32 proportion, either too short, or too tedious.
33

34 **50-5.** The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments shall be read from a good
35 translation, in the language of the people, that all may hear and understand.
36
37

38 **Chapter 51**
39 **The Preaching of the Word**
40

41 **51-1.** The preaching of the Word is an ordinary and central part of the worship of God, and
42 a special means used by Him to call His elect to salvation (*WLC* 68). It is one of the privileges
43 of the church in corporate worship to hear the gospel proclaimed by Christ’s ambassadors
44 (Rom. 3:2; 2 Cor. 5:20; *WLC* 63).
45

1 **51-2.** Ministers of the Gospel are to preach the Word as workers who seek God’s approval,
2 and have “no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15; 4:2; *WLC*
3 158). That he may preach the gospel with power and the whole counsel of God with clarity,
4 the minister should seek to know the whole system of theology, but most of all the Holy
5 Scriptures (Acts 20:27; Rom. 10:14-15). In this ministry, the preacher must study the Word
6 and make introductions, illustrations, and applications with care. While reliant on the Spirit’s
7 help, he must not offer to God what has cost him nothing (2 Sam. 24:24). Both in private and
8 in public, he is to commend his labors to the blessing of God, and he should be persuaded in
9 his own heart that all that he teaches is the truth of Christ. In the preparation and preaching of
10 sermons the Lord calls and equips the minister to be a worshipper, a herald, a shepherd, and a
11 servant of Christ and his church. The minister is to aim at the salvation, sanctification, and
12 edification of his hearers, and not his own gain or glory, keeping nothing back which may
13 promote those holy ends (*WLC* 159).

14
15 **51-3.** The subject of a sermon should be some portion of Scripture. The sermon itself should
16 be grounded on the text that is read and should customarily emphasize what the text principally
17 intends. The text of God’s Word must not be treated superficially but be expounded with care.
18 Every preacher must point to Christ the mediator, and the blessings and benefits that come
19 from union with him, earnestly persuading the listener that the whole of the Scriptures hold
20 out the necessity and sufficiency of the Savior (Luke 24:27; 2 Cor. 4:5). The purposes and
21 demands of the law and the promise and power of the gospel are to be presented for Christians
22 and non-Christians alike, and faith and repentance should be preached by every minister of
23 the gospel (1 Tim. 1:8; 1 Cor. 2:2; *WCF* 15.1). It will often be necessary to urge hearers to
24 turn from their sins to Christ, and to confess him publicly and faithfully in word and deed.

25
26 **51-4.** The congregation worships the Lord by hearing the Word preached and attending to it
27 with diligence, preparation and prayer, receiving the truth with faith and love (*WLC* 160). The
28 saints further benefit from the Word read and preached as they meditate upon it, discuss it
29 with others, hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of the Word in their lives.

30
31 **51-5.** The minister should be careful not to make sermons so short as to trivialize the Word,
32 or so long as to weary the people and interfere with other parts of the worship service.

33
34 **51-6.** The sermon is central in the ministry of the Word, but the Word may be taught at other
35 points in a service of worship, including a declaration that assures the contrite of pardon, or
36 in the recitation of a creed, or a portion of a confession or catechism.

37
38 **51-7.** No person should be invited to preach in any church without the consent of the Session.

41 Chapter 52

42 Public Prayer

43
44 **52-1.** Public prayer is a part of the corporate worship of God, and His people have availed
45 themselves of this privilege from ancient times (e.g., 2 Chron. 6:12-42; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor.

1 14:15; *WCF* 21.3, 4, 6). A portion of every service of worship should be set aside for prayer
2 to our Triune God, addressing the Father, in the name of the Son, relying on the power of the
3 Holy Spirit (Matt. 6:9; John 14:16-17, 26; 16:23-24, 26-27).

4
5 **52-2.** We worship a glorious, loving, and gracious God; we are weak, needy, and sinful
6 creatures. Therefore, the corporate prayer of the saints should be offered with words and
7 postures that convey reverence, affection, and holy boldness (Heb. 12:28; Gal. 4:6-7).

8
9 **52-3.** It is the duty of every minister to consider carefully his public prayers, and prior to
10 entering upon his holy calling, to devote himself to prayer as well as to the ministry of the
11 Word (Acts 6:4). He should, by a thorough knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, by the study of
12 the best writers on prayer, by meditation, and by a life of communion with God, endeavor to
13 cultivate a spirit and gift of public prayer (Rom. 8:26-27). Moreover, when he offers prayer
14 in public worship, his heart should be ready and his thoughts ordered, that he may pray
15 profitably with and for his fellow worshippers. If a minister of the Word does not lead the
16 congregation in prayer, the Session should give careful thought to the suitability of anyone
17 asked to pray. The one praying may use fixed forms of prayer (e.g. lectionaries, prayer books,
18 etc.), or no form at all (e.g. extemporaneous prayers). Corporate prayer should be offered in a
19 language known to the greater part of the people present. Examples of these prayers (or parts
20 of a longer prayer) include, but are not limited to: invocation and adoration, confession of sin,
21 intercession, illumination and blessing accompanying the reading and preaching of Scripture,
22 thanksgiving, and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

23
24 a. The Church is encouraged to offer a prayer of invocation or adoration near the
25 commencement of the worship service. In this prayer we ask that the God who calls
26 us to worship Him, and who meets us in His mercy, will assist us by His powerful
27 Spirit and accept our act of worship in His Son. Drawing on the inspired Word of God
28 and the church's rich confessional heritage, we acknowledge the infinite majesty of
29 the living God, glorifying Him for who He is and what He has done for His people.
30 Furthermore, considering all that we have learned and enjoyed of God's grace, the
31 Church is happily constrained to confess the richness of God's self-revelation, the
32 wonder of the salvation He has planned, promised and accomplished through His Son,
33 and the persistence and power of the Spirit's work in believers.

