

Directory for the Worship of God

Preamble

This directory seeks to avoid the extremes of being so rigorous as to be viewed as a liturgy, or so loose that it serves no purpose. There are some matters it contains that may be inconsistent with the scruples of every office bearer due to the various opinions concerning the relationship between the gifts, functions, and offices that Christ has instituted for the Church. Nevertheless, we hope that it will be received in the spirit of the directory produced by the Westminster Assembly, which wrote:

“Albeit we have not expressed in the Directory every minute particular which is or might be either laid aside or retained among us, as comely and useful in practice, yet we trust that none will be so tenacious of old customs not expressly forbidden, or so averse from good examples although new, in matters of lesser consequence, as to insist upon their liberty of retaining the one or refusing the other, because not specified in the Directory, but be studious to please others rather than themselves.”

Introduction

God has established and revealed in the Bible how to publicly worship him.¹ To add to or subtract from what God has commanded is not acceptable, because it introduces human traditions and leads to unnecessary divisions in the Church.² Therefore, the Lord's Day public worship is to be comprised of only those elements and ordinances instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ as given through the prophets and apostles.³ Under the New Covenant instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ, public worship is no longer connected with the physical temple, Levitical priests, animal sacrifices, Levitical choirs, or the use of musical instruments, that were all commanded by the Lord through Moses and David in the Old Covenant.⁴ These types of ordinances have passed away, leaving the Church with the simplicity of congregational worship "in spirit and truth."⁵

When it comes to public worship, the Church needs to consider:

- (a) There are the *elements*, that is, those things which are essential to the public worship; and there are *circumstances* of public worship, such as where to worship and at what time, etc.
- (b) The *elements* are clearly expressed either by command and example in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.
- (c) The *circumstances* are not explicitly set forth in Scripture and are decided upon at the discretion of a church session, remembering that all things should be done decently and in order.⁶

¹ Hebrews 12:28; Genesis 4:3-8 with Hebrews 11:4; Exodus 20:2-6; Exodus 25:40; Leviticus 10; 1 Samuel 15:22; Matthew 15:1-14; Deuteronomy 12:8; Deuteronomy 17:3; Colossians 2:8-10, 16-23.

² 1 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 11:2, 16; Matthew 15:9; Colossians 2:8-10, 16-23; Ephesians 4:2-3.

³ Jeremiah 19:4-5; Colossians 2:18-23.

⁴ Leviticus 23:4, 37; Hebrews 9:1-10, 24; 1 Chronicles 6:31; 1 Chronicles 15:16; 1 Chronicles 23:5; 1 Chronicles 25:1-6; 2 Chronicles 5:12; 2 Chronicles 7:6; 2 Chronicles 29:25-30.

⁵ John 4:21, 23-24; Hebrews 12:27-29; Acts 7:48; Acts 17:25.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:13-14; 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40.

Chapter 1 – Lord’s Day Public Worship Services

General Principles of Public Worship

- 1.1 The Lord expressly calls and commands his people to draw near to him, for the sacred duty and high privilege of public worship each Lord’s Day, as it is a Sabbath of solemn rest and holy convocation to him.⁷
- 1.2 Under the Old Testament, God established a pattern of Sabbath day morning and evening worship.⁸ In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus seemingly supports this same pattern by meeting with his disciples both in the morning and the evening on the Lord’s Day.⁹ Moreover, the Lord sanctified the entire Lord’s Day to himself and in it gives his people a foretaste of their eternal enjoyment of him and his glorious Kingdom.¹⁰ Therefore, the congregation should ordinarily assemble for public worship in the morning and evening on the Lord’s Day. The specific times and locations of each service, as a circumstance of worship, are left to the discretion and wisdom of the session.

The Elements and Ordinances of Public Worship

- 1.3 The elements and ordinances of New Testament public worship prescribed and instituted in the Scriptures are: a call to worship,¹¹ prayer,¹² reading the Word,¹³ preaching the Word,¹⁴ hearing the Word, congregational unaccompanied singing of Psalms,¹⁵ observing the sacraments,¹⁶ giving of tithes and offerings,¹⁷ the giving and taking of oaths and vows, and a benediction.¹⁸
- 1.4 All elements and ordinances are to be observed in a manner consistent with Christ’s prescription as revealed in the Scriptures, being a clear application of our Lord’s command, “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”¹⁹

⁷ Leviticus 23:3; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-18, 33-34; 1 Corinthians 14:23, 26; Hebrews 10:25.

⁸ Numbers 28:1-10.

⁹ John 20:19.

¹⁰ Exodus 20:8; Hebrews 4:9; Hebrews 10:25.

¹¹ Genesis 4:26; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Timothy 2:22.

¹² 1 Timothy 2:1; Philippians 4:6.

¹³ Acts 15:21; Colossians 4:16; 1 Timothy 4:13.

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 4:13; 1 Timothy 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:2.

¹⁵ 2 Chronicles 29:30; Matthew 26:30; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:33-34.

¹⁷ Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 96:8; 1 Corinthians 16:2.

¹⁸ Numbers 6:23-27; 2 Corinthians 13:14.

¹⁹ Matthew 28:20; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 11:2.

Order of Worship and Leadership

- 1.5 A fixed order of worship is not prescribed in the Scriptures. Nevertheless, having an order of service is a common and accepted practice.²⁰ However, care ought to be taken that the elements are observed in a manner that is suitable to the capacity of those worshipping. The following is a suggested order of worship:
- Call to Worship and Greeting
 - Prayer
 - Singing of a Psalm
 - Scripture Reading – this may be a Psalm which is then briefly expounded
 - Singing of a Psalm
 - Baptism, when occasioned
 - Prayer
 - Singing of a Psalm
 - Scripture Reading
 - Sermon
 - Prayer
 - The Lord’s Supper, when celebrated
 - Singing of a Psalm
 - Collection of Tithes and Offerings
 - Prayer
 - Benediction
- 1.6 Pastors and Teachers, as ministers of the Word, shall ordinarily conduct public worship and administer the sacraments.²¹
- 1.7 Ruling elders, as ordained under-shepherds, may call the congregation to worship and give the greeting, lead the congregation in prayer,²² introduce the Psalms to be sung, read the Scriptures, and on occasion preach the Word and pronounce the benediction.
- 1.8 When the presbytery has granted permission, men training for the Gospel ministry may lead the congregation in public worship. They are not permitted to administer the sacraments or pronounce the benediction.
- 1.9 The session may occasionally request a lawfully ordained pastor from another church to conduct the public worship. However, if such supply is necessary for an extended period,

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:26, 33, 40.

²¹ Colossians 1:17; 1 Timothy 5:17; Galatians 6:6; Romans 12:8; Hebrews 13:7.

²² Romans 12:8; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-3.

permission must be granted by the presbytery.

General Points About Public Worship

- 1.10 Those gathering for worship are to be encouraged to do so with a joyful, reverent heart. No persons should absent themselves from the public worship of God unless they are engaged in a work of necessity or mercy.²³ Everyone must take care to be on time and if they are unable to be present when worship begins, they should join the assembly quietly.
- 1.11 Once worship has begun, the congregants shall give their full attention and refrain from any behaviour that might be unnecessarily distracting to others.
- 1.12 It is commendable for infants and young children to be in the public worship services.²⁴ However, if a child becomes unsettled, a place should be provided for parents to take their child.

The Element of Public Prayer

- 1.13 The officer leading in public prayer must have a solemn understanding of the majesty of God and a deep sense of his own sinful unworthiness. He shall seek the help of the Holy Spirit and pray with confidence that God will hear and answer according to his perfect will.
- 1.14 The officer should think about the content of his prayers prior to worship, and they should be grounded in God's Word, with special attention being given to the form which the Lord Jesus used in what is commonly called 'The Lord's Prayer'.²⁵
- 1.15 The prayer of 'adoration and invocation' should include adoration and thanksgiving, and seek the presence, help, and power of the Holy Spirit in the worship of God.
- 1.16 The prayer of 'intercession' should include confession, along with requests for such things as the needs of the local congregation and community, the RP Church of Canada, and her global sister churches; for the kingdom of Christ in her many branches; for our nation, the nations of the world, and those who are in places of authority and trust.²⁶ Prayers for the preaching of God's Word and in relation to the sacraments should seek the blessing of God upon the means of grace and that the worship offered would be acceptable.²⁷
- 1.17 The prayer of 'thanksgiving' should acknowledge the blessing and privilege of hearing God's

²³ Exodus 19:8-11; Luke 13:10-17.

²⁴ Exodus 10:9; Exodus 12:26; 2 Chronicles 20:13; Matthew 19:14.

²⁵ See *Larger Catechism*, 178-196, and the original *Westminster Directory of Worship* for helpful guides.

²⁶ Matthew 6:7-13; Mark 11:24; Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18, 19; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; 1 Timothy 2:1, 2.

²⁷ Ephesians 6:18, 19; Psalm 15; Isaiah 29:13; 1 Corinthians 11:28.

Word preached and seek the help of the Holy Spirit to bless it.²⁸

- 1.18 The Scriptures do not explicitly command one particular posture in prayer. They do give the examples of kneeling, bowing, sitting, standing, and lying on one's face as postures that are signs of reverence and devotion.²⁹

The Element of the Public Reading of Holy Scripture

- 1.19 All the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments are to be publicly read, clearly and distinctly, using the best available common language translations of the Bible. Paraphrased versions shall not be used as an element of public worship.³⁰

- 1.20 The length of the passages to be read is left to the wisdom and discretion of the pastor. It is commendable to read a consecutive passage from each Testament in the services. While a goal should be to read through the whole of Scripture in the course of time, it is wise to read Scriptures which will best edify all present, for example, the Law, the Psalms, the Sermon on the Mount, etc.

The Element of the Congregational Singing of Psalms

- 1.21 Congregational praise is an element of public worship that is to be done according to the appointment and example of Jesus Christ and his apostles as revealed in God's Word. Therefore, only the "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," from the book of Psalms in the Bible, shall be sung in worship in accordance with what God commands in the Scriptures.³¹

- 1.22 The Psalms, because of their divine inspiration and inherent excellence, are to be sung with heartfelt passion and thanksgiving by the congregation, to honour and praise God. No instrumental accompaniment is to be used. Precentors may lead the congregation in its praise.

- 1.23 The practice of giving a brief exposition of a Psalm (or portion thereof), during worship is commended, so that the congregation may become familiar with, and sing through, the entire book of Psalms.

- 1.24 To facilitate congregational singing, singable versions of the Psalms are to be used. But like all translations of Scripture, this is a circumstance of public worship, and therefore no specific version is required. Nevertheless care should be taken that the text faithfully translates the original language and that the tune used for singing is appropriate.

²⁸ Romans 10:15; Titus 3:5.

²⁹ Genesis 17:3, 7; Genesis 24:52; 1 Kings 8:54; Psalm 95:6; Ephesians 1:15–23; Ephesians 2:4–7.

³⁰ 1 Timothy 4:13.

³¹ Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

The Element of the Preaching the Word of God

- 1.25 The preaching of God’s Word, being “the power of God for salvation,” should be done in such a way that the workman need not be ashamed but may save both himself and those who hear him.³²
- 1.26 The preacher shall prepare his sermon with careful study of the Scriptures and prayer, seeking constantly the help of the Holy Spirit, as he strives to declare faithfully the whole counsel of God.³³ He should seek to read and keep abreast of the scholarship and of the social and doctrinal issues of the times.³⁴
- 1.27 While a pastor’s personality will affect the structure and delivery of his sermons, as a servant of Christ he is to perform his ministry according to the following principles:
- (a) He is to preach conscientiously and not negligently, labouring in the work of preaching and teaching.³⁵ The sermon is an exposition and application of Scripture. The continuous exposition of a book, or a section of a book, is a commendable approach. However, topical messages are also appropriate to address the needs of the congregation and issues of the nation. These should be chosen wisely so that souls might be drawn to Christ and be conformed to his image.³⁶
 - (b) He is to preach plainly, so that everyone may understand; delivering the truth not in the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.³⁷ He ought to use or quote ecclesiastical or other human writers with discernment and care.
 - (c) He is to preach faithfully, looking to the honour of Christ, the conversion, edification, and salvation of the people, and not to his own gain or glory. He should keep nothing back which may promote these holy ends, without favouritism.³⁸
 - (d) He is to preach wisely, framing all his doctrines, exhortations, comforts, and especially his reproofs, in a winsome manner, with a view to the edification of the hearers.³⁹
 - (e) He is to preach earnestly, as is proper to the Word of God, from the heart and to the heart.⁴⁰
 - (f) He is to preach perceptively, taking into account the knowledge and understanding of the congregation.⁴¹

³² Romans 1:16, 17; Romans 10:14-17; 2 Timothy 2:15.

³³ Acts 10:44; Acts 20:27; Philippians 1:1-11.

³⁴ 1 Chronicles 12:32.

³⁵ 1 Timothy 5:16; 2 Timothy 2:15.

³⁶ Romans 8:29.

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

³⁸ Acts 20:20.

³⁹ 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Corinthians 9:22.

⁴⁰ Acts 20:26.

⁴¹ Acts 17:16-34.

- (g) He is to preach with loving affection, that the people may see that all he says comes from his godly zeal and hearty desire to do them good.⁴²
- (h) He is to preach as taught of God, persuaded in his own heart that all he teaches is the truth and that as a pastor, he will be judged with greater strictness as one who must give an account.⁴³

1.28 The congregation participates in the preaching of the Word as they listen with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receiving it with faith and love; laying it up in their hearts; and practicing it in their lives.⁴⁴

The Element of the Tithes and Offerings

- 1.29 The collection of the tithes and freewill offerings, being an element of public worship, should be taken up during public worship. Sessions have the discretion to permit the use of electronic means prior to or after worship.⁴⁵ The collection of *weekly* Lord’s Day tithes and freewill offerings is an element of worship.⁴⁶
- 1.30 Special offerings for specific needs may also be collected.

The Element of the Benediction

- 1.31 The benediction is to be understood as a pronouncement of God’s blessing upon his people at the conclusion of the worship service. Words of benediction taken from Scripture are to be used. The Old Testament Trinitarian, high priestly benediction, “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace,” or the Trinitarian, apostolic benediction, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all,” are distinctly appropriate.⁴⁷ If, however, the pastor deems another benediction taken from Scripture more fitting for a particular occasion, he may use it.

The Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper

- 1.32 A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which symbols and actions signify Christ and the benefits of the covenant of grace.⁴⁸ Sacraments become means of grace and

⁴² Acts 20:31, 32.

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 11:23; Ephesians 6:19; Hebrews 13:17.

⁴⁴ Acts 17:11; James 1:19-25.

⁴⁵ Genesis 14:20; Psalm 96:8; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9.

⁴⁶ Acts 5:2.

⁴⁷ Numbers 6:24-26; 2 Corinthians 13:14.

⁴⁸ Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.

seals of the benefits of the covenant only by the blessing of Christ and the working of his Spirit in those who by faith receive them.

- 1.33 There are two sacraments of the New Covenant instituted by Christ, namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are to be administered according to Christ's appointment, by pastors/teachers at a time when the congregation assembles for public worship.⁴⁹ In the case of those unable to attend public worship, the sacraments may be administered apart from a regular service. In such cases, the congregation must be represented by other members in addition to the pastor/teacher, and there should be a brief ministry of the Word of God.

The Ordinance of Baptism

- 1.34 Baptism is only to be administered by an ordained pastor/teacher of Christ.

The Baptism of an Adult

- 1.35 Adults will be baptized upon a credible profession of faith provided they have not previously been baptized in a true branch of Christ's Church. Acceptance of a baptism of those who have had the Roman Catholic form of this ordinance will be at the discretion of the session.
- 1.36 Before baptism is administered, instruction should be given as to the institution, nature, and purpose of the sacrament. Suitable Scripture should be chosen for the occasion and instruction.⁵⁰ The following (or similar) instruction shall either be explicit in the sermon or given in the form of a statement:

“Baptism is a sacrament ordained by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a sign and seal of the inclusion of the person who is baptized in the covenant of grace. Baptism with water teaches that we and our children are conceived and born in sin. It signifies our dying to sin and our rising to newness of life by virtue of our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. It also signifies and seals to us cleansing from sin by the blood and Spirit of Christ. Since these gifts of salvation are the gracious provision of the triune God, who is pleased to claim us as his very own, we are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Baptized persons are called upon to assume the obligations of the covenant of grace; baptism summons us to renounce sin and the world, and to walk humbly with our God in devotion to his commandments.”

- 1.37 The person to be baptized shall give public profession of faith by means of assent to the *Covenant of Church Membership* (see, Official Vows 1).

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.

⁵⁰ E.g., Matthew 28:18-20; Ezekiel 36:25-27.

- 1.38 The pastor shall ask the congregation to rise and respond either by verbal assent or by raising the right hand to the following vow:
- “Do you, the members of this congregation, receive this person into your fellowship and promise to pray for him/her, and to help and encourage him/her in the Christian life?”*
- 1.39 The pastor shall lead in prayer, thanking God for his grace and seeking his blessing on the ordinance of baptism, and then baptize the person, stating the person’s name and saying, *“(Name), I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God, blessed forever, Amen.”*
- 1.40 A member of the session may conclude with prayer, that the grace signified and sealed in baptism would be abundantly realized in the person’s life.

