



NEW MEMBER HANDBOOK

GOD'S GRACE, MY GRATITUDE, OUR GROWTH



“Who Are the Presbyterians?”

Six Great Ends of the Church

Eight Historic Principles

Book of Order

Confessions

History

Government

Worship

Predestination

Discipline

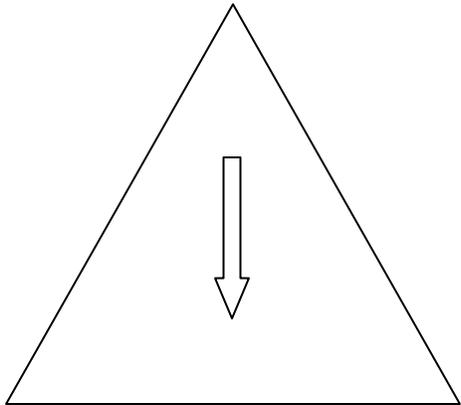
Sacraments

Bible

Major Beliefs

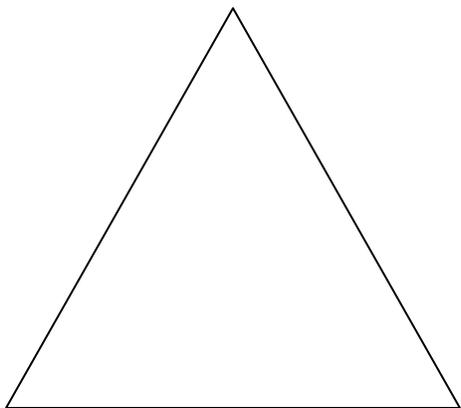
Leadership

The Three Forms of Church Government



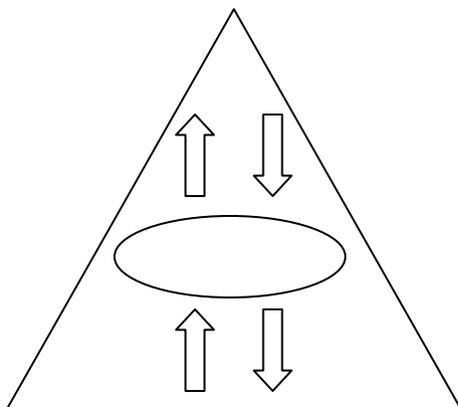
Episcopal

Authority from the "top."
Church officials make binding decisions.



Congregational

Authority from "grass roots."
Church officials, if any, have no say.



Presbyterian

A Representative Democracy.
Authority vested in "governing bodies."
Decisions of church officials must be
ratified by lower bodies.

OUR PRESBYTERIAN HERITAGE

About our unique name:

“Presbyterian” derives from the Greek word *presbuteros*, or *elder*. From earliest times congregations were led by those who demonstrated maturity through experience and spiritual growth. Presbyterian churches are “elder churches,” governed as representative democracies by elected lay people and called pastors.

What is “reformed” theology?

Presbyterians belong to the historic stream of Christian believers who, beginning in the 1500’s in Europe, began to “re-form” their faith on the basis of biblical principles, instead of reliance on Catholic church traditions.

Those who are reformed in their faith believe that the Bible is the final arbiter of spiritual thinking and practice: God’s Living Word (Jesus) continues to speak over the centuries through the Written Word (scriptures of the Old and New Testaments).

Some historical highlights:

- ✦ *Early Christian church.* The Presbyterian Church, like all Christian churches, traces its roots back to the early church in Jerusalem. Many people consider modern Presbyterianism to be a rebirth of the early church of the New Testament.
- ✦ *Martin Luther* initiated the Protestant Reformation in nailing his Ninety-Five Theses to a church door in Wittenberg, Germany (1517), taking a firm stand for “scripture alone.”
- ✦ *John Calvin*, called the father of Presbyterianism, converted to Protestantism in 1533. He published Institutes of Christian Religion (1536), the primary interpretive tool for Reformed thinking and living; Calvin became the spiritual director of Geneva, Switzerland, which modeled this new way of relating to Christ.
- ✦ *John Knox*, a Scottish Protestant who fled persecution in his homeland, studied with Calvin in Geneva (1554-1559), after which time he returned to his native Scotland spreading Presbyterian views.
- ✦ *The Westminster Assembly of Divines* (1643-1649) gathered 121 English and Scottish pastors and 30 layman to write The Westminster Confession, the fullest expression of Reformed theology.
- ✦ *American Revolution.* Presbyterians escaped persecution in Europe and settled in America. There were so many Presbyterians in America that some British people called the American Revolution the “Presbyterian Revolt.” At least 14 signers of the Declaration of Independence were Presbyterians, including clergyman John Witherspoon.
- ✦ *Francis Makemie* established the first presbytery in America (1706); the Presbyterian Church here was organized in 1789. During the 1800s, disagreement over slavery and evangelism divided the church into northern and southern branches prior to the Civil War. The two branches reunited in 1983 as the PC(USA).