34
35 b. It is important for the church to make humble corporate confession of sin with united
36 hearts, and even a united voice (Jer. 14:20; 1 Pet. 5:5). We are to acknowledge our
37 sinful state and actions, endeavoring to feel a deep sense of the evil of all sin, and our
38 sin, as a departure from the living God. It is fitting to consider in this prayer our sins
39 against God, our neighbor, and our own selves; sins in thought, word, and deed; sins
40 secret and presumptuous; sins accidental and habitual, and the various fruits which
41 proceed from these roots (Matt. 7:16-20). In any acknowledgment of our sin, it is right
42 both to earnestly ask for pardon of sin and peace with God, and to give thanks for
43 God's saving mercies through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:9). We do well to express
44 our assurance that God answers prayers and forgives sins. In assuring ourselves and
45 others of God's love, it is fitting to thank Him for the abundant fruits of our union with

1 Christ, for the Spirit's work in our sanctification, for the generous grace given for the
2 discharge of our duties, and even for trials that our Father sees as necessary for us, and
3 which He will work for our good.
4

5 c. The Church, both local and universal, is helped and edified through public
6 intercession and petition. Loving the bride of Christ and pitying a lost world, we pray
7 together for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; for the peace, purity, and extension of
8 the Church of God; for ministers and missionaries in all lands; and for all who are
9 persecuted for righteousness' sake. Supporting the household of faith, we bring before
10 the throne of grace the sick, dying, and bereaved, and consider the needs of churches
11 in our presbytery, our denomination, and our locality. Caring for our community and
12 country, we ask for mercy for the poor and destitute, provision for strangers and
13 prisoners, encouragement for the aged and the young, the weary and the traveler;
14 usefulness for those single and those married; integrity for civil rulers; wisdom for
15 those who pursue and uphold peace and justice; and salvation for all.
16

17 d. It is fitting to offer a prayer of illumination accompanying the reading and preaching
18 of Scripture, asking for help to hear, believe, and do that to which the Word calls us;
19 and to ask for a blessing on what we have received (*WLC* 160).
20

21 e. It is fitting for the Church to regularly thank God for all His mercies of every kind,
22 general and particular, spiritual and temporal, common and special; above all, for
23 Christ Jesus, His inexpressible gift, the hope of eternal life through Him, and for the
24 mission and work of the Holy Spirit (*WLC* 108).
25

26 f. It is fitting at some point in the worship service that a prayer conclude with a
27 corporate utterance of the Lord's Prayer.
28

29 **52-4.** The proportion of the time of public worship given to corporate prayer is left to the
30 judgment of the Session, but the prayers of the congregation should be encouraged.
31

32 Chapter 53

33 The Singing of Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs

34
35
36 **53-1.** Congregational singing in the Church is a part of the public worship of God. The
37 Session should ensure that Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are sung throughout the service
38 either using the words of Holy Scripture, or expressing the truths contained therein (Psalms
39 30:4; 33:3; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; *WCF* 21.5).
40

41 **53-2.** While our singing should teach and admonish all (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), the singing
42 of the congregation is directed to God, who alone deserves and commands our worship. It is
43 our privilege and duty to glorify God in our praises, and we do so when we raise our voices
44 with thankful hearts and understanding minds (1 Cor. 14:15).
45

1 **53-3.** The medium chosen to convey the Church’s praises is not a matter of indifference.
2 While the culture and context of a congregation will inform how it expresses its worship in
3 song, our priorities in worship are not culturally conditioned. Thus, the words of our hymns
4 and songs, whether new or old, should exalt the Triune God, delight in His gospel, celebrate
5 biblical truth, and reflect the breadth and depth of biblical psalmody and Christian hymnody,
6 while the melodies we choose must be suited to those ends and be appropriate for
7 congregational singing. Furthermore, the choice of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs should
8 strive to embrace those themes for singing commended in Scripture, ranging from reasons for
9 joy, thanksgiving, and confidence, to causes of lament, yearning, and hope.

10
11 **53-4.** If the minister does not lead the congregation in song, the Session should give careful
12 thought to the character of anyone asked to lead in this part of the worship service. Since the
13 New Testament especially prioritizes congregational singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), any
14 accompaniment, whether choral, instrumental, or individual, should be so ordered so as to
15 support and not to displace or overwhelm the praise of the congregation.