The Baptism of a Covenant Child

- 1.41 Parents, or legal guardians, of a covenant child, having received instruction on the nature and purpose of baptism, shall have their child baptized during a public worship service.
- 1.42 Whether baptism is by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling; whether a parent or pastor holds the infant child during the baptism; whether one or three applications of water are given when God’s triune name is pronounced, etc., are circumstantial and therefore are left to the discretion of the session.
- 1.43 During the service, instruction should be given to the congregation as to the institution, nature, and purpose of the sacrament. Suitable Scripture should be chosen for the occasion and instruction. The following (or similar) instruction shall either be explicit in the sermon or given in the form of a statement:

“Baptism is a sacrament ordained by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a sign and seal of the inclusion of the person who is baptized in the covenant of grace. Baptism with water teaches that we and our children are conceived and born in sin. It signifies our dying to sin and our rising to newness of life by virtue of our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. It also signifies and seals to us cleansing from sin by the blood and Spirit of Christ. Since these gifts of salvation are the gracious provision of the triune God, who is pleased to claim us as his very own, we are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Baptized persons are called upon to assume the obligations of the covenant. Baptism summons us to renounce sin and the world, and to walk humbly with our God in devotion to his commandments.”

“Although our young children do not yet understand these things, they are nevertheless to be baptized. For the promise of the covenant is made to believers and to their children, as

God declared to Abraham, 'And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you'.⁵¹ Under the New Covenant, no less than in the Old Covenant, the children of believers, have, by virtue of their birth, an interest in the covenant and a right to the seal of it. The covenant of grace is the same in substance in both the Old and the New Covenants, and baptism has replaced circumcision as the seal of that covenant.⁵² Our Saviour admitted little children into his presence, embracing them and blessing them, and saying, 'Of such is the kingdom of God'.⁵³ The grace signified in baptism is not tied to the moment of administration. Scripture teaches that our children are covenantally holy before their baptism.⁵⁴ Baptism applies the promises and obligations of the covenant to our children and calls them to personal repentance and faith as they come to years of understanding."

1.44 After the instruction, the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) are to bring the child to the front of the congregation. An unbelieving parent/legal guardian may be invited to accompany the believing parent/legal guardian in presenting the child. However, the unbelieving parent/legal guardian should not be asked to give assent to the Covenant of Baptism.

1.45 The pastor shall ask the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) to respond to the following question:
"Do you publicly renew your profession of faith in Christ as expressed in your vows of church membership?"

1.46 The believing parent(s)/legal guardian(s) shall then assent to the *Parental/Legal Guardian Baptismal Vows* in relation to their child (see, Official Vows).

1.47 The pastor should ask the congregation to rise and respond to the following vow:
"Do you, the members of this congregation, receive this child into your fellowship and promise to pray for him/her, and to help and encourage the parents as they seek to bring him/her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?"

1.48 The pastor shall lead in prayer, thanking God for his grace and seeking his blessing upon the ordinance of baptism.

1.49 The pastor shall then baptize the child, stating the child's name and saying,
"(Name), I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God, blessed forever, Amen."

⁵¹ Genesis 17:7.

⁵² Colossians 2:11-12.

⁵³ Mark 10:14.

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:14.

- 1.50 A member of the session may conclude with prayer, that the grace signified and sealed in baptism would be abundantly realized in the child's life.
- 1.51 An accurate record should be kept in the session minutes of all persons baptized, with the date, and, in the case of a child, the names of the parent(s)/legal guardian(s), and the child's date of birth. A Certificate of Baptism may be provided for each person baptized.

The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper

- 1.52 The Lord's Supper is to be celebrated frequently at the discretion of the session. Only an ordained pastor may administer the sacrament.⁵⁵
- 1.53 Whether believers are to take the bread into their hands and divide among themselves, or eat what is given to them; whether they are to move to be seated at tables; whether elders or deacons may help in distributing the elements; whether the communicant is to return the cup or bread to the deacon or elder or hand it to another communicant member; whether the bread is to be leavened or unleavened, and the wine to be red or white, fermented or unfermented; whether one cup is to be shared by all, or many cups derived and distributed from the one cup, etc., are not matters essential to the validity of the ordinance and are at the discretion of the session.
- 1.54 The visible Church is described in the Bible as both a living body, and a kingdom, to which keys are given.⁵⁶ The session ought to make efforts to ensure that the Lord's Supper be only served to those who are baptized and professing members in good standing in the Church of Christ.⁵⁷
- 1.55 The pastor should give instruction as to the institution, nature, and purpose of the Lord's Supper, drawing attention to the words of institution in the Gospels and 1 Corinthians. The following (or similar) instruction shall be explicit in the sermon or given in the form of a statement:

“The Lord's Supper is an ordinance instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is to be observed until he comes again, in remembrance of the sacrifice of himself which he offered upon the cross. The physical elements of bread and wine represent the body and blood of the Saviour and are received by true believers as signs and seals of all the benefits of his sacrifice. The Supper signifies and seals remission of sins, and nourishes our souls to grow in Christ, and is a bond and pledge of our union and communion with him and with each other as members of his body, the Church. It assures us that God is faithful to fulfill the promises of the Covenant of Grace, and it calls us to renewed commitment to obey and serve the Lord in

⁵⁵ Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7, 11; 1 Corinthians 11:2, 23, 26.

⁵⁶ Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18.

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:28; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

gratitude for his salvation. Christ himself is present by his Spirit in the Supper, to make it truly a means of grace to those who receive it in faith. Those who partake of the Supper do so in thankful remembrance that the body of Christ was given, and his blood shed, for them. They rejoice in hope as they anticipate the completion of their redemption in that day when they will share in the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

- 1.56 The pastor shall then draw attention to the words of warning and invitation found in 1 Corinthians 11:27-34. Such warning may be in the following (or similar) words:

“It is the duty of the Church to warn you that if you do not trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation, or if you are living an ungodly, disobedient life, and have not repented, you should not partake of the Lord’s Supper, lest you eat and drink condemnation to yourself. The Lord’s Supper is for repentant and believing sinners, who, after examining themselves and seeking reconciliation with their brothers and sisters, come confessing Christ as their Saviour.”

“This warning is not designed to keep the humble and contrite away from the Lord’s Supper. On the contrary, the Supper is a means of grace offered to sustain weak pilgrims on their journey through the wilderness of this life. We who come to partake of the symbols of Christ’s body and blood, come as sinners whose only hope is the grace of God in Christ. We come in a worthy manner if we recognize that in ourselves, we are unworthy sinners who need a Saviour, if we discern his body given for our sins, and if we hunger and thirst after Christ, giving thanks for his grace, trusting in his merits, feeding on him by faith, and renewing our covenant with him and his people.”

“If you are prepared to come in this way, then hear the Lord’s words of gracious invitation.”

- 1.57 The pastor shall take the bread and the cup, and exhibit them to the communicants, using words such as these:

“The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread and also the cup. Following his example, and ministering in his name, I take this bread and this cup, and exhibit them to you as the sacramental symbols of the body and blood of the Lord.”

- 1.58 Replacing the elements, he should say the following (or similar) words:

“After the Lord Jesus had taken the bread and the cup, he blessed them. Let us pray, as we give thanks, and consecrate these elements.”

- 1.59 A prayer should be offered to praise God for his grace in bringing salvation; reaffirm the trust of God’s people in God’s grace and Christ’s righteousness and mediation; and plead for the Lord to grant the gracious, effectual working of his Spirit through the sacrament.⁵⁸
- 1.60 The pastor shall take the bread (or a portion of it), and break it, and say the following (or similar) words:
- “After the Lord Jesus had blessed the bread, he broke it. Following his command and example, and ministering in his name, I break this bread <here the bread is broken> and give it to you his disciples, saying as he said, “Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me.”*
- 1.61 The bread is then distributed to the communicants, including the elders, who receive it and partake of it. During the distribution, appropriate Scriptures may be read, or Psalms sung.
- 1.62 Then, the pastor shall take the cup and offer it to the congregation, and say the following (or similar) words:
- ‘In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; this do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.’*
- 1.63 The cup is then distributed to the communicants, including the elders, who receive it and partake of it. During the distribution, appropriate Scriptures may be read, or Psalms may be sung.
- 1.64 After all the communicants have partaken, a brief address may be given, emphasizing the grace of God in Jesus Christ as set forth in the sacrament, and “exhorting them to continue in the faith.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:4; Philippians 1:3-11 Colossians 1:3-6 1:28; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

⁵⁹ Acts 14:22.

Chapter 2 – Days of Fasting or Thanksgiving

2.1 Under the New Testament, there is no day commanded in Scripture to be kept holy but the Lord's Day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Nevertheless, it may be appropriate to separate a day or days for public fasting or thanksgiving, as extraordinary dispensations of God's providence give occasion.

Fasting

2.2 Special days of fasting, humiliation, and prayer are particularly appropriate when God's judgments are evident in the land, or when corporate sin in the Church or nation provokes the Lord and invites his judgments.

2.3 In Christian fasting, the believer voluntarily abstains from food or some ordinary lawful pleasure for a season, for the purpose of seeking the will of God,⁶⁰ strengthening for service, spiritual growth, deliverance or personal protection,⁶¹ overcoming temptation, expressing grief,⁶² and declaring love for God and worshiping him.⁶³ It should be accompanied by prayer,⁶⁴ meditation, self-examination, humiliation⁶⁵ before God, confession of sin, repentance,⁶⁶ and renewed dedication to a life of obedience.⁶⁷

2.4 Fasts may be partial or absolute.⁶⁸ They may be private/family,⁶⁹ congregational,⁷⁰ or national.⁷¹ They may be regular or occasional.⁷² They may last for a part, or for the entirety of a day or longer.⁷³ They must be undertaken with a view to meeting the needs of others.⁷⁴

2.5 A fast day may be marked by a service of public worship. In such services, it is fitting that Psalms of penitence be sung, along with the offering of prayers of confession of sin and petitions for pardon.⁷⁵

⁶⁰ Judges 20:26-28; Acts 14:23.

⁶¹ 2 Chronicles 20:3-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:6.

⁶² Judges 20:26-28; 1 Samuel 20:34; 1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:11-12.

⁶³ Luke 2:37.

⁶⁴ Nehemiah 1:3, 4; Daniel 9:13.

⁶⁵ 1 Kings 21:27-29; Psalm 35:13.

⁶⁶ 1 Samuel 7:6; Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8.

⁶⁷ Ezra 4:16; Ezra 8:23; Esther 4:16; Daniel 1:12; Acts 9:9.

⁶⁸ Ezra 4:16; Esther 4:16; Daniel 1:12; Acts 9:9.

⁶⁹ Matthew 6:16-18.

⁷⁰ Joel 2:15-16; Acts 13:2.

⁷¹ 2 Chronicles 20:3; Nehemiah 9:1; Jonah 3:5-8.

⁷² Leviticus 16:29-31; Matthew 9:15.

⁷³ Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 1:12; 2 Samuel 12:16-23; Daniel 10:3-13; Acts 27:33-34; Luke 2:37.

⁷⁴ Isaiah 58.

⁷⁵ Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 9:3; Joel 2:12; Acts 13:2.

- 2.6 If the civil government calls for a time of prayer and fasting that is in harmony with the Scriptures, sessions should encourage the people of God to pay due respect to that call.⁷⁶
- 2.7 Apart from such general occasions, there may be times when families and individuals, for their own reasons, give themselves to prayer and fasting for a season.

Thanksgiving

- 2.8 Blessed with the hope of salvation in Christ,⁷⁷ Christians should always be thankful.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, there are occasions when special seasons of corporate thanksgiving should be observed.⁷⁹ These may be in response to a particular blessing of God in the life of the congregation, or to a call by the civil authority for a day of national thanksgiving because of God's provision of protection or material blessings. On such occasions, suitable Psalms of thanksgiving should be used, and the preaching of God's Word should be on the theme of gratitude to God.

Chapter 3 – Weddings and Funerals

Weddings and funerals are solemn public occasions for which the following guidelines are suggested as a help to pastors.

Weddings

- 3.1 Marriage is ordained by God for the welfare and happiness of humanity. God has ordained that marriage is between one man and one woman, for their joy and sanctification, for the raising of children, and for the more certain continuance of the Church. In marriage, husband and wife leave their parents and cleave to one another faithfully and are not separated except by death.⁸⁰
- 3.2 God instituted marriage at the beginning of time, and it is therefore neither a sacrament of, nor an ordinance peculiar to, the Church. It is integral to all societies and nations and is therefore rightly recognized by both Church and State. The Church should respect and abide by all reasonable and sound civil regulations that do not violate Scripture. The pastor should ensure that sound State regulations are fulfilled, while also keeping the Church's own record of marriages.

⁷⁶ 2 Chronicles 20:3; Nehemiah 9:1; Jonah 3:5-8.

⁷⁷ John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:1-9; James 1:12.

⁷⁸ 1 Chronicles 16:8-12; Psalm 105:1; Psalm 136:26; Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:4-7.

⁷⁹ Psalm 107:8, 9.

⁸⁰ Genesis 1:28; Genesis 2:23-25; John 2:1-12.

- 3.3 A Christian may marry whom he/she wishes, but only in the Lord.⁸¹ The Lord instructs all husbands and wives to live harmoniously together and has instituted marriage as an analogy of the love between Jesus Christ and his Church.⁸²
- 3.4 A notice of the marriage will be given on the two Lord's Days prior to the marriage ceremony.
- 3.5 If the marriage is to be legally recognized by the State, either a marriage licence must be obtained or the requirements for the publication of Banns will be undertaken according to local regulations. The form of the Banns may be as follows:

"I hereby publish the Banns of Marriage between Miss N of [City, Province], and Mr. N. of [City, Province], who are engaged to be married on the nth day of [Month, year] in [City, Province]. If any of you know cause, or just impediment, why these two persons should not be joined together in holy Marriage, you are to declare it to the elders of this congregation. This is the first [second, or third] time of publishing these Banns."

- 3.6 Weddings should be held on a day of the week other than on the Lord's Day.
- 3.7 In addition to prayer, singing, Scripture reading, and preaching, a wedding may include the following:
- Declaration of purpose.
 - Declaration of the bride's parent(s).
 - Exchange of marriage vows.
 - Exchange of rings.

- 3.8 Declaration of purpose - The pastor may use words such as these:

"We are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the presence of these witnesses, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honourable estate, instituted by God, which signifies to us the mystical union of Jesus Christ and his Church. God has ordained that marriage is between one man and one woman, for their joy and sanctification, for the raising of children, and for the more certain continuance of the Church. In marriage husband and wife leave their parents and cleave to one another faithfully and are not separated except by death. Jesus Christ honoured marriage by his presence and by doing his first miraculous sign at a wedding. Furthermore, he declared, "What God has joined together, let no man separate." Marriage is therefore not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy

⁸¹Genesis 24; Genesis 27:46-28; Proverbs 31; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:21-23.

⁸²Ephesians 5:21-23; Colossians 3:18, 19.

estate [name of the Groom], and [name of the Bride], come now to be joined.

Do you, or any person here today, know of any reason why you may not be legally married? If you do, please speak now or forever hold your peace.”

- 3.9 Declaration of the bride’s parent(s) - The pastor may ask either the father or mother of the bride:

“Do you give this woman to be married to this man?”

- 3.10 Exchange of marriage vows - An example of vows that may be used (either in a repeat-after-me form or be responded to by the statement “I do” by both groom and bride) is as follows:

“I [name of the Groom] take you [name of the Bride] to be my wedded wife and do, in the presence of God and before these witnesses, promise and covenant, to follow the example of Christ who has loved the Church and given himself for her, as I love, help, and guide you as we live together in holiness by God’s grace until he shall separate us by death.”

“I [name of the Bride] take you [name of the Groom] to be my wedded husband and do in the presence of God and before these witnesses, promise and covenant, to follow the commands of God to love, obey, and help you as we live together in holiness by God’s grace until he shall separate us by death.

- 3.11 Exchange of rings - If rings are used, the pastor may ask:

“What pledge do you give of your marriage vows?”

- 3.12 As each ring is presented to its recipient, the pastor may say:

“Give and receive this ring as a token of your marriage vows. May it be to you a symbol of the value, constancy, and purity of your wedded love, and a seal of the solemn vows you have made to one another before God.”

- 3.13 The pastor may then say:

“By virtue of the authority vested in me as a pastor of the Gospel, and in accordance with the laws of God and of this province, I now pronounce you husband and wife. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

- 3.14 The ceremony may then conclude with a prayer for God’s blessing.

Funerals

- 3.15 A Christian funeral should honour Jesus Christ and comfort the bereaved. Funerals can be held in whatever place and at whatever time is most suitable. The Lord's Day should ordinarily be avoided.
- 3.16 As there is a great difference between the end of a believer and an unbeliever, the funeral service may need to be modified. The suggested service that follows is designed with the believer in mind. In every funeral service, the pastor is to point everyone present to Jesus Christ as the sole hope in life and in death.
- 3.17 There is to be no compromise with secret societies or false religions. If called to officiate where such a society desires to perform any of their rituals, the pastor should make his service distinctly separate, or else refuse to participate. Likewise, neither the pastor nor any Christian is to offer worship or veneration to any idol or ancestor.
- 3.18 Christians should mourn with those who mourn, yet not mourn as those without hope. Therefore, it is right and proper for Christians to gather with their families and loved ones before and after funerals, so long as their allegiance to the Lord Jesus is not compromised by any unbiblical practices, such as ancestor worship or prayers for, or to, the dead.
- 3.19 It is appropriate to consult the family about suitable and comforting passages of Scripture. It is also appropriate to invite other pastors of like precious faith to share in the service.
- 3.20 The following is a suggested order for a funeral service which may be varied:
- Greeting
 - Prayer of Adoration and Invocation
 - Singing of a Psalm
 - Scripture reading
 - Prayer
 - Singing of a Psalm
 - Scripture Reading
 - Sermon
 - Singing of a Psalm
 - Benediction
- 3.21 If a graveside gathering takes place, suitable Scripture may be read and expounded, and prayer offered for those who are grieving.