WHAT IS A PRESBYTERIAN?

A Presbyterian is a Christian. This is **the** important statement about a Presbyterian. Whether a Presbyterian follows Calvin or Knox or the Westminster Assembly is meaningless unless we follow Jesus.

What does it mean to follow Jesus? First, it means to believe in him. To follow Jesus means to submit your life to him as your Savior and trust him as the one who gives you everlasting life by dying for you on the cross. To follow Jesus means to love him, pray to him, ask him to guide you each day and protect you from temptation.

Second, to follow Jesus means to obey him as your Lord. That means you don't lie, you don't steal, you don't commit adultery. It means you love and respect members of your family. It means you love your neighbors—you help and support them. It means you love your enemies. You don't try to destroy your enemies, but win them over.

To obey Jesus means to share the good news about Jesus with people who don't know him, whether you do it in the church building, or in your own home, or 12,000 miles away. To obey Jesus means to feed hungry people, to give clothes and shelter to those who need it. It means to visit the sick and those in prison.

Sometimes we deceive ourselves into thinking that if at one time in our lives we accepted Jesus as our Savior then we are Christians. But accepting Jesus as Savior is only the beginning. Jesus said, "You are my disciples if you do what I command you."

A Presbyterian is a person who has a particular attitude toward the Bible. We believe that the Bible is our only infallible rule of faith and practice, or as our newer ordination vows state, "the authoritative standard by which your faith and life are to be directed."

What does that mean? It means that if you find your creed doesn't conform to the Bible, you change your creed. If you find something you are doing in your life does not agree with the Bible, you stop what you are doing. The Bible is the yardstick for what Presbyterians believe and how they act. It is for this reason that most Presbyterian ministers are expected to have a reading knowledge of Hebrew and Greek in order to be able to read the Old and New Testaments in the original languages.

A Presbyterian is a person who believes education is important. One of the first things Presbyterians did in Geneva 400 years ago was to start a college. Our ministers today are called teaching elders. The pulpit robe worn by most Presbyterian ministers is the teaching gown of the medieval church.

And Presbyterians do not just study the Bible. They study everything—science, mathematics, literature, history, economics—everything. Why? Because this planet is God's planet, which he has put into our care. And if we are to care for this planet, we have a duty to understand everything we can about it.

A Presbyterian is a person who believes the church should be governed in a certain way—by electing representatives who seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in setting the policies of the church. Presbyterians believe that the church should be governed in an orderly, responsible way.

A Presbyterian is a person who follows a certain lifestyle. This statement is important because it expresses one of our strengths as well as one of our weaknesses. (Please forgive the use of the masculine pronoun.)

A Presbyterian is a person who gets up early in the morning and makes his bed. He prays and reads his Bible. He eats a nourishing, but modest, breakfast. He goes to his job or business and does a day's work for a day's pay. He saves his money. He gives a tenth of his income to the church.

If he is a father, the Presbyterian prays with and for his children and teaches them the faith by his words and his actions.

A Presbyterian honors the Lord's Day. He takes his family to church. He sits in worship with his children and shows them how to worship, unless he is singing in the choir or serving in some other capacity during the service. When not at worship, a Presbyterian uses the Lord's Day to rest, to think about God's will for his life, and to care for others.

A Presbyterian serves his community, his nation, his world. He believes that God's rule must be acted out by God's people.

A Presbyterian, in sum, believes that his life must be disciplined, orderly, and dedicated to the service of God in God's world. Ironically, this lifestyle proves to be a weakness as well as a strength. Why?

Well, what happens to a person who gets up early, makes his bed, works hard, limits his pleasures, and saves his money? He becomes successful. It is no accident that many Presbyterians are affluent. We program ourselves to be that way.

But when we become successful we often become boastful, self-centered and stubborn. Instead of working to spread the Gospel and make the world a better place, we are tempted to hold on to what we think is ours. And today in our land there are many Presbyterian churches that are dying of selfishness.

Obviously, a selfish Presbyterian is the opposite of a committed. It is impossible to share the Gospel if we only associate with people who are like us. It is impossible to feed the hungry and clothe the naked with a closed hand.

Therefore, when our Presbyterian lifestyle leads us into selfishness, we must begin again at the beginning: A Presbyterian is a Christian who trusts and obeys Jesus. A Presbyterian is a Christian who accepts the Bible as the final authority for what he believes and does. A Presbyterian is . . .