16
17 **53-5.** The proportion of the time of public worship given to praise is left to the judgment of
18 the Session, but the Session should encourage the singing of the congregation.
19
20

21 **Chapter 54**

22 **The Worship of God by Giving**

23
24 **54-1.** It is a privilege and a duty to bring gifts to God as acts of worship and thanksgiving (1
25 Chron. 29:14; 1 Cor. 16:2). God loves a cheerful giver, for He Himself is the giver of every
26 good gift, and we His creatures are but stewards of the gifts and possessions He grants us (1
27 Cor. 4:7; 2 Cor. 9:7; James 1:17). Old Testament examples of tithing encourage the Church,
28 but our thankfulness is even greater, for the Scriptures remind us, “you know the grace of our
29 Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you
30 through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

31
32 **54-2.** The worship of God by gifts weakens the power our possessions hold over us (Luke
33 16:13), cultivates a trust in the Lord (Deut. 14:22-23; Phil. 4:17), and enables us to partner in
34 the work of the Church as we provide for those who labor in teaching and preaching, and share
35 with those in need (1 Tim. 5:17-18; Acts 2:42; Rom. 12:13; Phil. 4:15). Thus, it is wise to
36 make regular, weekly, systematic, proportionate, and generous collections for our local
37 congregation and the wider mission of the Church.

38
39 **54-3.** When such gifts are collected in a worship service, or when designated means by
40 which to give are announced to the congregation, it is appropriate that they be dedicated to
41 God in prayer.
42
43

44 **Chapter 55**

45 **Baptism of Infants and Children**

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55-1. Christian baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament in which a person is baptized with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19-20; *WCF* 27, 28).

55-2. Baptism is to be administered by a minister of Christ, called to be the steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1). Baptism is not to be delayed unnecessarily, nor to be administered, in any case, by any private person (*WCF* 28.2). It is not to be administered privately, but in the presence of the congregation under the supervision of the Session. Whether baptism has been duly administered is to be determined by the Session.

55-3. When one or both believing parents or guardians of a covenant child express a desire that their child be baptized, the Session is to provide any necessary instruction regarding baptism to the member or members of the congregation presenting the child, being especially careful to review the questions to be asked of parents at the baptism.

55-4. The ministry of the Word is to accompany the administration of the sacraments, and thus before all baptisms the minister is to use some words of instruction, touching the institution, nature, use, and ends of this sacrament, showing:

- a. That it was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, and places the name of the Triune God Himself upon the one baptized;
- b. That it is a seal of the covenant of grace, of our ingrafting into Christ, and of our union with Him, of remission of sins, regeneration, adoption, and life eternal;
- c. That the water, in Baptism, represents and signifies both the blood of Christ, which takes away all guilt of sin, original and actual; and the sanctifying virtue of the Spirit of Christ against the dominion of sin, and the corruption of our sinful nature;
- d. That baptizing, or sprinkling and washing with water, signifies the cleansing from sin by the blood and for the merit of Christ, together with a putting to death of sin, and a rising from sin to newness of life, all by the virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ.

55-5. Prior to the baptism of a covenant child, the minister shall use some additional words to explain the covenantal nature of household baptism, showing, for example:

- a. That the promise is made to believers in Christ and their children; and that under the gospel the children of believers have a share in the covenant, and right to the seal of it, and to the outward privileges of the church, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament; the covenant of grace, for substance, being the same; and the grace of God, and the comfort of believers, more plentiful than before (Acts 2:39; Rom. 4:7-12; *WCF* 28.4);
- b. That the Son of God admitted little children brought by their parents into His presence, embracing and blessing them, saying, “For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14);
- c. That children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the embrace of the visible Church, are distinguished from the world, and are united with believers; and that

- 1 all who are baptized in the name of Christ, are summoned to renounce, and are by
2 their baptism bound to fight against, the devil, the world, and the flesh (*WCF* 28.1);
3 e. That they are federally holy before baptism, and therefore they are baptized (1 Cor.
4 7:14);
5 f. That the inward grace and virtue of baptism is not tied to that very moment of time
6 in which it is administered; and that the fruit and power of baptism reaches to the
7 whole course of our life; and that outward baptism is not so necessary, that through
8 the lack thereof, the child is in danger of damnation (*WCF* 28.6-7);
9 g. That by virtue of being children of believing parents they are, because of God's
10 covenant ordinance, made members of the church, and are called by God's grace
11 to live in the light of that glorious reality; and that as they grow, parents should
12 encourage their children to make age-appropriate expressions of faith and
13 repentance, and in due time to make a public profession of their faith in Christ and
14 become communicant members (*WLC* 166; *BCO* 28).

15
16 **55-6.** In these or similar instructions, the minister is to use his own liberty and godly wisdom,
17 as the edification of the people, and ignorance or errors in the doctrine of baptism, shall
18 require. He is also to admonish all that are present to look back to their baptism, to repent of
19 their sins against their covenant with God; to stir up their faith; to improve and make right use
20 of their baptism, and of the covenant sealed between God and themselves (*WLC* 167).

21
22 **55-7.** The minister is to exhort the parents in particular to consider the great mercy of God
23 to them and their child; to bring up the child in the Christian faith, and in the nurture and
24 admonition of the Lord; and to let them know the danger of God's fatherly displeasure to
25 themselves and the child, if they are negligent; requiring a solemn promise for the performance
26 of this duty (Matt. 18:6-7).