Chapter 4 – Special Ordinances

- 4.1 The session shall seek to encourage these special ordinances towards the promotion of holiness of life and character of the congregation⁸³ as a means of bringing hope, comfort, joy, and revival to the soul. They may include prayer,⁸⁴ reading⁸⁵ and meditating⁸⁶ on God’s Word, and the singing of Psalms.⁸⁷

Personal Worship

- 4.2 Daily personal worship is necessary because of the tendency of the human heart to yield to temptation and depart from the Lord.⁸⁸ It is also a means of disciplining ourselves for the purpose of godliness.⁸⁹

Family Worship

- 4.3 Daily family worship is essential to the development of family religion and is a distinguishing mark of the Christian home.⁹⁰ While devotional material may be used to help with the understanding of God’s Word, it should not replace the reading and meditation in the Scriptures.⁹¹ It is the responsibility of the spiritual head of the home to ensure such worship takes place.⁹² Thanksgiving for God’s provision and prayer for God’s blessing should also be offered before meals are eaten.⁹³

Fellowship Groups

- 4.4 It is a blessing for the Church to gather during the week for mutual encouragement and edification.⁹⁴ This may be a single gathering, or multiple gatherings in different locations and at different times. While devotional material may be used to help with the understanding of God’s Word, it should not replace the reading and meditation in the Scriptures.⁹⁵

⁸³ 1 Timothy 4:7; Psalm 119:11.

⁸⁴ Matthew 6:5-9; Luke 5:16; Luke 11:9; Luke 18:1; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Hebrews 4:16.

⁸⁵ Matthew 4:4; Matthew 19:4.

⁸⁶ Ezra 7:10; Proverbs 22:17-19; Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 119:97-99; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Timothy 4:13; John 17:17.

⁸⁷ Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 3:18-21; Psalm 92:1-2; Psalm 98:1; Psalm 100:1; Psalm 106:1.

⁸⁸ James 1:13-15.

⁸⁹ Romans 12:2; Philippians 3:13, 14; Timothy 4:7.

⁹⁰ Joshua 24:14, 15; Acts 2:39; 2 Timothy 1:5; 2 Timothy 3:15.

⁹¹ Psalm 1:2; Psalm 119:99; Philippians 4:8; James 1:25.

⁹² Genesis 8:20, 21; Job 1:5; Joshua 24:14, 15.

⁹³ Genesis 9:3; Matthew 14:19; Mark 8:7; Luke 12:24; John 6:23; Acts 27:38; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; 1 Timothy 4:4-5.

⁹⁴ Acts 20:20; Romans 1:11, 12.

⁹⁵ Psalm 1:2; Psalm 119:99; Acts 2:24; Acts 17:11; Acts 20:20.

Instruction Classes

- 4.5 Instruction classes for the congregation may be arranged by the session to take place on the Lord's Day. The purpose shall be to teach the doctrines of grace and biblical truth set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Larger Catechism*, and the *Shorter Catechism*.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 2 Timothy 3:16; Acts 18:11.

Directory for Church Government

Introduction

The Lord Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders is all government, is the only king and head of the Church, who rules it by his Word and Spirit.¹ Church government must conform to the Scriptures and follow the specific provisions revealed in the New Testament.² According to his wisdom, love, and sovereignty, Christ has prescribed what has historically been called *Presbyterianism* as the biblical form of church government.³ Although this government is not essential to the existence of the Church, it is necessary for her edification and wellbeing.⁴ Every Christian is responsible to implement and uphold it as Christ's will for his Church.⁵

In those circumstances of Church government not explicitly stated in Scripture, the Church must observe the general rules of God's Word. The biblical admonition applicable to all circumstances requires that all things be done decently and in order.⁶ There are some things set forth in this Directory that are ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence which are common to human actions and societies.⁷

¹ Isaiah 9:6-7; Psalm 2:6; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18; Colossians 2:8-10; Revelation 1:12-20; Exodus 24:7; Deuteronomy 12:32; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Psalm 119:89; Isaiah 40:8; Isaiah 66:2; Matthew 5:17-19; Matthew 19:3-6; 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

² 1 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 7:17; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:16; John 3:3; John 18:36; Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 11:12; Ephesians 2:20.

³ Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18; Matthew 17:5.

⁴ Titus 1:5.

⁵ Psalm 133:1; Ephesians 4:3; Acts 2:44-45; 1 John 3:17; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9; Acts 11:29-30.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:40.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:13-14; 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40.

Chapter 1 – The Church

General Principles of the Church

- 1.1 The universal visible Church on earth consists of all those persons in every nation who make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and promise submission to his commandments, together with their children.⁸ This visible Church is distinguished from the invisible Church, which consists of those who have been born again and are united to Christ by a living faith.⁹
- 1.2 The ministry of the Word of God, the sacraments, and Church discipline have been given by Jesus Christ to the visible Church,¹⁰ to gather the nations into her and build up her members to Christian maturity until his return.¹¹

Chapter 2 – The Congregation

- 2.1 A congregation consists of those who profess faith in Christ (communicant members), together with their children (baptized members), who gather together as one body in a particular locality, under the spiritual oversight of a session, for the purposes of Christian worship on the Lord's Day,¹² and for instruction, fellowship, work, and witness when called by the session.
- 2.2 The session is required to keep a current register of communicant and baptized members of the congregation. This register is to be reviewed annually. If communicant members lack reasonable explanation for not fulfilling their *Vows of Church Membership* (see, Official Vows 1), the session shall seek to foster the spiritual wellbeing of the individuals and exhort them to repent.¹³

Communicant Membership

- 2.3 The communicant membership of the Church consists of all those within the congregation who have given credible evidence of a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; have been admitted by the session to the Lord's Supper; and have been granted all the privileges and responsibilities of such membership, including participation in the voting process for Church office bearers.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Psalm 2:8; Revelation 7:9; Romans 15:9-12.

⁹ John 14:23; Ephesians 1:10, 22-23; Ephesians 5:23, 27, 32; Colossians 1:18.

¹⁰ Jeremiah 3:15; 1 Corinthians 11:23; Ephesians 4:11.

¹¹ Matthew 28:18-19; Ephesians 4:12-13.

¹² Hebrews 10:19-25.

¹³ Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Psalm 76:11; Ecclesiastes 5:4-6.

- 2.4 A communicant member is a person who has given his/her informed assent to the terms of the *Vows of Church Membership* (see, Official Vows 1).¹⁴
- 2.5 The degree of knowledge necessary for admission depends upon the maturity and capacity of the candidate, and that person's opportunities for acquiring biblical knowledge.¹⁵
- 2.6 No one should be admitted into communicant membership who is completely ignorant of the plan of salvation, or who assumes an attitude antagonistic to the teaching, worship, or government of the Church.¹⁶
- 2.7 In extraordinary circumstances, such as the organization of new congregations, the presbytery may assume this function or delegate it to a temporary governing body of elders (see, Official Vows 1).¹⁷
- 2.8 Persons who are worshipping regularly within a congregation should, with wisdom and patience, be encouraged to seek communicant membership.
- 2.9 If those being admitted to membership are unbaptized, then public baptism shall accompany and follow their affirmation of the *Vows of Church Membership* (see, Official Vows 1) during a public service.¹⁸ If the individual has no definite knowledge that he/she has received a valid Christian baptism,¹⁹ then it shall be administered.²⁰ If those being admitted to membership have young unbaptized children living at home, these children shall be baptized following the parent's(s')/legal guardian's(s') affirmation of the *Parental/Legal Guardian Baptismal Vows*²¹ (see, Official Vows 2).
- 2.10 Due to its solemn and binding nature, Church membership cannot be resigned. It can only cease by transfer or Church censure (see, Chapter 4).

¹⁴ Acts 2:37-47; Acts 8:9-13; 1 John 2:19; 1 Peter 5:1-5; Acts 20:28.

¹⁵ Acts 16:32; Acts 19:2-5; Ruth 1:16; 2 Kings 5:18-19; 1 Corinthians 8; Romans 14; Acts 8:36-39; Acts 16:31-3; Romans 10.9.

¹⁶ Romans 16:17; 2 Timothy 3:5.

¹⁷ Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5; Acts 20:29-30.

¹⁸ Matthew 3:6; Acts 2:38-41; Acts 8:12, 36.

¹⁹ Given that the validity of Roman Catholic baptism has been debated among eminent godly theologians since the late 19th century, we leave it to the discretion of the local session to decide this matter.

²⁰ Acts 19:2-5.

²¹ Genesis 17:1-14; Acts 15:16; 1 Corinthians 1:16.

Membership Transfer

- 2.11 Any member moving from one congregation to another congregation within the RP Church of Canada or other true church,²² shall inform the session. If the member is in good standing, a letter shall be sent to the session of the congregation to which the member is transferring. This may be done electronically using the *Transfer of Membership* form (see, Form #2).²³
- 2.12 Any person transferring from another true church shall be admitted to the RP Church of Canada on the basis of acceptance of the *Vows of Church Membership* (see, Official Vows 1). If the church from which the person is transferring has concerns or grounds for censure, the person shall give full satisfaction to the session before being admitted. The judicial censures of any true church ought to be respected.²⁴

Baptized Members

- 2.13 Children of communicant members of the Church, in consequence of their covenant relationship, shall receive baptism, pastoral care, and instruction. However, baptized members of the Church are not to be admitted to the Lord's Supper until they have reached years of understanding and have voluntarily professed their faith in Christ and assumed for themselves the vows and obligations of the Covenant of Church Membership. Baptized members have no vote in the congregational meetings.
- 2.14 Baptized children are under the oversight, care, and discipline of the session.²⁵ As such, they shall receive instruction²⁶ with a view to nurturing them in biblical truth and preparing them for communicant membership.²⁷ This instruction shall arise from the doctrines set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, *Larger Catechism*, and *Shorter Catechism*. Upon becoming communicant members, they shall be granted all the privileges and responsibilities of communicant membership.²⁸

Congregational Responsibility to the Pastor

- 2.15 It is the responsibility of the congregation to sustain their pastor according to the terms of the contract of employment. If the congregation is unable to do so, they must immediately inform

²² For the definition of 'true church', see *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 25, paragraphs 3-6.

²³ Philippians 2:29; Romans 16:2; Ephesians 6:22.

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 5:3; Romans 16:17-18.

²⁵ Matthew 18:1-5.

²⁶ Psalm 119:99; Proverbs 5:13; Deuteronomy 31:12-13; Proverbs 22:6; Luke 2:46; Ezra 7:10.

²⁷ Psalm 34:11; Psalm 78:5; Genesis 18:19; Exodus 12:26-27; 1 Corinthians 13:11.

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:27-31.

both the moderator and clerk of the presbytery. In the event of such a notification, and if the circumstances require it, the moderator and the clerk may call a special meeting of the presbytery to address the matter. It is the responsibility of the presbytery to ensure that the obligations of the contract are fulfilled.

Congregational Meetings

- 2.16 Congregational meetings are called and overseen by the session.
- 2.17 Notice of congregational meetings shall be announced on at least the two Lord's Days prior to the date of the meeting. The purpose of the meeting shall be given as part of the notice.
- 2.18 As an expression of care and to encourage a congregation, an independently reviewed financial statement shall be published annually and submitted to the presbytery.
- 2.19 Each congregation should hold an annual meeting for the presentation and approval of the annual financial statement, as well as to fulfill any statutory requirements.

Congregational Trustees/Property

- 2.20 The presbytery will neither own nor hold title to any congregation's building or property unless the trustees of the congregation transfer ownership to the presbytery.²⁹
- 2.21 Title to all congregational property and invested funds shall be held by the congregation through its trustees, appointed by the congregation at a congregational meeting, according to the requirement of the law of the land. The trustees shall be chosen from among the office bearers of the congregation.
- 2.22 When a trustee of the congregation ceases to be a member of that congregation, he shall automatically cease to be a trustee of the congregation.
- 2.23 If two-thirds or more of the communicant membership of any local congregation votes to withdraw from the RP Church of Canada, those leaving, as well as the presbytery, should recognize their spiritual and financial responsibility to the minority that remain. If such a situation becomes acrimonious, the presbytery should yield to the injunction laid down by the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8.

²⁹ Luke 7:5; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2.

Organizing Congregations

- 2.24 A group of professing Christians shall be organized as a congregation of the RP Church of Canada only under the supervision of a presbytery. Persons desiring to establish a congregation shall petition the presbytery within whose bounds they are to be organized.³⁰ Congregations from other denominations may be welcomed and received upon willing adherence to the Constitution of the RP Church of Canada (see, Form #13).³¹
- 2.25 In conjunction with sessions, the presbytery shall be active in exploring new works and seeking to organize congregations.³²
- 2.26 Upon receipt of such a petition or prior to an exploratory work commencing, the presbytery shall appoint a committee to visit the locality and confer with the petitioners to ascertain the merits of the proposal contained in the petition and shall then present a report of their findings to the presbytery. This report will include information on the availability of qualified and suitable men for the offices of elder and deacon, the proposed meeting place for worship, and the likely financial viability of the proposed new congregation.
- 2.27 If the committee recommends proceeding to the exploratory phase, then the presbytery shall appoint a provisional oversight session. These provisional elders have authority to examine and receive new members, to exercise Church discipline, to administer the sacraments, and to conduct elections for ruling elders and deacons, in preparation of the work becoming an organized congregation.³³
- 2.28 Exploratory works will be reviewed annually by the presbytery to ascertain whether they should be formally organized into a congregation.
- 2.29 When the presbytery grants a petition for the organization of a congregation, or for the welcoming of a congregation from another branch of the visible Church, due notice shall be given, and the presbytery shall appoint the time and place where the service of organization will occur.
- 2.30 At the appointed time and place, an elder shall constitute the presbytery with prayer. The steps taken to this point should be narrated followed by a service of worship which shall include a sermon.³⁴ The presbytery shall determine the members that will make up the roll of the new congregation.³⁵ After the roll has been determined, the communicant members of the

³⁰ Matthew 9:35; Matthew 13:54; Mark 1:39; Acts 13:1, 43; Acts 18:7-8; Acts 19:1 with Ephesians 1:1 and Revelation 2:1.

³¹ Acts 16:5; Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Corinthians 11:16.

³² Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; Romans 15:19-23.

³³ Psalm 107:32; Acts 14:23; Acts 15:22; Titus 1:5.

³⁴ Psalm 79:13; Isaiah 63:7.

³⁵ Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Numbers 1:2; Psalm 87:6.

new congregation shall give assent to and sign the *Vows of Church Membership* (see, Official Vows 1), which shall be preserved in the minutes of the presbytery. An elder shall offer prayer for the congregation in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the king and head of the Church. The moderator of the presbytery shall then declare the congregation officially organized.

- 2.31 In the same meeting, the presbytery shall proceed to ordain and/or install those officers who have been previously elected by the congregation and examined and sustained by the provisional session, or in the case of a pastor, examined and sustained by the presbytery.³⁶
- 2.32 When deemed beneficial to the edification of its members, the session, together with the presbytery, may divide a large congregation and organize it into two or more separate congregations.³⁷ Such division should ordinarily be according to the geographical location of the members.³⁸

Disjoining Congregations

- 2.33 If a congregation desires to disjoin from the RP Church of Canada, it must petition the presbytery through its session.
- 2.34 The petition must make plain that disjunction is the will of both the session and the majority of the congregation. This can only be secured by presenting minutes of the relevant congregational and session meetings, which must be in the proper form.
- 2.35 The presbytery will appoint a special meeting at which the petitioning session and congregation will be invited to present their reasons. If there are no disciplinary matters outstanding and if it is evident that the petition reflects the settled will of the session and of the congregation, then the presbytery shall be bound to grant the petition and proceed to disjunction.

Disorganizing Congregations

- 2.36 Should the situation arise where the session of a congregation is reduced to one resident elder, the presbytery will meet with the congregation with a view to ascertaining whether the congregation is viable or ought to be disorganized.³⁹ If the presbytery decides that the congregation is viable, the presbytery shall appoint an elder(s) from a neighbouring

³⁶ 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5; Acts 14:21-23.

³⁷ Mark 6:39-40; Luke 9:14-16.

³⁸ 2 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 8:1; Galatians 1:2, 22; Colossians 4:15; 1 Corinthians 16:19.