27
28 The minister is also to exhort the parents to the careful performance of their duty, requiring:

- 29 a. That they teach the child to read the Word of God;
30 b. That they instruct the child in the principles of our holy faith, as contained in the
31 Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, an excellent summary of which we
32 have in the *Confession of Faith*, and in the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms* of the
33 Westminster Assembly, which are to be recommended to them as adopted by the
34 Church, for their direction and assistance, in the discharge of this important duty;
35 c. That they pray with and for the child;
36 d. That they set an example of piety and godliness before the child; and endeavor, by
37 all the means of God's appointment, to bring up their child in the nurture and
38 admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15).

39
40 **55-8.** The minister may then read covenant promises such as these:

41 **For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even**
42 **as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him. And I will establish my covenant**
43 **between Me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations**
44 **for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto you and to your offspring after you.**

1 **Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your house. (Acts**
 2 **2:39; Gen. 17:7; Acts 16:31)**
 3

4 The minister shall then propose the following questions:

- 5 **1. Do you acknowledge your child’s need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ,**
 6 **and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?**
 7 **2. Do you claim God’s covenant promises in (his) behalf, and do you look in faith**
 8 **to the Lord Jesus Christ for (his) salvation, as you do for your own?**
 9 **3. Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble**
 10 **reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him) a godly**
 11 **example, that you will pray with and for (him), that you will teach (him) the**
 12 **doctrines of our holy faith, and that you will strive, by all the means of God’s**
 13 **appointment, to bring (him) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?**
 14

15 To the congregation (optional):

16 **Do you as a congregation undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in**
 17 **the Christian nurture of this child?**
 18

19 9. Then the minister is to pray for the blessing of Christ and the working of his Spirit to attend
 20 this ordinance (*WSC* 91), after which, calling the child by name, he shall say:

21
 22 **I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**
 23

24 As he pronounces these words, he is to baptize the child with water, by pouring or sprinkling
 25 it on the head of the child, without adding any other ceremony; and the whole may be
 26 concluded with prayer.
 27
 28

29 **Chapter 56**

30 **The Baptism of Believers, and the Admissions of Persons to Sealing Ordinances**

31
 32 **56-1.** Believers’ children within the visible church, dedicated to God in baptism, are non-
 33 communing members under the care of the Church. They are to be taught from their earliest
 34 days to recognize themselves as those who belong to God and are in need of his saving grace,
 35 and to know the love of God the Father in sending His Son for their salvation. They are to be
 36 encouraged to live each day with a childlike faith in Christ as the Savior of sinners, to repent
 37 of their sins by the power of the Holy Spirit, and to pray to and worship God the Father as one
 38 who welcomes them with Christ’s blessing. They should be earnestly reminded that they are
 39 members of the Church by birthright, as children of believing parents, and that it is their duty
 40 and privilege to deepen their understanding of God’s Word, and to seek admission to the
 41 Lord’s Supper (*BCO* 6-1, 6-2).
 42

43 **56-2.** The time when young persons come to understand and believe the gospel cannot be
 44 precisely fixed by anyone but God Himself. The time at which they profess their faith publicly
 45 and participate in the Lord’s Supper must be left to the prudence of the Session, whose office

1 it is to judge, after careful examination, the qualifications of those who apply for admission
2 to sealing ordinances (*BCO* 12.5a).

3
4 **56-3.** It is recommended, as edifying and proper, that baptized persons, when admitted by
5 the Session to the Lord’s Supper, make a public profession of their faith in the presence of the
6 congregation. But in all cases, there should be a clear recognition of their existing status as
7 baptized members (*BCO* 6-1, 6-4).

8
9 **56-4.** The time having come for the making of a public profession, and those who have been
10 approved by the Session having taken their places in the presence of the congregation, the
11 minister may state that:

12 **Of the number of those who were baptized in infancy as members of the Church**
13 **of God by birthright, and as heirs of the covenant promises, the Session has**
14 **examined and approved (call them by name), who come now to assume for**
15 **themselves the full privileges and responsibilities of their inheritance in the**
16 **household of faith.**

17
18 **56-5.** When unbaptized persons apply for admission into the Church, they shall, ordinarily,
19 after giving satisfaction to the Session with respect to their knowledge and piety, make a
20 public profession of their faith, in the presence of the congregation.

21
22 If there are present any candidates for baptism, the minister may state that:

23 **As applicants for admission into the Church of God by baptism, which is a sign**
24 **and seal of our engrafting into Christ, and of our engagement to be the Lord’s,**
25 **the Session has examined and approved (call them by name), who are cordially**
26 **welcomed into the fellowship of the household of faith.**

27
28 **56-6.** If candidates profess their faith before the congregation, the minister shall use the
29 following questions, and may use words of introduction such as these:

30 **(All of) you being present to make a public profession of faith, are to assent to the**
31 **following declarations and promises, by which you enter into a solemn covenant**
32 **with God and His Church.**

- 33 1. **Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly**
34 **deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?**
35 2. **Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of**
36 **sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is**
37 **offered in the Gospel?**
38 3. **Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the**
39 **Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?**
40 4. **Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of**
41 **your ability?**
42 5. **Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church,**
43 **and promise to study its purity and peace?**
44

1 **56-7.** The minister may now briefly admonish those making a profession of faith as to the
2 importance of the solemn obligations they have assumed.

3
4 **56-8.** At this point, if there are any candidates for baptism, the minister is to use some words
5 of instruction, touching the institution, nature, use, and ends of this sacrament (see *BCO* 55-
6 4); he shall pray for the blessing of Christ and the working of his Spirit to attend this ordinance,
7 after which, calling the person by name, he shall say:

8
9 **I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**

10
11 The whole may be concluded with prayer.

12
13 **56-9.** Sessions may require baptized members seeking admission from other churches to be
14 received by reaffirmation of faith with an accompanying testimony of their Christian
15 experience to the Session. When letters of dismissal are requested from members transferring
16 from other churches, good government is maintained and respect is shown to the government
17 and witness of all faithful churches, especially to congregations of the Presbyterian Church in
18 America and those with whom she has fraternal relations. The names of those accepted as new
19 members by the Session are to be announced to the church with a recommendation of them
20 from the Session to the congregation's Christian confidence and affection.

21 22 23 **Chapter 57**

24 **The Administration of the Lord's Supper**

25
26 **57-1.** The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of the New Testament, instituted by Jesus Christ, as
27 a perpetual remembrance of His sacrificial death and as a seal of all His benefits unto true
28 believers as we await together the wedding Supper of the Lamb (*Rev.* 16:6-9). The Supper is
29 for our spiritual nourishment and growth in Christ and serves as a bond and pledge of our
30 communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body (*1 Cor.* 10:16-
31 17; 11:23-26; *WCF* 29.1).

32
33 **57-2.** Communion, or the Supper of the Lord, is to be observed frequently as part of the
34 worship of the congregation (*WCF* 29.4). Stated times for celebration of the Supper are to be
35 determined by the Session of each congregation, as it may judge most for edification. Where
36 celebration of the Supper is not weekly, it is proper that public notice should be given to the
37 congregation at least the Sabbath before the administration of this ordinance. It is important
38 that the Church be regularly instructed regarding the nature of the Supper and due preparation
39 for it, so that all may come in a suitable manner to this holy feast.

40
41 **57-3.** On the day of the observance of the Lord's Supper, the minister shall show that this is
42 an ordinance of Christ by reading the words of institution, either from one of the Gospels, or
43 from *1 Corinthians* 11, which he may briefly apply. The minister shall explain that the Supper
44 is to be observed in remembrance of Christ, to show forth His death till He come; that those
45 who receive the bread and wine by faith are nourished by participating in the body and blood

1 of Jesus Christ; that it is of inestimable benefit to strengthen His people against sin and to
2 support them in trouble; that it is designed to encourage and awaken them in duty, to inspire
3 them with love, to increase their faith and holy zeal, and to promote peace of conscience with
4 comforting hopes of eternal life (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

5
6 **57-4.** Since, by our Lord's appointment, this sacrament sets forth the communion of saints,
7 the minister, at the discretion of the Session, before the observance begins, may either invite
8 all those who profess the true faith, and are communicants in good standing in any evangelical
9 church, to participate in the ordinance; or may invite those who have been approved by the
10 Session, after having given indication of their desire to participate (1 Cor. 10:16-17). The
11 ignorant and scandalous are not to be admitted to the Lord's Supper, but it is proper to give a
12 special invitation to non-communicants to remain during the service (1 Cor. 10:21-22; 11:27-
13 32; *WCF* 29.8; *WLC* 173).

14
15 **57-5.** The table, on which the elements are placed, being furnished with bread and wine, the
16 minister should set the elements apart by prayer and thanksgiving, asking for the blessing of
17 Christ, and the working of his Spirit in the administration and reception of the sacrament.

18
19 The bread and wine being thus set apart, the minister is to take the bread, and break it, in the
20 view of the people, saying in the following or similar words:

21
22 **Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread,**
23 **blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples, as I, ministering in His name, give**
24 **this bread to you** (1 Cor. 11:23-24).

25
26 The minister may continue, as or before the bread is eaten, saying:

27
28 **Our Lord Jesus said, Take, eat, this is my body, which is for you; do this in**
29 **remembrance of me** (Matt. 26:26; Luke 22:19).

30
31 Having given the bread, the minister shall take the cup and give it to the people, saying in the
32 following or like words:

33
34 **In the same manner, our Savior also took the cup, and having given thanks as has**
35 **been done in His name, He gave it to His disciples as I, ministering in His name,**
36 **give this cup to you** (Matt. 26:27).

37
38 The minister shall then give the cup, as in the distribution of the bread. The minister may
39 continue, as or before the cup is drunk, saying:

40
41 **Our Lord Jesus said, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for**
42 **many for the remission of sins; drink of it, all of you** (Matt. 26:27-28; 1 Cor. 11:25).

43
44 **57-6.** The distribution of the elements shall be done in a manner that the Session deems best
45 for edification. The elements may be given to communicants seated at or around the

1 communion table, remaining in their seats, or who leave their seats to receive the elements. If
2 the minister or elders do not distribute the elements, the Session should give careful thought
3 to the character of anyone asked to assist in this part of the worship service.
4

5 **57-7.** While the elements may be distributed together, the bread should be eaten and the wine
6 drunk separately, as distinct actions and elements of the Supper as instituted and explained by
7 our Lord, the one being a token of Christ's crucified body, and the other of His shed blood
8 (Matt. 26:26-28). Whether the elements are to be consumed as they are received, or held by
9 communicants until all members of the congregation may partake together, shall be
10 determined by the Session in a manner that best serves for edification.
11