³⁹ Matthew 18:15-20; Nehemiah 4:19-20; Romans 15:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:23.

congregation to form a provisional session until such time as a new elder(s) may be elected. Alternatively, a congregation may be reduced to a preaching station under the immediate supervision of the presbytery.⁴⁰

- 2.37 The presbytery may establish a temporary roll of membership when a congregation becomes disorganized. Those placed on this roll of the presbytery shall become members of another congregation within one year. If after a year they have not become members of another congregation, they shall be removed from the roll of the presbytery. Diligent effort should be made to retain members in the RP Church of Canada.⁴¹
- 2.38 In the event that a congregation of the RP Church of Canada ceases to exist, its trustees will be encouraged to apply the assets for the furtherance of the work and witness of the RP Church of Canada.
- 2.39 If a congregation of the RP Church of Canada has no elders or deacons to act as trustees, the congregation may appoint communicant members as trustees.

Chapter 3 - The Office Bearers of the Church

- 3.1 Christ appointed through the apostles, pastors, teachers, and rulers (who are elders with equal authority), and deacons⁴² as the permanent office bearers of his Church, for the ministry of the Gospel in word and deed.⁴³
- 3.2 No one may take upon himself any office in the Church.⁴⁴ Only biblically qualified men who have been called and set apart through ordination by the Lord Jesus Christ may serve as an elder or deacon.⁴⁵
- 3.3 The communicant membership of a congregation chooses and elects its own office bearers.⁴⁶ Every communicant member in good standing is entitled to vote in such an election.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Acts 8:5, 14-15.

⁴¹ 2 Corinthians 11:28.

⁴² Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-13; Acts 6:3-6; Acts 14:23; Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; 1 Corinthians 13:8; Philippians 1:1.

⁴³ Since the Reformation, confusion over the use of the word 'office' has led to many different views respecting the number of offices Christ has appointed. Some true churches maintain that there are four, others three, and still others two. In view of this manifest confusion, any office bearer who may have reservations about subscribing to the four-office view set forth by the Synod of Dort and Westminster Assembly may hold an alternate view.

⁴⁴ Hebrews 5:4; Numbers 16:1-30; Deuteronomy 1:13; Acts 1:21-26; Acts 6:3-6; Acts 20:28.

⁴⁵ Acts 9:15; Acts 13:2; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-19; 1 Timothy 3:2-13.

⁴⁶ Acts 6:3; Acts 6:5-6; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; cf. Acts 14:23 with Acts 20:28.

⁴⁷ Genesis 24:58; Acts 13:2-3.

- 3.4 When a man has been elected and accepted the office to which he has been called, he is to be **ordained**. Ordination is the solemn act of the Church admitting a man to office and giving him the right and title to discharge its functions.⁴⁸ The Church shall only ordain a man when satisfied respecting his character and gifts, and only in response to a call to a particular office.⁴⁹
- 3.5 If a congregation does not have office bearers, the presbytery may temporarily appoint provisional elders, including a pastor or teacher as pulpit supply, until the congregation is able to elect its own officers or call a pastor.⁵⁰ The presbytery will consult the congregation before making any appointment.

Elders

- 3.6 Elders alone exercise ecclesiastical authority to teach and rule.⁵¹ They have the responsibility and privilege of exercising immediate rule and oversight in their local congregation.⁵² They also represent their congregation in the higher courts of the Church.⁵³
- 3.7 The authority of elders is only pastoral, declarative, moral, and spiritual.⁵⁴
- 3.8 Each court of elders shall base its decisions upon Scripture and shall not presume to bind anyone's conscience by its own authority.⁵⁵
- 3.9 By virtue of their ordination as elders, the particular functions of pastors, teachers, and rulers in no way diminishes the parity of authority they equally share in the courts of the Church.⁵⁶
- 3.10 Scripture commands every member of a congregation to submit to the authority of the elders, who in turn are submitted to the Word of God.⁵⁷

The Pastor

- 3.11 The pastor is an elder who has special gifts from Christ for the public preaching of the Word.⁵⁸

⁴⁸ Acts 1:23-25; Acts 6:6; Acts 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14.

⁴⁹ Titus 1:6; 1 Timothy 2:11; cf. 1 Timothy 3:2 with 1 Timothy 3:12; 1 Corinthians 14:34; Acts 6:3.

⁵⁰ Titus 1:5; Acts 14:21-23.

⁵¹ Philippians 1:1; 2 Timothy 4:3; 1 Timothy 5:7.

⁵² Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Peter 5:2; Revelation 1:20.

⁵³ Numbers 1:44; Acts 15:2; Matthew 18:17.

⁵⁴ 1 Timothy 5:20.

⁵⁵ Deuteronomy 12:32; Matthew 15:9; Acts 17:25; Matthew 4:9-10; Deuteronomy 4:15-20; Exodus 20:4, 6; Colossians 2:23; Hebrews 13:17.

⁵⁶ Acts 15:6, 22-29; 1 Timothy 4:14; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1.

⁵⁷ Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-5.

⁵⁸ Malachi 2:7; Ezekiel 3:16-21; Matthew 9:36; 1 Peter 5:2; John 21:15-17; 1 Timothy 4:13-16.

- 3.12 In addition to the general shepherding done by all elders, the particular function of the pastor is to conduct the public worship of God, pray as the mouth of the people before God,⁵⁹ read and preach the Word as an ambassador of Christ, administer the sacraments, and pronounce the blessing of God.
- 3.13 The pastor is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, comfort, and pray for God's people, as well as evangelize the lost. He is to apply the truth of Scripture with pastoral authority as a diligent workman approved by God.⁶⁰ He must shepherd the flock according to the needs of families and individuals within the congregation by visiting the people, especially the sick, teaching the congregation, comforting the mourning, and nourishing and guarding the children of the congregation.⁶¹ Along with the other elders, he is to lead the congregation in serving Christ.⁶²

The Teacher

- 3.14 The teacher is an elder who has special gifts from Christ for teaching and defending sound doctrine. Like the pastor, the teacher also has the authority to teach publicly the Word, administer the sacraments, and pronounce the blessing of God.⁶³
- 3.15 In addition to the general shepherding done by all elders, the particular function of a teacher is to be proficient in expounding the whole system of truth revealed in the Bible. He is to teach sound doctrine, convince those who contradict it, and defend it against errors and heresies.⁶⁴ Although the office of pastor and teacher share much in common, the pastor's particular gift is to preach and teach by way of exhortation to the heart, while the teacher is especially gifted to explain biblical truth to the mind.
- 3.16 A teacher may ordinarily serve a local congregation if there is at least one other pastor serving as pastor. The teacher is particularly suited to giving instruction in a theological seminary or school.⁶⁵

The Ruler

- 3.17 The ruler is an elder who has special gifts from Christ for watching over and disciplining the congregation.

⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 9:14-16; Acts 9:15; Galatians 2:7; Acts 8:29; Jeremiah 1:7; Acts 13:2-4; Acts 22:21; Acts 15:40.

⁶⁰ 1 Thessalonians 2:4; 1 Timothy 2:15.

⁶¹ Acts 20:20; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:5; Matthew 18:5-10.

⁶² Nehemiah 8:2-8; Acts 6:4; Acts 13:5-7; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 4:11-12; Colossians 4:17; 2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Timothy 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 1:25.

⁶³ Romans 12:6-7; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 5:17.

⁶⁴ John 3:6.

⁶⁵ Acts 5:34; Acts 22:3; Luke 2:46.

- 3.18 In addition to the general shepherding done by all elders, the particular function of the ruling elder is to care for souls through encouragement, instruction, oversight, and governing the flock.⁶⁶
- 3.19 Ruling elders, both individually and jointly with the pastor in the session, are to lead the congregation in the service of Christ. They are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to protect them from errors in doctrine and morals. They should visit the people, especially the sick, counsel the congregation, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the congregation.⁶⁷ They should pray with and for the people and pay attention to and care for the doctrine and conduct of the pastor.⁶⁸

Deacons

- 3.20 The deacon is an ordained servant who has special gifts from Christ for the practical expression of the Gospel in the Church and the community. The particular function of the deacon is to extend mercy and compassion to the poor and suffering.
- 3.21 The deacon is to show an active and impartial concern for the wellbeing of everyone.⁶⁹ As they fulfill their responsibility, the deacons are to give priority to the needs of those who are within the Church. This does not negate the personal responsibility of every Christian to love his/her neighbour through the practice of true religion.⁷⁰ The members of a congregation are to respect and accept the work of the deacons as they fulfill their duties.⁷¹
- 3.22 The deacons are also responsible for maintaining the church's property in good order.
- 3.23 The deacons may choose one of their number, or a member of the congregation, to serve as the congregational treasurer. The treasurer will be accountable to the office bearers of the church in their administration of this role.
- 3.24 The discharge of the deacons' service is under the supervision and authority of the session. The deacons shall meet with the session at least semi-annually to ensure that there remains unity and harmony among all the office bearers, and to review matters pertaining to the care of the life of the church and property.

⁶⁶ Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1; 1 Timothy 5:17; Romans 12:8.

⁶⁷ James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:5.

⁶⁸ Acts 20:28-30; Revelation 2:20; 1 Timothy 1:3.

⁶⁹ Acts 6:1.

⁷⁰ Luke 6:32-35; Luke 10:27; Leviticus 19:10; James 1:27; James 2:15-16; Deuteronomy 15:8; Proverbs 14:21.

⁷¹ Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:8-10.

3.25 *Clarifying note:* Scripture also sets forth the service of qualified widows as a means of providing support to them and a blessing to the Church. This service is not an ordained office. However, the elders and deacons may employ such widows according to the rules set down by the Apostle in 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

Training and Licensing Men for the Gospel Ministry

3.26 The Scriptures require that men who are to be ordained to the ministry of the Word should be proven godly and gifted.⁷² Any man therefore who believes himself to be called by Christ to the ministry of the Word within the RP Church of Canada, must be able to articulate clearly what has led him to present his request, by speaking to God's work in, and call upon, his life.⁷³

3.27 The first step toward receiving a license to receive a call is for a man to be enrolled by the presbytery as a candidate for ordained ministry. A prospective candidate must have been a communicant member of the RP Church for at least two years.

3.28 His session shall provide the presbytery with a written recommendation certifying that in its judgment his Christian faith, character, and potential gifts qualify him to be a candidate for the ordained ministry of the Word.⁷⁴ This judgement may be obtained by giving him the opportunity to serve and exercise his gifts, including exhortation, preaching, and teaching in the life of the Church except during public worship. The recommendation should indicate whether the candidate's gifts are best suited to the office of pastor or teacher.

3.29 Upon receiving this recommendation from the session, the presbytery shall meet the prospective candidate and inquire as to his holiness of life and his service as a faithful member in his congregation. The presbytery shall also inquire concerning the motives influencing him to desire the sacred office and seek to ascertain if he:

- (a) Has demonstrated a willingness to work and so provide for himself and his family, if applicable.⁷⁵
- (b) Is able to indicate that he understands something of the nature and demands of the ministry. While his understanding of these will necessarily be limited, he should nevertheless have some grasp of what he anticipates will be involved in the ministry, as well as the cost involved.⁷⁶

⁷² 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Romans 12:6-7; 2 Timothy 2:2.

⁷³ 2 Corinthians 8:16, 17.

⁷⁴ 2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; James 3:1.

⁷⁵ 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9.

⁷⁶ 2 Timothy 3:2-4, 10ff; Titus 1:5-9.

- (c) Has demonstrated himself to be a man who can interact with people of all ages and all levels of ability and is approachable.⁷⁷
- (d) Has demonstrated an ability to study, think, and formulate his thoughts into a coherent form.⁷⁸
- (e) Shown evidence of an active devotional life and clear growth in grace beyond that of his contemporaries who are believers in Christ.⁷⁹
- (f) Possesses a reputation which commands respect, both within and outside the Church.⁸⁰
- (g) Has shown himself to be a man willing to submit to authority—one who is humble, possessing a true servant heart and a genuine willingness to be taught.⁸¹

3.30 Once satisfied with the prospective candidate's suitability, the presbytery shall enroll him by a two-thirds majority vote. The presbytery will also grant the man a *License to Preach* (see, Form #15), granting him liberty, under the presbytery's guidance, to use and develop his gift of preaching in a congregation.

3.31 The RP Church of Canada shall provide a program for the instruction, training, and mentoring of candidates for the ministry of the Word.⁸² Ordinarily, the presbytery shall examine enrolled candidates over three years of preparation according to the following pattern:⁸³

- (a) At the end of each year the candidate shall be examined on some or all of the following subjects. Each subject must be covered at least once in the student's training period:
 - Bible knowledge
 - Original languages
 - Systematic theology
 - Church history
 - Personal godliness
- (b) The student shall also preach before the presbytery at the end of each year of his training on a passage assigned to him; or give a lecture if he is being prepared as a teacher.
- (c) The student should preach in as many congregations of the presbytery as possible. The presbytery may set the texts on which to preach on these occasions.
- (d) The candidate shall also undertake a period of pastoral internship with a pastor in the presbytery at the end of his first and second years.

⁷⁷ 2 Timothy 2:24, 10ff; Titus 1:5-9.

⁷⁸ 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 2:6ff.; 1 Corinthians 2:1-4.

⁷⁹ Acts 16:1-3.

⁸⁰ 1 Timothy 3.

⁸¹ Hebrews 13:17; 2 Corinthians 8:16-17.

⁸² 2 Timothy 2:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:10-17.

⁸³ 1 Timothy 5:22; 1 Timothy 3:6; Hebrews 5:12-13.

- 3.32 It is the responsibility of all the pastors, teachers, and ruling elders of the presbytery to familiarize themselves with candidates for ministry over the course of their training. This will include both taking opportunities to listen to the student preach and engaging meaningfully with him at least three times per year.
- 3.33 If possible, the presbytery shall financially assist candidates for ministry over the course of their training when financial support is needed.⁸⁴
- 3.34 The clerk of the presbytery shall keep track of the examinations along with any records for each enrolled candidate. The clerk shall also arrange in conjunction with the presbytery's Training of Men for Ministry Committee, when each exam will be taken, so as to adequately cover assigned subjects. These exams will be conducted by a presbyter appointed by the clerk. Each examination shall be a serious analysis of the candidate's competence in the area being examined. Questions from the floor shall be granted, as considered suitable by the presbytery.
- 3.35 When the candidate has satisfactorily completed his training along with the presbytery examinations, the presbytery shall proceed with an assessment towards granting him a *License to Receive a Call*:
- (a) The moderator shall read the *Statement Concerning Subscription* (see, Official Vows 3) to the candidate for licensure.
 - (b) The candidate shall disclose any scruples he may have to the *Confession, Catechisms, Directory for the Worship of God, or Directory for Church Government*, and the presbytery shall proceed, or take no action, accordingly.
 - (c) The presbytery shall vote by roll call whether to certify the candidate as 'Licensed to Receive a Call'. This certification must be made by a two-thirds majority vote.
 - (d) If certified, the *Vows of Licensure* (see, Official Vows 4) shall be read by the moderator, assented to verbally, and signed by the candidate. The clerk shall keep these on record.
 - (e) Having thus attested his subscription and adherence to the doctrines, worship, and government of the RP Church of Canada, he shall be furnished with a certificate of *License to Receive a Call* (see, Form #16) bearing the seal of the presbytery and the signatures of the moderator and the clerk. His name shall be placed on the pastoral roll.
- 3.36 A man licensed to receive a call is permitted to read and preach the Word, but he shall not administer the sacraments or pronounce the benediction; neither shall he participate in ordinations or conduct a marriage. He is under the jurisdiction of his presbytery and must

⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:9-14; Luke 10:7; Philippians 4:16-19; 1 Timothy 5:17-18; Galatians 6:6.

attend its meetings, but he may not vote in the presbytery, nor can he represent it in a higher court, unless he is a ruling elder.

- 3.37 Ordinarily, if after three years a licentiate's services do not appear to be edifying to the Church, or he is not actively seeking a call to pastoral service, then the presbytery shall recall his license.
- 3.38 A man shall only be ordained to the office of pastor/teacher once, and it shall precede his being installed as a pastor in a congregation, a mission work, or other pastoral work, or as a teacher in an institution. The ordination and installation of a pastor or teacher can only be undertaken by a presbytery.⁸⁵ A ruling elder who subsequently trains and is called to become a pastor/teacher shall be ordained to the new role he is going to fulfil.
- 3.39 The presbytery's clerk shall hold the credentials of its pastors which shall include a record of their education, training, license to receive a call, and ordination and installation(s).⁸⁶

Election, Ordination, and Installation of Pastors and Teachers

- 3.40 A congregation may call any pastor or licentiate of the RP Church of Canada or global sister Reformed Presbyterian Church. Ordained pastors or teachers from other denominations may also be called according to the procedure set out below (see, *The Ways a Pastor's Service may Change or End – By Transfer*).
- 3.41 When the session has set a date for the election of a pastor, it shall be announced to the congregation on the two Lord's Days prior to the election. It is commendable to appoint a particular day of fasting and prayer, when the congregation will humbly seek the Lord's wisdom and blessing upon the election.⁸⁷
- 3.42 The session should be prepared to complete the *Pastor's Call* (see, Form #7) at the time of the election. For convenience, all but the name of the candidate may be filled in prior to the meeting for election.
- 3.43 When the congregation meets for the election of a pastor, the interim moderator of the session shall:
- (a) Ensure that at least two thirds of the communicant members in good standing are present to constitute a quorum necessary for a ballot. Absentee ballots sent to the session shall count as present communicant members. Communicant members may also participate

⁸⁵ Acts 13:3; Acts 15:40; 1 Timothy 4:14; 1 Timothy 5:22.