12 **57-8.** Since believers are to personally engage in all their acts of worship, it is proper that a
13 part of the time in the distribution of the elements should be spent in thanksgiving,
14 intercession, and prayer (*WSC* 170-72, 174-75).
15

16 **57-9.** The singing of the congregation, or words spoken by the minister, may put the
17 communicants in mind:
18

19 **Of the grace of God, in Jesus Christ, held forth in this sacrament; and of their**
20 **obligations and privileges as those who belong to Him; and may exhort them to**
21 **walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they have been called; and, as**
22 **they have professed to receive Christ Jesus as Lord, that they be careful to walk**
23 **in Him, and to maintain a godly life** (Eph. 4:1; Col. 2:6).
24

25 It may be advantageous for the minister to give a word of exhortation to those who are present
26 but have not partaken of the meal. Those who are not believers in Christ shall not be invited
27 to the Supper, but they may be urged to come to Christ himself even as those around them
28 partake of the meal. Those members who are weak in faith should be assured that the
29 minister's summons to self-examination is not meant to keep the poor in spirit away from the
30 food of heaven, nor to suggest to those who mourn their sin that they must find other means
31 to be comforted. As for those who are living in secret disobedience, they must be called upon
32 to repent of their sins and thus be ready to partake of the Supper once more.
33

34 Then the minister may pray and give thanks to God in these or similar words,
35

36 **For His rich mercy, and invaluable goodness, pledged to God's people in this**
37 **sacred communion; to beg pardon for the defects God sees in our service; and to**
38 **pray for the acceptance of our persons and our endeavors; for the gracious**
39 **assistance of the Holy Spirit to enable us, as we have received Christ Jesus the**
40 **Lord, to so walk in Him; that we may hold fast to that which we have received;**
41 **that our walk of life may be such as is worthy of the Gospel; that we may always**
42 **carry in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be**
43 **manifested in our bodies; that our light may so shine before others, so that they**
44 **may see our good works, and give glory to our Father who is in heaven** (Matt.
45 5:16; 2 Cor. 4:10-11; Phil. 1:27; Col. 2:6; 1 Thess. 5:21; *WCF* 16.6).

1
2 **57-10.** It is especially appropriate in connection with this service to request an offering for
3 the poor or some sacred purpose, and it may be made at such time as shall seem fitting to the
4 Session (Acts 2:42-46).

5
6 **57-11.** Following the pattern of the first Supper, a Psalm, hymn, or spiritual song may be sung
7 before the congregation is dismissed, along with the following or some other gospel
8 benediction:

9
10 **Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the**
11 **great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with**
12 **everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in**
13 **His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen**
14 (Hebrews 13:20–21).

15
16
17 **Chapter 58**
18 **The Solemnization of Marriage**

19
20 **58-1.** The marriage union is a divine institution, the first and most basic relationship of the
21 created world next to that of the creature to the Creator. Marriage is a lifelong, exclusive, and
22 publicly recognized bond. It is only to be between one man and one woman, in accordance
23 with God’s created pattern (Gen. 2:24, 25; Matt. 19:4-6, 1 Cor. 7:2). Marriage was designed
24 from the beginning for companionship, mutual support, and the reproduction of the human
25 race; since the fall, it has served in support of the promotion of sexual purity; since the promise
26 of the gospel, it is privileged to picture the bond between Christ and the Church (Gen. 1:27-
27 28; 2:18-25; 1 Cor. 7:2, 9; Eph. 5:22-33; *WLC* 20).

28
29 **58-2.** Marriage is a gift but not a sacrament. It is of a public nature, common to all humanity,
30 and people are free to marry without respect to race, ethnic origins, or nationality. The welfare
31 of civil society, the happiness of families, and the flourishing of the Church are deeply
32 invested in the institution of marriage.

33
34 **58-3.** Christians must marry in the Lord and mirror the relationship between Christ and His
35 bride (2 Cor. 6:14-16; 7:39; Eph. 5:22-33). Therefore, it is fitting that their marriage covenant
36 be solemnized by a minister of the gospel, that special instruction and encouragement may be
37 given to them, heartfelt prayers be made for them, and faithful Christian witnesses be present
38 with them. Nonetheless wedding ceremonies should not displace the worship of the
39 congregation on the Lord’s Day, and the minister shall not offer private communion to the
40 bride and groom.

41
42 **58-4.** Those considering or solemnizing marriage must do so according to God’s full
43 purposes of marriage and the parties for whom it is ordained. Therefore, ministers in the
44 Presbyterian Church in America, and members in the same who are qualified to solemnize
45 marriage, shall only ever solemnize marriages between one man and one woman (Gen. 1:27-

1 28; Rom. 1:32; *WLC* 137-139). Ministers of the Church must also not solemnize a marriage
 2 between a Christian and an unbeliever (2 Cor. 6:14-16; 7:39).

3
 4 **58-5.** Ministers shall be careful to obey the laws of the commonwealth or state in which the
 5 marriage will be solemnized, to the extent that those laws do not transgress the laws of God
 6 as interpreted by the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America (Acts 5:29). That
 7 they may foster the peace and comfort of families, ministers should be assured that, with
 8 respect to the parties applying to them, no just objections lie against their marriage.