⁸⁶ 2 Samuel 8:16; 1 Kings 4:3.

⁸⁷ Acts 13:2-3; Acts 14:23.

via live stream with the session's approval.

- (b) Constitute the meeting by prayer, read from the Scriptures, and give a suitable exhortation.
- (c) Explain the proceedings of the meeting and ask the session to appoint at least two communicant members to count the votes.
- (d) Declare the man elected if he receives at least two-thirds of the votes cast by the congregation. If the congregation does indicate its approval, by at least two-thirds margin, the interim moderator shall declare that person elected.
- (e) Ensure the *Pastor's Call* (see, Form #7) is completed and invite all officers and communicant and baptized members to sign the call.

3.44 The session shall immediately forward an electronic version of the completed *Pastor's Call* (see, Form #7) to the clerk of the presbytery. If the man elected is currently serving a congregation, the session of that congregation shall also be immediately informed.

3.45 The clerk of the presbytery shall arrange an online meeting to determine if the elected man is a suitable fit for the calling congregation and if the compensation is adequate. This meeting shall take place no later than 10 days after the day of the election. Any objections and concerns regarding the call, from either the electing congregation or the congregation the man is currently serving, may be heard and discussed at this meeting.

3.46 If the presbytery is satisfied, then the man called can request up to 14 days to declare his acceptance or declination of the call.

3.47 If the man called accepts the call, a suitable date shall be set for the ordination and/or installation by the presbytery clerk in consultation with the man called and the session of the calling congregation.

3.48 The *Edict for the Ordination and Installation of a Licentiate* (see, Form #18), or the *Edict for Installation of a Pastor/Teacher* (see, Form #19), shall be read to the calling congregation by the session clerk on the two Lord's Day prior to the ordination and/or installation service.

3.49 On the day of the ordination and/or installation, the presbytery shall be constituted with prayer and will conduct the following service:

- (a) A brief recounting of the history leading to the ordination and/or installation service shall be given by the presbytery clerk.
- (b) A suitable Psalm sung, and prayer offered by the moderator of the presbytery.
- (c) The *Statement Concerning Subscription* (see, Official Vows 3) and *Vows of Ordination*

and Installation (see, Official Vows 4) shall be read by the moderator, assented to verbally and signed by the candidate.

- (d) If the man is a pastor, the *Vows of Ordination* (see, Official Vows 4) shall be read by the moderator, and the verbal assent of the pastor sought. A pastor will lead in a prayer of installation.⁸⁸ If the man called is a licentiate, he shall be asked to declare his subscription to the Constitution of the RP Church of Canada's *Statement Concerning Subscription* (see, Official Vows 3). When this has been declared, the moderator shall put to him the *Vows of Ordination* (see, Official Vows 4) and seek the verbal assent of the licentiate.
- (e) Once the licentiate has taken his vows of ordination and declared his subscription to the standards, he shall be asked to kneel while the elders of the presbytery lay their hands upon him, and a pastor of the court will lead in a prayer of ordination.⁸⁹ If the man being installed is already an ordained elder, this should not be done.
- (f) The moderator shall then declare the man officially ordained and/or installed as a pastor of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and will invite him to receive the right hand of fellowship from the members of the presbytery.
- (g) The pastor shall be furnished with the appropriate *Certificate of Ordination and/or Certificate of Installation* (see, Form #20) bearing the seal of the presbytery and the signatures of the moderator and clerk. His name shall be placed on the pastoral roll of the presbytery, which he will then sign.
- (h) The moderator, or another pastor, shall then preach a sermon fitting the occasion.
- (i) The service shall be concluded with a benediction pronounced by the installed pastor.

The Election, Ordination, and Installation of Ruling Elders

3.50 Every congregation shall elect its own ruling elders, except in extraordinary circumstances.⁹⁰ Those chosen must:

- (a) Be a male communicant member of the congregation in good standing for at least one year.
- (b) Have served the Church in ways that have manifested his character, gifts, and qualifications as outlined by the Scriptures.⁹¹
- (c) Be knowledgeable of and committed to the standards of the RP Church of Canada.

⁸⁸ 1 Corinthians 14:40; Titus 1:5.

⁸⁹ 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6.

⁹⁰ Deuteronomy 1:13; Exodus 18:21; Numbers 11:16-17; Philemon 12-14.

⁹¹ 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-3.

- 3.51 The decision to proceed with an election of a ruling elder(s), provided there are qualified men in the congregation, may be initiated by any of the following:
- (a) The session determines that an increase in the number of elders is needed.
 - (b) A request from the congregation to the session to increase the number of elders.
 - (c) A directive by the presbytery to hold an election for ruling elders.
- 3.52 The session shall inform the congregation that an election for ruling elder(s) will take place. The pastor shall preach and teach the congregation on the office and qualifications for the eldership.⁹² The session shall give the congregation a specified period of time for the submission of nominations to the session.
- 3.53 The session shall meet privately with each nominee to ascertain his qualifications, willingness to serve, and his affirmation of the *Statement Concerning Subscription* (see, Official Vows 3) and *Vows of Ordination* (see, Official Vows 4). No man shall be compelled to serve.⁹³ Upon examination, if the session is satisfied that the nominee possesses the necessary character and fulfils the qualifications to be an elder, it shall certify him as eligible for election.
- 3.54 The session shall not be required to provide an explanation for why a particular nominee has not been certified.⁹⁴ This is because a man may be nominated whom the session has been counseling or admonishing for some sin or other reason that would render him unfit for office, but which is not openly known or apparent to the congregation.⁹⁵ Where a nominee is not certified by the session, the members of the congregation should not seek an explanation or harbour speculations about the nominee or the session. If any member believes that a nominee has not been certified for unjust reasons, he may appeal to the presbytery, but should realize that such a course of action may result in the public exposure of these matters.
- 3.55 The date of the election shall be announced to the congregation on the two Lord's Days prior to the election. The session shall also announce the names of those it has certified on the two Lord's Days prior to the election. Only the men certified by the session shall be eligible for election.
- 3.56 The session may appoint a particular day of fasting and prayer before the election, when the congregation will humbly seek the Lord's wisdom and blessing upon the election.⁹⁶

⁹² 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9.

⁹³ 1 Timothy 3:1; 1 Peter 5:2.

⁹⁴ 1 Peter 4:8; Proverbs 10:12; Proverbs 17:9.

⁹⁵ Matthew 18:15; James 5:19.

⁹⁶ Acts 13:2-3; Acts 14:23.

- 3.57 At least two thirds of the communicant members in good standing shall constitute a quorum necessary for a ballot. Absentee ballots sent to the session shall count as present communicant members. Communicant members may also participate via live stream with the session's approval.
- 3.58 Communicant members unable to attend the meeting may send their absentee ballot to the session.
- 3.59 A man must receive at least two thirds of the votes cast to be declared an elder-elect.
- 3.60 After a man has been elected to the office of ruling elder, the session shall notify the congregation of the date and time for his ordination. A man shall only be ordained to the office of ruling elder once.
- 3.61 The order of service for the ordination and installation shall be arranged by the session. As part of the service, a brief statement outlining the process undertaken may be given along with the *Statement Concerning Subscription* (see, Official Vows 3) to the elder-elect, the *Vows of Ordination* (see, Official Vows 4) shall be read by the pastor, assented to verbally and signed by the elder-elect. The elder-elect may then kneel, and the session and any other members of the presbytery who are present shall lay their hands upon him as a prayer of ordination is offered by the pastor. In case of installation, only a prayer of installation shall be offered.

The Election, Ordination, and/or Installation of Deacons

- 3.62 Every congregation shall elect its own deacons.⁹⁷ Those chosen must:
- (a) Be a male communicant member of the congregation in good standing for at least one year.
 - (b) Have served the Church in ways that have manifested his character, gifts, and qualifications as outlined by the Scriptures.⁹⁸
 - (c) Be knowledgeable of and submit to the standards of the RP Church of Canada.
- 3.63 The decision to proceed with an election of a deacon(s), provided there are qualified men in the congregation, may be initiated by any of the following:
- (a) The session determines that an increase in the number of deacons is needed.

⁹⁷ Deuteronomy 1:13; Exodus 18:21; Numbers 11:16-17; Philemon 12-14.

⁹⁸ Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

- (b) A request from the congregation to the session to increase the number of deacons.
 - (c) A directive by the presbytery to hold an election for deacons.
- 3.64 The session shall inform the congregation that an election for a deacon(s) will take place. The pastor shall preach and teach the congregation on the office and qualifications for the deacon.⁹⁹ The session shall give the congregation a specified period of time for the submission of nominations.
- 3.65 The session shall meet privately with each nominee to ascertain his qualifications, willingness to serve, and his affirmation of the *Statement Concerning Subscription* (see, Official Vows 3) and the *Vows of Ordination and Installation* (see, Official Vows 4). No man shall be compelled to serve.¹⁰⁰ Upon examination, if the session is satisfied that the nominee possesses the necessary character and fulfils the qualifications to be a deacon, it shall certify him as eligible for election.
- 3.66 The session shall not be required to provide an explanation for why a particular nominee has not been certified.¹⁰¹ This is because a man may be nominated whom the session has been counseling or admonishing for some sin or other reason that would render him unfit for office, but which is not openly known or apparent to the congregation.¹⁰² Where a nominee is not certified by the session, the members of the congregation should not seek an explanation or harbour speculations about the nominee or the session. If any member believes that a nominee has not been certified for unjust reasons, he may appeal to the presbytery, but should realize that such a course of action may result in the public exposure of these matters.
- 3.67 The date of the election shall be announced to the congregation on the two Lord's Days prior to the election. The session shall also announce the names of those it has certified on the two Lord's Days prior to the election. Only the men certified by the session shall be eligible for election.
- 3.68 The session may appoint a particular day of fasting and prayer before the election, when the congregation will humbly seek the Lord's wisdom and blessing upon the election.¹⁰³
- 3.69 At least two thirds of the communicant members in good standing shall constitute a quorum necessary for a ballot. Absentee ballots sent to the session shall count as present communicant members. Communicant members may also participate via live stream with the session's approval.

⁹⁹ 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9.

¹⁰⁰ 1 Timothy 3:1; 1 Peter 5:2.

¹⁰¹ 1 Peter 4:8; Proverbs 10:12; Proverbs 17:9.

¹⁰² Matthew 18:15; James 5:19.

¹⁰³ Acts 13:2-3; Acts 14:23.

- 3.70 Communicant members unable to attend the meeting may send their absentee ballot to the session.
- 3.71 A man must receive at least two thirds of the votes cast to be declared a deacon-elect.
- 3.72 After a man has been elected to the office of deacon, the session shall notify the congregation of the date and time for his ordination. A man shall only be ordained to the office of deacon once.
- 3.73 The order of service for the ordination and installation shall be arranged by the session. As part of the service, a brief statement outlining the process undertaken may be given along with the *Statement Concerning Subscription* (see, Official Vows 3) to the deacon-elect, the *Vows of Ordination* (Official Vows 4) shall be read by the pastor, assented to verbally, and signed by the deacon-elect. The deacon-elect may then kneel, and the session and any other members of the presbytery who are present shall lay their hands upon him/them as a prayer of ordination is offered by the pastor. In the case of installation, only a prayer of installation shall be offered.

The Ways a Pastor's Service may Change or End

By Transfer

- 3.74 A pastor or teacher who has moved into the jurisdiction of another presbytery by a valid call, or otherwise, shall have his credentials transferred to that presbytery.¹⁰⁴ Every presbytery shall exercise due diligence when receiving any pastor.¹⁰⁵ The presbytery shall examine every pastor transferring into its jurisdiction which shall include: (1) a sermon or lecture delivered before the presbytery, (2) an examination in the soundness of the faith, and (3) an examination in personal godliness.¹⁰⁶
- 3.75 Pastors transferring from another denomination shall be examined by the presbytery. The examination should give particular attention to those subjects that distinguish the two denominations, as well as the transferring pastor's understanding and affirmation of the *Statement Concerning Subscription* (see, Official Vows 3) and the *Vows of Ordination and Installation* (see, Official Vows 4).¹⁰⁷ He is not to be re-ordained but shall be installed to a pastoral charge.
- 3.76 A pastor in good standing desiring affiliation with a true church of another denomination

¹⁰⁴ Acts 21:17; Acts 28:21; Acts 15:4; Acts 17:15; Philemon 17.

¹⁰⁵ Acts 9:26-28; Philippians 2:25-30; Colossians 4:10, 17; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21; 1 Timothy 3:10.

¹⁰⁶ Acts 9:26-28; 1 John 4:1; Philippians 2:25-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21; 1 Timothy 3:10; Colossians 4:10, 17.

¹⁰⁷ 2 Corinthians 8:22-24; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 1 Timothy 6:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21; 1 Timothy 3:10.

may, upon application, have his credentials forwarded by the presbytery to the new denomination (see, Form #22).¹⁰⁸

By Retirement

- 3.77 When a pastor retires from his charge, he may participate in discussions in the church courts but shall not vote except when granted to do so by the presbytery.¹⁰⁹
- 3.78 When it becomes apparent that a pastor, who is reluctant to retire, is unable to perform the duties of his office due to age, sickness, or other personal disabilities, he shall be retired from his charge by the presbytery, with grace and respect.¹¹⁰

By Unsuitability

- 3.79 In rare cases it becomes apparent that the relationship between a congregation and its pastor is not suitable.¹¹¹ When a two-thirds majority of communicant members desire to end the pastoral relationship, they may request this of the session or the presbytery. The presbytery should carefully inquire whether the request to end the relationship is reasonable and most beneficial to the Church. If such a change is made, the presbytery and higher courts (where applicable) shall ensure that all the churches understand that the ending of the pastoral relationship in no way discredits the gifts and calling of the pastor.¹¹² The presbytery shall ensure that fair and adequate compensation for the pastor is provided until he obtains a new charge, except in the case of divestiture or deposition (see, below).¹¹³

By Resignation

- 3.80 If a pastor desires to resign or leave his office, the presbytery shall ordinarily require him to wait six months to ascertain whether his reasons are worthy.¹¹⁴ If at the end of this time, his desire is unchanged and the presbytery is satisfied with his reasons, he shall be allowed to resign his ministry and the presbytery shall record the fact in its minutes and remove his name from the roll.

By Divestiture

- 3.81 A presbytery shall divest a pastor of his office if after a period of two years, it is clearly evident that he does not either possess the gifts requisite for the Gospel ministry or he fails

¹⁰⁸ 1 Corinthians 16:3; 2 Corinthians 8:18; 2 Corinthians 9:3; Philippians 2:19-28; Titus 3:12; 3 John 6.

¹⁰⁹ Leviticus 19:32; Deuteronomy 32:7; 1 Kings 12:6; Proverbs 16:31; 1 Timothy 5:1; Psalm 71:9, 18; Job 32:6-8.

¹¹⁰ Numbers 8:23-26; 1 Samuel 18:4-5.

¹¹¹ Acts 15:37-40.

¹¹² Colossians 4:10; Colossians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:11.

¹¹³ Leviticus 19:13, 35-36; Luke 6:31; Deuteronomy 15:13-14; Proverbs 20:23; Micah 6:8.

¹¹⁴ 1 Kings 19:4-9; Jonah 1:1-3; Jonah 4:3, 9; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Isaiah 40:31.

to perform adequately the work of the ministry.¹¹⁵ Divestiture is not a Church censure. The presbytery shall give any pastor it contemplates divesting the opportunity to defend his office before the court. A motion to divest shall require a two-thirds majority vote of the presbytery.

- 3.82 When a pastor is divested from his office, the presbytery shall remove his name from its roll and commend him to a local congregation.

By Suspension

- 3.83 A pastor may be suspended from his office by censure of the presbytery and will be deprived of the privileges of his office until such time as the suspension is lifted (see, Chapter 4: Church Censures).¹¹⁶

By Deposition

- 3.84 A pastor may be deposed from his office by censure of the presbytery for serious offences in doctrine or conduct that obviously disqualify the person from exercising office.¹¹⁷
- 3.85 When a pastor of the Word is judged to have apostatized from the Christian faith he shall be deposed, and his ordination nullified. The clerk of the presbytery shall note the apostasy in the records. The presbytery may not, under any circumstance, transfer credentials of an apostate to a congregation of the universal visible Church.¹¹⁸

The Ways a Ruling Elder's or Deacon's Service may Change or End

By Transfer

- 3.86 A ruling elder or deacon who transfers to another congregation does not continue to exercise the office unless he is elected by the new congregation and installed there. The process for the election of an elder is to be followed, but he is not to be re-ordained.

By Retirement

- 3.87 When an elder or deacon retires from his office, he may continue to participate in discussions in church courts but may not vote unless granted to do so by the session.¹¹⁹
- 3.88 When an elder or deacon is unable to perform the duties of his office due to age, sickness, or

¹¹⁵ Proverbs 22:29; Exodus 36:1-6; Exodus 18:25; 1 Chronicles 15:22; 1 Chronicles 25:7.

¹¹⁶ 1 Timothy 5:19-20; James 3:1; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Corinthians 2:5-8.

¹¹⁷ Proverbs 29:2; 1 Samuel 2:28-30.

¹¹⁸ 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Hebrews 6:4-8; Galatians 1:8-9; Deuteronomy 13:6-11; Hebrews 10:26-29; 1 John 2:19.