9
 10 **58-6.** The parties in a marriage should be of such years of discretion as to be capable of
 11 making their own choice (e.g., Gen. 24:57–58; 1 Cor. 7:36-38). If a party to a proposed
 12 marriage is underage, and such a marriage is permitted according to the laws of that
 13 commonwealth or state, the consent of the parents or guardians under whose care they rest
 14 should be obtained, and the minister should be certified of this permission prior to solemnizing
 15 marriage. Parents or guardians should neither compel their children to marry contrary to their
 16 inclinations, nor deny their consent without just and important reasons.

17
 18 **58-7.** In addition to any records required by a commonwealth or state, the minister should
 19 keep a record of all the names of the persons whom he marries and of the time and place of
 20 their marriage, for the perusal of all whom it may concern.

21 22 23 **Chapter 59** 24 **Visitation of the Sick** 25

26 **59-1.** The Old Testament Scriptures reveal God’s compassion for the sick and the duty of
 27 His servants to care for them (Ex. 23:25; 2 Chron. 6:28-31; Ezek. 34:1-4). The ministry of our
 28 Lord and His instruction to the church encourages us to continue this care until He returns and
 29 wipes every tear from our eyes, for then there will be no more death or mourning or crying or
 30 pain (Matt. 4:24; Luke 10:30-37; Gal. 6:2; Rev. 21:4; *WCF* 21.5).

31
 32 **59-2.** It is the privilege of a Christian, and the duty of elders and deacons, to pray and care
 33 for the needy, ministering in Christ’s name to their physical, mental, and spiritual welfare
 34 (Acts 6:1-6). As reminders of frailty provide opportunities for ministry, those who visit the
 35 sick are encouraged both to listen and to speak with appropriate tenderness and compassion.
 36 In public teaching and in private, the Church is encouraged to reflect on anything that is
 37 profitable, emphasizing especially the unwavering love of our Father in all His dealings, the
 38 mystery of conformity to Christ in suffering and exaltation, and the presence and comfort of
 39 the Spirit, especially in hours of loneliness and hardship (Acts 20:20; Rom. 8:15-17). Those
 40 approaching death should be exhorted to examine themselves, repent of their sins, and find
 41 comfort in Christ as the sufficient sacrifice and substitute of all who turn to Him in faith.

42
 43 **59-3.** Christians are called to use discretion in the performance of visitation, not wearying
 44 the sick or unnecessarily endangering the one visiting. If the Lord’s Supper is to be
 45 administered to those chronically ill or otherwise isolated, the minister must not offer private

1 communion but seek to bring with him at least an elder and church member, conducting a
2 brief service of worship of which the blessing of the Supper is one part (1 Cor. 10:16-17; *WCF*
3 29.5).

4
5 **59-4.** God delights to answer His children, and He renders the prayer of faith a powerful
6 blessing (Prov. 15:8; James 3:15). Christians therefore should bring the needs of the sick to
7 the throne of grace, seeking recovery, repentance where needed, and God’s blessing upon all
8 proper means employed to those ends (James 5:13-16).

9
10
11 **Chapter 60**
12 **Funerals, Memorial Services, and Burials**
13

14 **60-1.** We see the propriety of funeral services prior to burial, graveside services at which the
15 body is interred, and memorial services following burial in the manner in which the saints of
16 old have cared for the bodies of those who have died, as well as in our Lord’s compassion for
17 a grieving mother, and His tears over a dead friend. (Gen. 23, 50; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:35).
18 The proper object of these services is the worship of God and the consolation of the living and
19 will usually be conducted by a minister of the Word in his function as a pastor, or, in a civil
20 service, by a chaplain.

21
22 **60-2.** While not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the will and the notice of our
23 heavenly Father, not all are privileged to be remembered by others in their death, and some
24 die in a manner that does not permit burial. When the body of a Christian can be buried, and
25 the minister is invited to speak, it may be fitting for him to remind the bereaved of these or
26 similar words:

27 **Not knowing our own end, let us encourage one another often, believing with**
28 **saints of old that our redeemer lives and at the last He will stand upon the earth,**
29 **and that even after our flesh is destroyed, yet in our flesh we will see God, and**
30 **our own eyes shall behold Him, and not another. We will see too that there is not**
31 **only an earthly body, sown in weakness, that is perishing, but a glorified body,**
32 **raised in power, that is incorruptible. Thus, we will “not grieve as others do who**
33 **have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so,**
34 **through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep” (Job. 19:25-**
35 **27; 1 Cor. 15: 42-49; 1 Thess. 13-18; *WLC* 87-90).**

36
37 **60-3.** The choice of service and the way it is conducted is largely left to the discretion of the
38 minister performing it, and in the context of a local congregation, to the judgment of the
39 Session. Nonetheless, the minister should encourage the singing of Psalms, hymns, and
40 spiritual songs, approving choices with power to express grief and faith. He should read
41 suitable selections from the Holy Scriptures and make such remarks as may seem proper. And
42 he should labor to pray with care, and kindness, seeking strength and grace on behalf of the
43 bereaved, that they may be sustained and comforted in their sorrow, and that their affliction
44 may be blessed to their spiritual good. Thus, the saints will be assured that there is a

1 communion with Christ in glory in this life, which continues after death, and is perfected in
2 glory (*WLC* 82-86).