¹¹⁹ Leviticus 19:32; Deuteronomy 32:7; 1 Kings 12:6; Proverbs 16:31; 1 Timothy 5:1; Psalm 71:9, 18; Job 32:6-8.

other personal disabilities, he shall be retired from his charge with grace and respect by his session.¹²⁰ He may only retain the privileges of his office, including participation in discussions in the church courts, as granted by the session.

By Unsuitability

- 3.89 In rare cases, it may become apparent that a man is unsuitable for the office he holds. If a two-thirds majority of communicant members support his removal from office, then that man shall be asked with care and grace to resign his charge. If he refuses, then the matter will be addressed by way of formal suspension. If that proves unsuccessful in getting the man to resign, then deposition will be pursued.

By Resignation

- 3.90 A ruling elder or deacon may request to resign from his charge within the congregation. If the grounds of his resignation are other than unsuitability, he may go through the process to be re-elected and installed to serve again.

By Divestiture

- 3.91 If it becomes apparent that the relationship between a congregation and one of its ruling elders or deacons is not suitable or edifying, that officer may be divested of his charge by a two-thirds majority vote of the session.¹²¹ Divestiture is not a Church censure and should be carried out tenderly. Opportunity shall be given to any communicant member to give reasons why the officer should not be divested of his charge.

By Suspension or Deposition

- 3.92 A ruling elder or deacon may be suspended from his office or deposed by judicial discipline for an offense in doctrine or life, or because of delinquent failure to perform the work of his office.¹²²

¹²⁰ Numbers 8:23-26; 1 Samuel 8:4-5.

¹²¹ Proverbs 22:29; Exodus 36:1-6; Exodus 18:25; 1 Chronicles 15:22; 1 Chronicles 25:7; Acts 15:37-40.

¹²² 2 Timothy 4:10; Proverbs 29:2; 1 Samuel 2:28-30.

Chapter 4 -- The Governing Assemblies of the Church

General Principles of Presbyterianism

- 4.1 The Bible teaches that the Church is to be governed by assemblies of elders chosen to represent the Church as a whole.¹²³ The governing assemblies, also known as courts, are the session, the presbytery, and the synod.
- 4.2 The authority of each governing assembly increases based on the parity of authority of every elder. Since each ascending court is a broader representation of the entire Church, it possesses more authority than the individual courts that comprise it.¹²⁴
- 4.3 Each court has the authority to call before it any person within its jurisdiction. Each has the power to hear and determine controversies, discipline cases, and to dispense Church censures. If any person believes that he/she has been wronged by the decision of a lower assembly, he/she has the right of appeal to a higher court.
- 4.4 Since the governing assemblies of the Church represent the authority of the entire Church, no judicial decision may be made apart from a quorum necessary to constitute each court. Whenever a decision or action of a lower court is appealed to a higher court, no members of the lower court will be recused from the deliberations and vote. In the case of a judicial matter, the entire court shall hear the matter and render its judgment. No judicial matter shall be delegated to a Church committee.
- 4.5 A higher court may appoint some of its members temporarily to participate in a lower court in order to maintain a quorum.
- 4.6 No court may meet while a higher court is meeting without the permission of the higher court.
- 4.7 A court may invite those of similar standing from other churches to participate in its meetings as consultative members.
- 4.8 The power of Church courts is a pastoral, declarative, moral, and spiritual application of the doctrines and precepts of Jesus Christ.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ephesians 5:21; Matthew 18:20.

¹²⁴ Matthew 18:15-20.

¹²⁵ 1 Corinthians 5:12; 1 Corinthians 6:4.

Committees of the Courts

- 4.9 A committee consists of members appointed by a court for a particular purpose. A committee has no power to act in the name of the appointing court, but must bring its reports and recommendations to that court for its consideration.

The Session

- 4.10 The elders of a congregation are known in their formal and collective capacity as the ‘session’.¹²⁶ A session exercises jurisdiction over a local congregation and is subject to the authority of the presbytery to which it belongs.¹²⁷
- 4.11 The session is charged with watching over and ruling the congregation as spiritual shepherds. In order to fulfill this duty, the session shall diligently seek to:
- (a) Ensure that all matters concerning the conduct of public worship are according to God’s Word outlined in the *Directory for Worship*.
 - (b) Visit the membership to ascertain what growth in grace has been experienced and to give encouragement regarding the daily use of the means of grace.¹²⁸
 - (c) Exercise discipline according to the process outlined in the *Directory for Church Government* (see, *Church Censures*).
 - (d) Oversee the service of the deacons to ensure that there is no divergence in either approach to, or fulfillment of, the Church’s service of Christ.
 - (e) Meet monthly for business and frequently pray for the congregation.
 - (f) Keep the roll of both communicant and baptized members. This roll shall include births, baptisms, receptions into communicant membership, transfers, censures, and restorations.
 - (g) Submit an electronic copy of its minutes to the presbytery, along with a brief report summarizing the various actions, activities, and spiritual health of the congregation.
 - (h) Arrange congregational meetings (see, *Congregational Meetings*).

¹²⁶ AKA: ‘consistory.’

¹²⁷ Philippians 1:1; Timothy 3:8-12.

¹²⁸ Acts 20:20; Acts 20:31, 32; Philippians 1:7-11.

- (i) Appoint and certify ruling elders to higher governing courts.
- 4.12 A majority of the elders shall constitute a quorum of the session. The pastor shall ordinarily serve as the moderator of the session for as long as he remains the pastor of the congregation, and a ruling elder ordinarily serves as the clerk.
- 4.13 If a congregation does not have at least two elders, then the presbytery may appoint a provisional ruling elder(s) from a neighbouring congregation until such time as a new ruling elder(s) may be elected. The provisional ruling elder(s) may attend a session meeting via videoconferencing. In the event of the congregation being without a pastor, the presbytery may appoint an interim moderator.

The Presbytery

- 4.14 A presbytery is the governing assembly consisting of the pastors, teachers, and ruling elders appointed as representatives by the congregations within its specified geographical area. It has the responsibility to oversee the spiritual welfare and govern the congregations under its care.¹²⁹
- 4.15 In fulfillment of its responsibility, the presbytery will receive and determine matters that relate to the spiritual condition of the regional church, including:
- (a) Addressing issues of doctrine which may injure the purity or peace of the Church.
 - (b) Exercising discipline in accordance with the process outlined in the *Directory for Church Government* (see, *Church Censures*).
 - (c) Taking under its care men seeking training for the Gospel ministry (see, *Training and Licensing Men for the Gospel Ministry*).
 - (d) Ordaining, installing, and removing pastors and teachers (see, *Election, Ordination and Installation of Pastors and Teachers* and *The Ways a Pastor's Service May Change or End*).
 - (e) Fostering fellowship among the congregations within its bounds.
 - (f) Establishing new congregations within its bounds (see, *Organizing Congregations*).
 - (g) Disjoining and disorganizing congregations (see, *Disjoining Congregations* and *Disorganizing Congregations*).

¹²⁹ Acts 15:1-35.

- 4.16 Each presbytery is free to assemble as often as circumstances may require. However, a presbytery shall hold at least two regular meetings each year, one in the spring (ordinarily in April) and the other in the fall (ordinarily in October).
- 4.17 To constitute a presbytery, a quorum of certified elders must be present from at least one half of the congregations on the roll of the presbytery; and at least one fourth of the elders present must be ruling elders. Certified elders may join a meeting by videoconference but should not ordinarily do so. Any elder may participate in debate, but only certified elders are entitled to vote.
- 4.18 Each elder must be certified by his session. This may be done by email to the clerk of the presbytery.
- 4.19 The session of each congregation shall send certified delegates to each meeting of the presbytery; these would normally include a pastor and a ruling elder. Where a congregation has called other pastors/teachers to serve on its staff, they should also be certified as delegates. Congregations with more than 100 members (communicant and baptized) shall be entitled to an additional delegate.
- 4.20 The moderator of the presbytery is to be chosen by the court as the first item of business. Each meeting of the presbytery is (ordinarily) constituted by the moderator from the previous meeting. There is no limit to the number of times a man may be chosen to serve as the moderator.
- 4.21 The moderator of the presbytery is not entitled to vote in the courts of the Church except in the case of equal votes being cast on either side of a question. The moderator may record his dissent and complaint against the decisions of the court as other members may.
- 4.22 The moderator of the presbytery shall:
- (a) Ordinarily begin the meeting with devotional exercises prior to the constitution of the court.
 - (b) Work through the business on the agenda as expeditiously as possible, while seeking to ensure that all the members of the court clearly understand the nature of the matters being discussed and have reasonable opportunity to speak to them.
 - (c) Give guidance to persons involved in cases coming before the court.
 - (d) Express the judgements and administer the censures of the court.

- 4.23 The presbytery shall appoint its own clerk who must be a member of the court. Given the nature of the clerk's responsibilities, it is beneficial to appoint a gifted man who is willing to serve for many consecutive years.
- 4.24 The clerk of the presbytery shall:
- (a) Maintain a current roll of the members of the court and ensure that a quorum of certified elders is present prior to the constitution of each meeting.
 - (b) Prepare, in conjunction with the moderator, an agenda for each meeting of the court. Ordinarily, the agenda should be circulated two weeks prior to the meeting, but no less than two days in the case of an extraordinary meeting.
 - (c) Produce formal minutes of each meeting using the standard form of the RP Church of Canada. Ordinarily, the minutes should be circulated to all church sessions within one week of the meeting.
 - (d) Retain all official papers produced or adopted by the presbytery.
 - (e) Provide an annual report to the spring meeting of the presbytery which will include a listing of the current students under care, censures, ordinations, installations, active pastors, pastors without charge, congregations without pastors, dissolutions of pastoral relationships, congregational organizations or disorganizations, unions or divisions of congregations, important congregational or presbytery matters, and any information he believes to be pertinent to the presbytery's work.
- 4.25 Prior to the spring meeting, the clerk shall arrange the annual review of the minutes of each session to ensure that matters pertaining to the life of each congregation within its bounds are consistent with the standards of the RP Church of Canada.
- 4.26 At the spring meeting, the presbytery shall receive a brief report from each congregation within its bounds summarizing the various actions, activities, and spiritual health of the congregation.

The Synod

- 4.27 The synod is the broadest, and therefore highest, governing assembly of the Church. It consists of the pastors, teachers, and ruling elders appointed as representatives by the congregations from all presbyteries. The synod has the responsibility of overseeing the spiritual welfare and governance of the presbyteries under its care. Upon the establishment of two presbyteries, a synod will be constituted and shall meet annually.
- 4.28 Each elder must be certified by his session. This may be done by email to the clerk of the synod.
- 4.29 The session of each congregation shall send certified delegates to each meeting of the synod. This delegation would normally include a pastor and a ruling elder. Where a congregation has called other pastors/teachers to serve on its staff, they should also be certified as delegates. Congregations with more than 100 members (communicant and baptized) shall be entitled to an additional delegate.
- 4.30 The moderator of the synod is to be chosen by the court as the first item of business. Each meeting of the synod is ordinarily constituted by the moderator from the previous year.
- 4.31 The moderator of the synod is not entitled to vote in the courts of the Church except in the case of equal votes being cast on either side of a question. He may record his dissent and complaint against the decisions of the court as other members may.
- 4.32 The moderator of the synod shall:
- (a) Work through the business on the agenda as expeditiously as possible, while seeking to ensure that all the members of the court clearly understand the nature of the matters being discussed and have reasonable opportunity to speak to them.
 - (b) Give guidance to persons involved in cases coming before the court.
 - (c) Express the judgements and administer the censures of the court.
 - (d) Begin the following year's meeting with devotional exercises.
- 4.33 The synod shall appoint its own clerk who must be a member of the court. Given the nature of the clerk's responsibilities, it is beneficial to appoint a gifted man who is willing to serve for many consecutive years.

4.34 The clerk of the synod shall:

- (a) Maintain a current roll of the members of the court and ensure that a quorum of certified elders is met prior to the constitution of each meeting.
- (b) Prepare the agenda for each meeting of the court. Ordinarily, the agenda should be circulated one month prior to the meeting.
- (c) Produce formal minutes of each meeting using the standard form of the RP Church of Canada. Ordinarily, the minutes should be circulated to all church sessions within one week of the meeting.
- (d) Retain all official papers produced or adopted by the synod.

Chapter 5 – Church Censures

General Principles of Church Discipline

- 5.1 Church discipline is a vital part of biblical discipleship.¹³⁰ It is the exercise of that authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to the visible Church for the preservation of its purity, peace, and blessing. Discipline keeps the Church from provoking the anger and wrath of God against his people, it prevents the name of God from being blasphemed by unbelievers, and it preserves the godly from the influence of false teaching and godless morals. The goal of discipline is to bring about the repentance and full restoration of the offending member.¹³¹ The exercise of discipline is to be motivated by the love of Christ and his Church. No Church court shall avoid implementing Church discipline under the pretense of showing love to the offender or out of a concern for offending others in the congregation.
- 5.2 No accused person shall be deprived of the right to plead and offer evidence in his/her defense in any court of the Church. If any member believes he/she has been unjustly censured by the session, that person may appeal to the presbytery. If the presbytery upholds the censure, the person may appeal to the synod. The censure shall stand until it is overturned by a higher court. When a presbytery or a synod receives an appeal respecting a Church censure, it shall not adjudicate the matter by a committee. The entire court shall hear the case to determine the matter. The person making the appeal is entitled to speak on his/her own behalf or with the assistance of counsel. The clerk of the court must ensure that the members of the court possess all relevant documents pertaining to each case *prior to the meeting*, in order for the court to make informed decisions. Every judgment is to be made in the name of Jesus Christ without partiality.¹³²

Censures Prior to Excommunication

- 5.3 An offense is anything in the doctrine or practice of a Christian which is contrary to the Word of God. For something to be considered an offense it must be proved to be such from Scripture and be supported by two or more witnesses.¹³³
- 5.4 The appropriate civil authorities and the session must be immediately informed of any sin

¹³⁰ Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Ephesians 5:25-27; 2 Corinthians 2:5-8.

¹³¹ 2 Corinthians 2:5-8.

¹³² Deuteronomy 1:16-17; Proverbs 24:23; Isaiah 1:17; Micah 6:8; James 2:9.

¹³³ There must be multiple witnesses (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 19:15; Deuteronomy 17:6-7; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; Hebrews 10:28). These witnesses may include a person's own confession, eyewitness accounts, or clear circumstantial evidence (Joshua 7:22) such as a published document or a written communication.

which is also a civil or criminal offense. An elder shall inform the offender that it is his duty to carry out this action. The session shall take measures to ensure the safety of all with respect to any person who has been convicted of a sexual or violent crime.

- 5.5 Private offenses are those which are known by only a few persons. Public offenses are those which are commonly known by many persons and are, in most cases, scandalous.
- 5.6 When an offended person has unsuccessfully attempted to reconcile a private offense with the offending party, he/she should discreetly seek the help of one or a few spiritually mature members. All should follow the prescribed process laid out in Matthew 18:15-16. If private means fail, then the matter should be brought to the attention of the elders of the congregation of which the offender is a member.
- 5.7 The elders must carefully examine each case of offense or sin that comes to its attention. Spiritual maturity, access to faithful teaching, and mental capacity are factors that should be taken into consideration when determining what degree of discipline is warranted. The suitable degree of discipline shall be prayerfully determined to restore the offender and preserve the Church from scandal.
- 5.8 The session shall keep records of any relevant correspondence respecting each case of discipline, as well as detailed minutes. This shall be done to assist a higher court to render a just judgment should the matter be appealed. Any censure officially given to the offender in a constituted court shall be recorded in the minutes.
- 5.9 No member under the process of Church discipline shall be granted a transfer to another congregation until the accusation(s) against him/her have been cleared. If the person transfers his/her membership to another denomination prior to resolution of the matter, the appropriate court shall inform the receiving church of its concerns and provide a record of the censure.
- 5.10 The manner of communicating a censure should be in the spirit of loving pastoral discipline. Several forms are provided to help elders articulate the appropriate censure (see, Form #s 27, 28, 35, 35, and 37). Although all censures administered by a court are to be recorded in the minutes, the censures of admonition and rebuke are not ordinarily to be publicly declared or published.

Admonition

- 5.11 Admonition is the lightest degree of censure and is commonly used in cases of neglect of duty. It consists of reproving the offender by warning him/her of the danger of his/her course and encouraging him/her to greater faithfulness (see, Form #32).

Rebuke

- 5.12 Rebuke is a censure used in cases of active transgression or where there is continued neglect of duty despite counsel and admonition. It consists of an authoritative reproof in the name of Christ with a call for repentance and reformation of life (see, Form #33).

Suspension

- 5.13 Suspension is the temporary exclusion from the Lord's Supper and other privileges of Church membership. This censure should ordinarily be given only after the session has patiently sought to bring about repentance through encouragement, counsel, and the censures of admonition and rebuke. However, suspension may also be imposed when a scandalous public sin has suddenly become known to the elders. When an offending member is suspended, the court shall impress upon the offender that the censure has been imposed with the hope that it would be removed. The court shall appoint an elder to inform the congregation publicly the first Lord's Day after the censure has been imposed by reading Form #34 to the congregation.
- 5.14 Whenever a suspended person manifests signs of genuine repentance, he/she is to be forgiven and fully restored to the Lord's Supper and the privileges of membership. An elder shall publicly declare before the congregation the offender's confession, repentance, and resolve, through the strength of Christ, to sin no more. This shall be done on the first Lord's Day after the censure has been lifted by reading Form #38 to the congregation. Although it is not required, a written or verbal confession to the congregation by the repentant member should be encouraged and welcomed as an effective means of full restoration.

Excommunication

- 5.15 If a suspended member remains obstinate after patient attempts to bring about restoration, he/she is liable to excommunication. Excommunication is the cutting off a person from the communion of the visible Church. It is the final and most terrible censure of the Church. It should never be inflicted without mature deliberation and prayer, or until all other means of bringing about repentance have been exhausted. Excommunication is reserved for those sins that overthrow the Christian Faith or destroy the power of godliness within a congregation.

- 5.16 Before the session carries out the sentence, the elders shall ask the offender at least three times to appear before the session. If the offender appears, the elders shall warn the offender from the Scriptures concerning the nature of the sin and the danger of impenitency, especially after so much effort has been expended on the offender's behalf. The elders shall remind the offender of the woeful condition of those who are cast out of the communion of the saints. The session should implore the offender to consider how God in Christ stands ready and willing to forgive and how the church desires to see the person restored. Such exhortations should be impressed upon the offender from suitable places of Scripture. Prayer shall also be offered.
- 5.17 When a sin is especially grievous the Church may proceed to excommunication more expeditiously. If the offender will not appear before the session, the elders shall pray for him/her. If by the last meeting with the offender there is no evidence of repentance, the session shall pronounce the sentence of excommunication, whether the offender is present or not. Prayer shall also accompany the sentence.
- 5.18 The session shall appoint an elder to inform the congregation publicly on the first Lord's Day after the censure has been imposed by reading Form #37. If the excommunicated offender was not present at his/her sentencing, the offender shall be notified of it. The sentence is also to be made known to all the congregations of the RP Church of Canada as well as any true Church which enquires about the membership status of the person.
- 5.19 Given the severity of this censure, the session shall inform the presbytery of its action.

Restoration

- 5.20 If there are credible signs of true repentance following excommunication, the individual should stand before the congregation and confess his/her sin and sorrow for it. The person shall call upon God for mercy in Christ and express a desire to be restored to the communion of the Church. This may be done extemporaneously or by reading a sincere, carefully written statement. The person shall then publicly affirm the *Vows of Church Membership* (see, Official Vows 1). Following this, the person shall be pronounced, in the name of Jesus Christ, free from the censures of the Church and restored to all the privileges of communicant membership. The congregation shall immediately receive the person with love, joy, and brotherly affection (see, Form #39).

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Official Vows

1. Vows of Church Membership

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule for faith and life?
2. Do you believe in the one living and true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Scriptures?
3. Do you repent of your sin; confess your guilt and helplessness as a sinner against God; profess Jesus Christ, Son of God, as your Saviour and Lord; and dedicate yourself to his service: Do you promise that you will endeavour to forsake all sin, and to conform your life to his teaching and example?
4. To the end that you may grow in the Christian life, do you promise that you will:
 - a) Diligently read the Bible, engage in private prayer, keep the Lord's Day, participate in public worship, observe the sacraments, and give back to the Lord as he biblically requires?
 - b) Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness in all the relationships of life, faithfully to perform your whole duty as a true servant of Jesus Christ, and seek to win others to him?
 - c) Accept your responsibility to work with others in the Church, and do you promise to support and encourage them in their service to the Lord?
 - d) Submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this Church as being based upon the Scriptures and set forth in the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada?
 - e) Respect the authority and discipline of the Church, should you need correction in doctrine or life?
5. Do you make this profession of faith and state these promises in the presence of God, in humble reliance upon his grace, as you desire to give your account with joy at the Last Great Day?

2. Parental/Legal Guardian Baptismal Vows

1. Do you believe this child is God's possession entrusted to your care? Do you promise therefore to provide for his/her physical and emotional wellbeing?
2. Do you promise to teach him/her to love God and his Word, and to provide him/her with a God-centered education?
3. Do you promise to teach him/her of his/her sinful nature, of the plan of salvation which centers on Jesus Christ, of his/her own personal need of a relationship with Christ, and the need for daily repentance of sin?
4. To the end that he/she may grow in the Christian life, do you promise to pray for him/her, and to train him/her to read the Bible, to pray, to keep the Lord's Day, and to understand the nature of the Church, the value of its worship and fellowship, and his/her need to seek communicant membership in the Church?
5. Do you promise to lead him/her by your example and parental discipline, exercised in love, to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness in all his/her relationships?
6. Do you make these promises in the presence of God, in humble reliance upon his grace, as you desire to give your account with joy at the Last Great Day?

3. Statement Concerning Subscription

Subscribing, in the presence of Almighty God, to the *Doctrinal Standards* of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada is a solemn act and should only be entered into following prayerful deliberation.

A man who has any doubts or scruples about subscribing to the *Doctrinal Standards* of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada shall not be admitted to a Church office. No man is at liberty to subscribe to doctrines which he does not truly believe.

If during the fulfilment of his office a man alters his views concerning any part of the doctrine, worship, or order of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada, he must:

1. Reflect on the fact that no church constitution will express every biblical truth in a way that will satisfy everyone, and that the purest churches are subject to error.
2. Decide if he can conscientiously remain silent about them. If he can, then he may remain in peace. However, if he cannot and feels compelled to speak, publish, or propagate them, then he must inform the session and the presbytery immediately with a view to peaceably joining another branch of the visible Church, with which he can walk harmoniously.

Date: [*date*]

Signature: [*signature*]

Subscription Exceptions

The RP Church of Canada permits her office bearers, if they deem it necessary, to hold to two exceptions to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*:

Exception 1

Chapter 24:4 of the *Confession* states that, “The man may not marry any of his wife’s kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own; nor the woman of her husband’s kindred nearer in blood than of her own.” In view of the uncertainty among many students of Scripture as to the true interpretation of the injunction laid down in Leviticus 18:18, any office bearer having reservations on this subject may take exception to subscribing to this clause.

Exception 2

Chapter 25:6 of the *Confession* states that, “The Pope of Rome ... is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God.” In view of the manifest uncertainty in interpreting prophetic passages of Scripture, any office bearer having reservations about specifically identifying the papacy with the antichrist rather than an antichrist, may take an exception to this clause.

Subscription Clarifications

Subscription to the confessional standards of the RP Church of Canada requires the acceptance of the following clarifying statements to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*:

Clarification 1

The RP Church of Canada maintains that the phrase “in the space of six days,” and “all very good” in Chapter 4.1 of the *Confession* requires the plain sense interpretation of Genesis. The duration of the creation period was six days of ordinary length, and the state of the original creation prior to the curse was perfect and without death.¹

Clarification 2

In the *Westminster Confession of Faith*:

Chapter 23:3: This portion of article 3 harmonizes with its first sentence, as well as chapters 30 and 31. It refers to a civil magistrate’s responsibility to uphold the first table of the moral law and not to support

¹ Genesis 1:21, 24; Genesis 2:7.

Erastian (State) authority, jurisdiction, or interference regarding the affairs of the Church. Furthermore, no part of the Westminster standards countenances persecution for conscience's sake.²

Chapter 31:2: This second article refers to times when the visible Church is not settled, or when schisms and factions prevail within a nation. Civil magistrates are to uphold the first table of the moral law, but they do not have authority or jurisdiction over the Church. The word 'synod' in this section, does not refer to the church court commonly called the 'Synod', but to an advisory committee, such as the Council of Nicaea, the Synod of Dort, or the Westminster Assembly. Church government, being distinct from civil government, is always free to assemble as often as needed for the good of the Church.

Therefore, we express our reservations regarding these three sections of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and understand that they should be interpreted in accordance with the decision of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, upon receiving the *Confession of Faith* in 1647, stated:

“The Assembly understandeth some parts of the second article of the thirty-first chapter only of kirks not settled or constituted in point of Government and that, although in such kirks a Synod of Pastors, and other fit persons, may be called by the Magistrate's authority and nomination without any other call, to consult and advise with, about matters of religion; and although, likewise, the Pastors of Christ, without delegation from their Churches, may of themselves, and by virtue of their office, meet together synodically in such kirks not yet constituted, yet neither of these ought to be done in kirks constituted and settled.”

The RP Church of Canada's acceptance of this interpretation does not imply the granting of any authority to the magistrate other than the requesting of pastors and other qualified persons to assemble together.

² Psalm 2:10-12; Isaiah 49:23.

4. Vows for Licensure, Ordination, and Installation

“I [*name*], do sincerely believe and own all the doctrine set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the *Larger Catechism* and *Shorter Catechism* to be the teaching of the Word of God. I declare these as the confession of my faith. I do seriously promise and vow, in the presence of Almighty God, that I will consistently adhere to, maintain, and defend this doctrine. I also vow to keep and uphold the *Directory for Worship of God* and the *Directory for Church Government* of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada.

If I should ever find myself unable sincerely to own and believe any doctrine set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the *Larger Catechism* and *Shorter Catechism*, then I promise, in the presence of Almighty God, that I will not propagate or defend these sentiments, either by preaching, teaching, or writing. I will reveal and explain my new convictions to the session, the presbytery, or a higher court, where they may be examined. If necessary, I promise cheerfully to submit to the judgment of the court and/or that I will peaceably withdraw and join some other branch of the visible Church, with which I can walk harmoniously.”

Date: [*date*]

Signature: [*signature*]

For the ordination of ruling elders add the following:

So far as I know in my heart, it is the call of Christ, the glory of God, and the welfare of the Church, and not any selfish object, that has moved me to undertake this sacred office.

I am determined to seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance. I promise, in his strength, to live a holy and exemplary life, to study and promote the purity, peace, unity, and progress of the Church, to watch over the spiritual growth of the members of the congregation, to endeavour to win others to Christ, to visit the afflicted, and to attend the meetings associated with my office.

Date: [*date*]

Signature: [*signature*]

For the ordination of pastors/teachers add the following:

So far as I know in my heart, it is the call of Christ, the glory of God, and the welfare of the Church, and not any selfish object, that has moved me to undertake this sacred office.

I promise, in the strength of the Holy Spirit, to live a holy and exemplary life, to study and promote the purity, peace, unity, and progress of the Church, to watch over the spiritual growth of the members of the congregation, to visit the afflicted, and to attend the meetings associated with my office. I

promise, in his strength, to bring to the congregation the fruits of earnest study of the Word, to watch for souls as one who must give an account, to maintain a testimony for God's Kingdom, and to endeavour to win others to Christ.

Date: [date]

Signature: [signature]

For the ordination of deacons add:

"I [name] do sincerely believe and own all the doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger Catechism and Shorter Catechism to be the teaching of the Word of God. I declare these as the confession of my faith. I do seriously promise and vow, in the presence of Almighty God, that I will consistently adhere to, maintain, and defend this doctrine. I also vow to submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this Church as being based upon the Scriptures and set forth in the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada.

If I should ever find myself unable sincerely to own and believe any doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger Catechism and Shorter Catechism, then I promise, in the presence of Almighty God, that I will not propagate or defend these sentiments, either by preaching, teaching, or writing. I will reveal and explain my new convictions to the session, the presbytery, or a higher court, where they may be examined. If necessary, I promise cheerfully to submit to the judgment of the court and/or that I will peaceably withdraw and join some other branch of the visible Church with which I can walk harmoniously.

So far as I know in my heart, it is the call of Christ, the glory of God, and the welfare of the Church, and not any selfish object, that has moved me to undertake this sacred office.

I am determined to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance. I promise, in his strength, faithfully to keep and distribute the tithes and offerings given to the Church according to the sincere needs of God's people and in the interest of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. And I endeavour to handle the Lord's money without covetousness and in a manner worthy of Christ's service.

Date: [date]

Signature: [signature]

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Session Oversight Forms

Form 1 – Certificate of Reception

This is to certify that [*name of member*] was received into membership of the [*name and location of congregation*] on the [*date*].

Clerk of Session: [*signature*]

Moderator of Session: [*signature*]

Note: This form is to be sent to the dismissing session.

Form 2 – Transfer of Membership

This is to certify that [*name*] is a member of [*name of congregation*], and is at his/her own request, hereby dismissed to unite with the [*name of congregation*]. This certificate is valid for one year from the date of issue for transfer within the denomination. For transfer from the denomination, the transfer becomes effective immediately.

Date: [*date*]

Clerk of Session: [*signature*]

Moderator of Session: [*signature*]

Note: This may be amended to include other communicant members from the same family transferring to the same congregation. If there are baptized children, but not communicant members, it should be noted, and their name(s) should be recorded. If the issuing session desires to state exceptions, or grounds for censure in the certificate, they should be noted above the signatures of the clerk and moderator. This certificate should be given to the communicant member(s).

Form 3 – Notice of a Congregational Meeting to Elect a Pastor

The session having decided to conduct an election for a pastor, the congregation is called to meet on the [*date*], at [*time*], at [*place of meeting*]. Members unable to be present may send absentee votes to the meeting enclosed in a sealed envelope, given or mailed to the Clerk of Session. The envelope shall bear the name of the communicant member and shall be addressed to the session. Absentee votes are valid only on the first electing ballot.

By order of the Session, this [*date*]

Clerk of Session: [*signature*]

Moderator of Session: [*signature*]

Form 4 – Notice of a Congregational Meeting to Elect Elder(s)/Deacon(s)

The session having decided to conduct an election for an elder(s)/ deacon(s), the congregation is called to meet on the [date], at [time], at [place of meeting]. Members unable to be present may send absentee votes to the meeting enclosed in a sealed envelope, given or mailed to the Clerk of Session. The envelope shall bear the name of the communicant member and shall be addressed to the session. Absentee votes are valid only on the first electing ballot.

By order of the Session, this [date]

Clerk of Session: [signature]

Moderator of Session: [signature]

Form 5 – Edict for Ordination and/or Installation of Ruling Elder(s)

[Name of the elder(s)], having been chosen to the office of ruling elder by this congregation, and having been examined by session and judged qualified to take the office, notice is hereby given that the [date] has been fixed as the time for the ordination and/or installation, with certification that the session will proceed in the same manner, unless some valid objections be offered to the session, which is appointed to meet on the [date], at [time] a.m./p.m., at [place of meeting]. The meeting for the ordination and/or installation will be held at [time] a.m./p.m., at [place of meeting].

By order of the Session, this [date]

Clerk of Session: [signature]

Moderator of Session: [signature]

Form 6 – Edict for the Ordination and/or Installation of Deacon(s)

[Name of the deacon(s)], having been chosen to the office of deacon by this congregation, and having been examined by the session and judged qualified to take the office, notice is hereby given that the [date] has been fixed as the time for the ordination and/or installation, with certification that the session will proceed in the same manner, unless some valid objection(s) be offered to the session, which is appointed to meet on the [date], at [time] a.m./p.m., at [place of meeting]. The meeting for the ordination and/or installation will be held at [time] a.m./p.m., at [place of meeting].

By order of the Session, this [date]

Clerk of Session: [signature]

Moderator of Session: [signature]

Form 7 – Pastor’s Call

We, the office-bearers, communicant members, and baptised members of the [*name of the congregation*] of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada, being without a stated pastor, and knowing well your pastoral qualifications, especially your piety and soundness in the faith, do with the permission of the presbytery, call you, Mr./Rev. [*full name*] to become the pastor of our congregation. Upon your acceptance of this Call and performing your pastoral duties among us, we promise you our dutiful respect, obedience, encouragement, and support in the Lord.

In witness thereof, we sign this Call at [*location*] on this [*date*]

[*names and signatures of communicant members*]

[*names and signatures of covenant children*]

Ruling Elders: [*signatures*]; Date: [*date*]

Form 8 – Pastor’s Covenant of Employment

We, the [*name of the congregation*] congregation, under the care of the [*name of the presbytery*], being without a pastor to take the spiritual oversight of us in the Lord; and satisfied that your spiritual attainments, intellectual abilities, and soundness in the faith, with the concurrence of the presbytery, call you, [*full name of the pastor*], to undertake the office of pastor among us.

Upon your accepting this call and performing the duties of your office as set forth in the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada, we promise you all due respect and support in the Lord.

We hereby promise to pay you [*list the amount of the total annual compensation package*], payable in [*number*] installments of \$[*amount*] per year.

We include the following in the compensation package, except item 4 as shown below:

1. Housing (Indicate which of the following you will provide)

- Free use of the church manse
- \$[*Amount*] per month to be used for housing
- \$[*Amount*] as an interest-free loan to be used for down payment on housing
- Payment of utilities, water, gas, electricity, phone, trash service, etc.
- Payment of \$[*amount*] to be used for utilities

List any other housing arrangements.

2. Business Expenses (Indicate which of the following you will provide by a check mark and/or fill in the amount)

- Provide a car/van for church use
- Mileage allowance as set forth by the synod
- Mileage allowance of \$[amount] per kilometer
- Mileage allowance of \$[amount] per month
- Office materials and supplies
- Book allowance of \$[amount] per month
- Study/office, equipment, telephone, etc.
- Fees:
 - Synod
 - Presbytery
 - Presbytery Camps
 - Seminars
 - Educational Meetings
 - Other [list]
- Secretarial services
- \$[Amount] to be used for hospitality and/or entertainment expenses

List any other business expenses to be paid.