3
4 **60-4.** The Church should seek to commit the bodies of the dead to the Lord in the most
5 respectful manner that believers can arrange and afford, if necessary, with the assistance of
6 the congregation.

7 8 9 **Chapter 61** 10 **Days of Fasting and Thanksgiving**

11
12 **61-1.** The Christian Church awaiting the return of the bridegroom knows the power of
13 Christ's resurrection and yet shares in His sufferings. In this passing age, God's wise and
14 varied providence will give His church occasions both for special thanksgiving and solemn
15 fasting (Psalm 100:4; Matt. 9:15; Phil. 3:10-11).

16
17 **61-2.** Fasting, as an act of worship, is fitting for times when the Church must humble herself
18 as one expression of her sorrow or need. During a fast we abstain, as God helps us, from our
19 regular meals, conversation, recreation, or labor. Since the posture of our hearts is important
20 in God's sight (Matt. 6:16-18; Isa. 58:1-14), our abstinence from pleasure and change in
21 routine must seek to avoid pride, and aim at fervent and frequent prayer, encourage meditation
22 on God's holy character and gracious ways, and embolden humble confession of sin with
23 honest acknowledgement of our most earnest requests (2 Sam. 12:16; Isa. 58:1-12; Dan. 10:3;
24 Ezra 8:21-3; Matt. 6:1, 16-18; Acts 13:1-3).

25
26 **61-3.** Thanksgiving, as an act of worship, enables the church to better express her joy and
27 gratitude for prayers answered, mercies received, and special blessings granted. Seasons of
28 thanksgiving encourage mindfulness of God's mercies, and further dependence upon Him for
29 all of our needs, since those who rejoice often, pray more (Psalm 107:1-3; Eph. 5:18-20; 1
30 Thess. 5:16-18; James 1:17).

31
32 **61-4.** Services and days of fasting and thanksgiving may be observed by individual
33 Christians, by families, by particular congregations, by a number of congregations near to one
34 another, by all the congregations under the care of a Presbytery, or by all the congregations of
35 our Church. It should be left to the judgement and discretion of every Christian and family to
36 determine for themselves when it is proper to observe a private fast or thanksgiving. Likewise,
37 it is for church Sessions, Presbyteries, and the General Assembly to determine seasons for
38 public fasts and thanksgivings for the congregations under their care.

39
40 **61-5.** As it is the duty of ministers and members in our communion to pay due respect to the
41 Church's public fasts and thanksgivings, so in advance of these occasions proper notice should
42 be given, and sufficient time allowed, that people may order their affairs so as to best attend
43 to the duties of the day and any associated service of worship. The occasion for the worship
44 service, including any remarkable providence of God, should be explained by the court in its
45 summons and by the minister during the worship service itself.

1
2 **61-6.** In a public service of worship upon such days, the prayers offered, Psalms and songs
3 sung, and selections of Scripture read and preached, should be in a special manner adapted to
4 the occasion. Days and services of fasting should be spent in a longer than usual time of
5 solemn prayer, with confession and lament. Days and services of thanksgiving should be
6 longer occupied than usual with the singing of praises, with holy gladness.

7
8
9 **Chapter 62**
10 **Christian Worship in the Home**
11

12 **62-1.** In addition to public worship, it is the duty of each person and the privilege of Christian
13 families to worship God privately, and the Church has long encouraged Christians to engage
14 daily in prayer, self-examination and confession of sin, and reading, meditating on, and
15 memorizing the Scriptures (Deut. 6:4-9; Matt. 6:6; 2 Tim. 3:14-15; *WCF* 21.6).

16
17 **62-2.** Although it will often be attended by difficulty, inconvenience, and personal sacrifice,
18 parents are encouraged to add to their own worship a time in which the family gathers to pray,
19 sing, and read a portion of the Scriptures, adding comments and guiding discussion as they
20 are able. Lest they become discouraged, or exasperate their children, parents should remind
21 themselves and members of their family that both personal and family worship is often more
22 profitable if frequent rather than lengthy, especially for those who are younger in years or in
23 faith (Eph. 6:1-4). Parents are also encouraged to remember that variation of pattern may
24 benefit children at various stages of life; and that instruction will be most effective when
25 parents model the Christian life in their words and actions, including specific expressions of
26 their own faith, repentance, and dependence upon God. Personal examples of devotion are
27 both necessary and powerful, and family worship ought not to displace the private and united
28 prayers of married couples.

29
30 **62-3.** It can be profitable in private and family worship and instruction to add the reading of
31 devotional works and the careful consideration and memorization of catechetical material.
32 Sessions are encouraged to commend or provide such literature as they are able, and to offer
33 helpful instruction to those who will lead in family worship.

34
35 **62-4.** Parents should prize the worship and sanctification of the Lord's Day both for
36 themselves and their families, setting patterns and priorities that their own children would do
37 well to imitate. Where congregations offer Christian education on the Lord's Day in addition
38 to that in its stated worship services, parents are exhorted to make the most of these
39 opportunities, as they are able, by assisting their children in preparation for any lessons, by
40 timely and regular attendance, and by contributing to these endeavors, at the invitation of the
41 Session, through the use of their time and varied gifts. In the noble task of nurturing their
42 children in the Lord, parents must take responsibility that their children are given an education
43 in the Christian faith regardless of whether their children find a formal education in public,
44 private, or Christian schools, or in the home.