3. Other Benefits (Indicate the congregation's specific plan and commitment to provide for the new pastor's continuing pastoral development such as sabbatical leave, annual professional conference attendance, the purchase of books, and related professional resources as recommended by the synod.)

(Indicate which of the following you will provide by a check mark and/or fill in the amount.)

- Pension Plan:
 - Synod
 - Annuity
 - \$[Amount] Payment in lieu of Social Security
 - Health Insurance: [came of plan, and amount to be paid]
- [Number] of weeks will be provided for vacation time each year

- Attendance at church functions:
 - Time off for synod meetings
 - Time off for presbytery meetings
 - Family/youth conferences
 - Other [*list*]
- List any other special benefits.

4. Moving Expenses (Indicate which of the following you will provide.)

- Cost of professional movers from present location to new location
- \$[*Amount*] to be used for moving expenses

We promise to review annually with you the adequacy of this compensation prior to the adoption of the congregation’s budget meeting to take into account the cost-of-living increase (C.P.I.).

In witness thereof, we subscribe this call and financial agreement, the [*date*], in the presence of these witnesses:

Elders: [*list all*]

Deacons: [*list all*]

Communicant Members: [*list all*]

Form 9 – Attestation of a Call

I [*name*], appointed by the [*name of presbytery*] Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada to moderate a Call in the [*name of congregation*] congregation under the care of the [*name of presbytery*] Presbytery, certify that I conducted the moderation as appointed, that it issued in favour of Mr./Rev.[*name of pastor*], and that I witnessed the signing of this Call at the time of moderation, and afterwards committed it to the members of the session, that others not then present might have the opportunity of adding their names.

Moderator: [*signature*]; Date: [*date*]

Form 10 – In Support of a Call

To the Moderator and other members of the [*name of presbytery*] Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada, to meet in [*location of meeting*] on [*date*]. The Petition of the [*name*

of congregation] congregation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada, humbly shows that your petitioners, having met with the approval of your court for the election of a pastor of our congregation, have chosen and resolved to call Mr./Rev. [*full name*] to undertake the pastoral charge amongst us; that your petitioners ask your court to sustain and issue this Call; and we appoint [*name of person*], [*name of person*] and [*name of person*] to represent us before your presbytery and support this Call.

By order of the Session, this [*date*]

Clerk of Session: [*signature*]

Moderator of Session: [*signature*]

Presbytery Oversight Forms

Form 11 – Petition for the Organization of a New Congregation

To the [*name of the presbytery*] Presbytery, meeting on the [*date*], at [*location of meeting*]. We the [*name of mission church, fellowship, or “undersigned” in case of no current organization*], a body of [*number*] people located in or around [*location within the presbytery’s bounds*], confident in Christ’s promises to build his Church and convinced by his providence that such a work has begun among us, hereby petition this presbytery to grant the organization of this body into a congregation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada under the oversight of the [*name of presbytery*] Presbytery. We believe that God has provided men capable of constituting a session and acting as Christ’s under-shepherds for us. We seek this privilege from the presbytery with full reliance on God’s grace and not on ourselves.

Given this [*date*] by request of the undersigned.

Temporary Governing Body: [*signatures*]

Ruling Elder(s)-elect (as applicable): [*signature(s)*]

Pastor(s)/Teacher(s) elder(s)-elect (as applicable): [*signature(s)*]

Deacon(s)-elect (as applicable): [*signature(s)*]

Communicant Members (as applicable): [*signatures*]

Form 12 – Edict for the Organization of a New Congregation

The [*name of the presbytery*] Presbytery has received a petition made by the [*name of petitioning body*] requesting the organization of a congregation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada to be located in [*location*], and has granted this petition. The meeting for organization is intended to include the ordination and/or installation of the following officers, having been elected by the mission church

and examined in accordance with the law and order of the Church: [*name(s)*] to the office of pastor/teacher (as applicable), [*name(s)*] to the office of ruling elder (as applicable), [*name(s)*] to the office of deacon (as applicable). Notice is hereby given that the [*date*] has been fixed as the time for the organization of this congregation, along with the ordination and/or installation of the previously mentioned officers, with certification that the presbytery will proceed in the same, unless some valid objection(s) be offered to the presbytery, which is to meet at [*place of meeting*] on the [*date*]. The meeting for organization will be held at [*time*], at [*place of meeting*].

By order of the Presbytery, this [*date*]

Clerk of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Form 13 – Edict for the Reception of an Existing Congregation

The [*name of the presbytery*] Presbytery has received a petition made by the [*name of petitioning body*] requesting its reception into the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada located in [*location*]. The presbytery has granted this petition. The meeting for organization is intended to include the reception of the following officers each of whom has given assent to their respective ordination vows of the RP Church of Canada: [*name(s)*] to the office of pastor/teacher (as applicable), [*name(s)*] to the office of ruling elder (as applicable), [*name(s)*] to the office of deacon (as applicable). Notice is hereby given that the [*date*] has been fixed as the time for the reception of this congregation with certification that the presbytery will proceed in the same, unless some valid objection(s) be offered to the presbytery, which is to meet at [*place of meeting*] on the [*date*]. The meeting for reception will be held at [*time*], at [*place of meeting*].

By order of the Presbytery, this [*date*]

Clerk of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Form 14 – Declaring a Pulpit Vacant

The pastor of [*name of the congregation*] Presbytery presented his resignation to [*the name of the presbytery*] at its meeting at [*place of meeting*] on the [*date*]. The resignation was accepted, to take effect on the [*date*], and the pastoral relationship was dissolved. May the Lord guide the congregation to the choice of another under-shepherd.

(This form shall also contain the presbytery's authorization and counsel regarding pulpit supply, administration of the sacraments, and the moderation of a call.)

By order of the Presbytery, this *[date]*
Clerk of the Presbytery: *[signature]*
Moderator of the Presbytery: *[signature]*

Form 15 – License to Preach

This is to certify that *[name of the one to be certified]* has been examined and approved by the *[name of the presbytery]* Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada to be a student for the ministry of the Gospel. He is granted permission to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He may not administer the sacraments, perform marriages, or pronounce the benediction. This license shall be for a term of five years.

By order of the Presbytery, this *[date]*
Clerk of the Presbytery: *[signature]*
Moderator of the Presbytery: *[signature]*

Form 16 – License to Receive a Call.

This is to certify that *[name of the one to be certified]* has been examined and approved by the *[name of the presbytery]* Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada to be a candidate eligible for a call as a pastor in the Church. This license is for a term of two years and will be reviewed thereafter.

By order of the Presbytery, this *[date]*
Clerk of the Presbytery: *[signature]*
Moderator of the Presbytery: *[signature]*

Form 17 – Pastor/Teacher Credentials

Certificate of Pastor/Teacher Credentials in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada

Name: *[last name]*, *[first name]* *[second name]*

Date of Birth: *[date]*

Citizenship: *[country of citizenship]*

Baptized on *[date]* in the *[name of congregation]* congregation.

Profession of Faith on *[date]* in the *[name of congregation]* congregation.

Education Institutions attended: *[list name, years of attendance and diploma/degree obtained for each education institution beyond high school]*

Record of Service:

1. Taken under care as a student of theology: *[name of the presbytery]* Presbytery – *[date]*
2. Certificate to Preach *[name of the presbytery]* Presbytery – *[date]*
3. Certificate of Licensure: *[name of the presbytery]* Presbytery – *[date]*
4. Ordination: *[name of the presbytery]* Presbytery – *[date]*
5. Other service in the Church and other denomination(s).

Installed in *[name of congregation]* – *[date]*

Released from congregation: *[name of congregation]* – *[date]*

Installed in *[name of board/presbytery]* – *[date]*

Released from *[name of board/presbytery]* – *[date]*

Other: *[disciplinary actions, restorations, etc.]*

By order of the Presbytery, this *[date]*

Clerk of the Presbytery: *[signature]*

Moderator of the Presbytery: *[signature]*

Form 18 - Edict for the Ordination and Installation of a Licentiate

The [*name of the presbytery*] Presbytery has received a call made by the [*name and location of the congregation*] upon [*full name of the one called*] to be their pastor/teacher and has sustained it as a regular Gospel call. He has signified his intention to accept the call. Notice is hereby given that the [*date*], has been fixed as the time for his ordination and/or installation, with certification that the presbytery will proceed in the same, unless some valid objection(s) be offered to the presbytery, which is to meet at [*place of meeting*] on [*date*]. The meeting for the ordination and/or installation will be held at [*time*] a.m./p.m., at [*place of meeting*].

By order of the Presbytery, this [*date*]

Clerk of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Form 19 – Edict for the Installation of a Pastor/Teacher

The [*name of the presbytery*] Presbytery has received a call made by the [*name and location of the congregation*] upon [*full name of the one called*] to be their pastor/teacher and has sustained it as a regular Gospel call. He has signified his intention to accept the call. Notice is hereby given that the [*date*], has been fixed as the time for his ordination and/or installation, with certification that the presbytery will proceed in the same, unless some valid objection(s) be offered to the presbytery, which is to meet at [*place of meeting*] on [*date*]. The meeting for the ordination and/or installation will be held at [*time*] a.m./p.m., at [*place of meeting*].

By order of the Presbytery, this [*date*]

Clerk of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Form 20 – Certificate of Ordination and/or Certificate of Installation

The [*name of the presbytery*] Presbytery hereby certifies that [*full name of the pastor/teacher*] has been ordained/installed as pastor/teacher of [*name and location of the congregation*] at a meeting of the presbytery held at [*time*] a.m./p.m., at [*place of meeting*].

By order of the Presbytery, this [*date*]

Clerk of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Form 21 – Transfer of a Call from One Presbytery to Another

This call, made by [*name and location of the congregation*] upon [*full name of the one called*] on the [*date*], was made in accordance with the law and order of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada and has been sustained by the [*name of the presbytery*] Presbytery as a regular Gospel call. It is hereby transferred to [*name of the presbytery*] Presbytery, of which [*full name of the one called*] is a member, for presentation.

By order of the Presbytery, this [*date*]

Clerk of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Form 22 – Certificate of Transfer of a Pastor/Teacher from One Presbytery to Another

This certifies that [*full name of the pastor/teacher*] has, until this date, been a pastor/teacher under the oversight of the [*name of the presbytery*] Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada and is hereby certified to the [*name of the presbytery*] Presbytery at his own request. His credentials are in order and are attached to this certificate.

By order of the Presbytery, this [*date*]

Clerk of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Presbytery: [*signature*]

Form 23 – Bequest

I do give and bequeath to the Trustees of the highest court of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada, its successors and assigns forever, \$[*amount*] to be credited to:

1. The current account of the following funds: [?]
2. The endowment of the following funds or institutions: [?]
3. Funds functioning as endowments, as follows: [?]
4. To be distributed according to the judgment of the synod: [?]

(Note: A will should be witnessed by at least three persons, all of whom see the signing by the one making the will and by each other. In case of doubt, secure legal advice.)

I do give and bequeath to the Trustees of the highest court of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada, its successors and assigns forever, all that certain piece of land situated in [*location*], the proceeds from the same to be devoted to: (Use list of plans above, or others as desired.)

Church Censure Forms

Form 24 – Charge of Sin

To the session of the Reformed Presbyterian congregation of [*name of congregation*]. Your informant respectfully states that [*name of one charged*], a member of your congregation, is believed to be guilty of a serious sin, contrary to the Word of God and to the profession of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, in that [*he/she*] on or about [*date*], did [*charge of sin*], and that [*he/she*] ought to be proceeded against by your court to determine whether or not the charge is true.

Date: [*date*]

Name: [*name of accuser*]

List of witnesses: [list all]

List of material offered in evidence: [list all]

Form 25 – Accusation of Sin

Whereas a Charge of Sin has been brought against you, a copy of which is attached: and whereas the charge (or parts thereof) appear credible and therefore require action by this court: and whereas [*charge of sin*] is a serious sin, contrary to the Word of God and to the position taken by the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and you, [*name of one charged*] are charged with this offence, in that on or about [*date*], at [*place*] you did [*action*]. Resolved, that if this charge is found relevant and proved against you, you ought to be disciplined by this court of Christ's Church.

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

List of witnesses: [list all]

List of material offered in evidence: [list all]

Form 26 – Summons to the Accused Accompanying a Charge

By order of the Court of [*type of court*], you, [*name of accused*] are summoned to appear and to answer to the charge, at [*location of meeting*] on [*date of meeting*] and to bring any witnesses you may have.

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Form 27 – Summons to a Witness

You, [*name of witness*], are hereby summoned to appear before the Court of [*type of Court*] on [*date of meeting*] to give testimony in the case of [*name of accused*].

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Form 28 – Oath of a Witness

Do you swear by the Living God (or affirm) that you will tell the truth, all the truth, and nothing but the truth, as far as you know it, in the case now under trial, as you shall answer to God in the Judgment?
Answer: I do.

Form 29 – Pronouncement of Innocence

Whereas you, [*name of accused*], have been found not guilty by this court of Christ's Church, the decision of the Court is that you are not deserving of censure and the charge against you is dismissed. Now, therefore, for your own spiritual good and for the peace and purity of the Church, we commend you to the fellowship of the Church.

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Form 30 – Pronouncement of Guilt

Whereas you, [*name of accused*], have been found guilty by this court of Christ's Church, the decision of the Court is that you are deserving of the censure of [*provide summary*]. Now, therefore, for your own spiritual good and for the peace and purity of the Church, receive the pronouncement of this censure.

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Form 31 – Oath of Purgation

I, [*name of accused*] now on trial before the Court of [*type of court*] for the sin of [*name of sin*] charged against me, for the ending of such process, and giving satisfaction to the Church of Christ, do most solemnly declare before God and this court that I am innocent and free of this sin, and hereby call the living God, the Judge and Avenger of all falsehood, to be judge and witness against me in this matter if I be guilty, as I shall answer to him in the Judgment.

Signature: [*signature of accused*]

Date: [*date*]

Form 32 – Admonition

You, [*name*], have brought reproach upon Christ and are in danger of drifting further away from the Lord. This court of Christ's Church admonishes you to put away your sin, to watch and pray, and to walk faithfully with Christ.

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Form 33 – Rebuke

You, [*name*], by your continued neglect of your Christian duty and by the sin of [*name of sin*], have brought reproach upon yourself, and have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to mock and curse. This court of Christ's Church sadly and solemnly judges and rebukes you for your sin. You are commanded to give evidence of sincere repentance and to be more watchful, studying to know and to do the will of God.

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Form 34 – Suspension from the Lord's Supper

You, [*name*], have been found guilty of the sin of [*name of sin*]. This court, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, sadly and solemnly suspends you from the privileges of Church membership, including participation in the sacraments, until you have given satisfactory evidence of true repentance and have been restored to good standing by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada.

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Form 35 – Suspension of an Officer

You, [*name*], have been proven guilty of the sin of [*name of sin*], and therefore deserve the penalty of suspension from your office in the Church. In the name of Jesus Christ, this court of his Church, suspends you from the office of [*name of office*], and forbids you to perform any of the duties belonging to it. This censure shall continue in effect until you have given this court satisfactory evidence of true repentance.

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Form 36 – Deposition of an Officer

You, [*name*], have been proven guilty of the sin of [*name of sin*], and therefore deserve the penalty of deposition from your office in the Church. In the name of Jesus Christ, this court of Christ's Church deposes you from the office of [*name of office*] and declares your relationship to the congregation in this capacity to be dissolved. You are forbidden to exercise any of the powers or duties of this office anywhere in Christ's Church. It is our sincere hope and prayer that you will repent of your sin for the glory of Christ and the wellbeing of your soul.

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Form 37 – Excommunication

You, [*name*], have been found guilty of the sin of [*name of sin*], a sin deserving of the extreme penalty of excommunication, yet you continue obstinate and give no evidence of repentance although efforts have been made to restore you. Now, therefore, this court, constituted in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and acting under his authority, hereby excommunicates you, removing you from the membership of the Church, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. It is our sincere desire that you will repent and turn to the Lord that you might be forgiven and restored to the body of Christ. May God have mercy upon you by awakening you to repentance and bringing you to righteousness, so that you may be among the redeemed in the Day of the Lord Jesus.

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Form 38 – Restoration of Suspension

You, [*name*], having been suspended from the Lord’s Supper and privileges of communicant membership because of sinful conduct, and having now given very evident proofs of sincere repentance, the [*type of court*] in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, as a Court constituted by his authority, hereby absolves you from the censure of suspension given against you, and grants you access once again to the Lord’s Supper and privileges of communicant membership.

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Form 39 – Restoration of Deposed or Excommunicated Persons

You, [*name*], having been [*deposed/excommunicated*] because of sinful conduct, and having now given very evident proofs of sincere repentance, the [*type of court*] in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, as a Court constituted by his authority, hereby absolves you from the censure of [*type of censure*], given against you, and restores you to the membership of the Church, and to the fellowship of the Christian sacraments.

By order of the Court, this: [*date*]

Clerk of the Court: [*signature*]

Moderator of the Court: [*signature*]

Note: In the case of deposition, the statement as to restoration should fit the penalty imposed.

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