WHAT DO PRESBYTERIANS BELIEVE?

There is no strict set of beliefs that unites Presbyterians or separates them from other followers of Christ. Like other Christians, Presbyterians believe in:

THE TRINITY—*God exists in the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

GOD—*the Creator of the Universe.*

CHRIST—*the incarnation of God on earth. Christ is the Son of God, the Revealer of God and the Savior of humanity.*

THE HOLY SPIRIT—*the presence of God in the world and in the believer.*

THE CHURCH—*a universal company of Christ's followers.*

FORGIVENESS OF SIN—*made possible by the crucifixion of Jesus.*

LIFE EVERLASTING—*shown by the resurrection of Jesus.*

THE BIBLE—*the inspired Word of God.*

SOME PRESBYTERIANS BELIEFS

HEAVEN—*The souls of the faithful are reunited with God in a warm and loving relationship.*

HELL—*Separation from God may exist now as well as in the hereafter.*

VIRGIN BIRTH—*Jesus' birth was miraculous.*

MARY—*Mary is honored as the mother of Jesus. She was the special person chosen to bear the Son of God.*

RESURRECTION—*The resurrection of the body refers to the reuniting of the spiritual body and physical body.*

CONFESSION—*This is voluntary and made directly to God. But it may be made in the presence of a pastor.*

SALVATION—*God grants the gift of grace, which enables us to gain the faith necessary for salvation.*

THE CROSS—*The empty cross symbolizes the risen Christ who opened the Kingdom of Heaven.*

THE SACREDNESS OF MARRIAGE—*Presbyterians try to curb divorce by encouraging young people to prepare seriously for marriage.*

CHANGE—*Presbyterians admit different understandings of the Confessions of Faith. This is because they believe that the Holy Spirit constantly heightens truth.*

PARENTHOOD—*There is nothing in the church’s teaching that discourages intelligent, unselfish family planning.*

EDUCATION—*Presbyterians stress education, both for the ministry and for the laity.*

THE “ONLY” CHURCH—*No Christian church has exclusive possession of the church government authorized by Christ.*

THE SACRAMENTS—*These include baptism and communion.*

Presbyterians interpret the Bible very much like other Protestants do. Ultimately, however, every Presbyterian must find a personal set of beliefs through study, contemplation and worship.

Presbyterians Have Two Main Sources for Inspiration and Guidance in Their Faith

The Bible

The Bible is an inspired record of the revelation of God to all.

Presbyterians have always believed that the Bible is the most authoritative source for faith and practice for all people.

Presbyterians do not believe that the authors of the Bible were “pens of God” as the pre-Christian writers believed. Instead, they believe the authors were inspired by God to reveal God to all people.

Creeds and Confessions

Creeds and Confessions are statements of doctrine that express the beliefs of a church or congregation. They include:

- ✦ the Apostles’ Creed
- ✦ the Nicene Creed
- ✦ the Scots Confession, 1560
- ✦ the Heidelberg Catechism
- ✦ the Second Helvetic Confession
- ✦ the Westminster Confession of Faith
- ✦ the Larger Catechism
- ✦ the Shorter Catechism
- ✦ the Theological Declaration of Barmen
- ✦ the Confession of 1967
- ✦ “A Brief Statement of Faith” 1991

PREDESTINATION

When we speak of predestination today, we are discussing the issues of salvation and to whom it is given. We are not discussing the doctrine of providence, which concerns the control of God in the daily details of life. Divine attributes of sovereignty, justice, and mercy, as well as the human characteristics of free will and sin play a significant role in both discussions. Providence and predestination are closely tied but aren't identical. Under the Presbyterian Church (USA) umbrella, you will find various understandings of both doctrines. First, let's consider predestination.

The uninformed Christian community at large thinks Calvin is king when it comes to talk of predestination. He has many helpful insights to bring to our attention; however, there are other acceptable understandings of predestination within the PC(USA).

Our Presbyterian heritage instructs us to think, look to scripture, and think again, subjecting our thoughts and understanding to God's direction.

Following are three perspectives on the issue of election and predestination.

DOUBLE PREDESTINATION

Calvin, Westminster Confession, Augustine (5th century)

"Some in, some out."

Calvin—"About 20% of the human race are elect."

Jesus Christ died only for elect. The gift of faith, forgiveness, and ability to live as a child of God are given only to some.

Scriptural support: Matthew 22:14, John 17:9, Romans 9:13, 18
Romans 9:19-24 (prepared beforehand)
Jeremiah 18:1-11 (God as the potter making us)
Unbelievers are "passed by" (Westminster II, 7)

Positive emphases:

1. All deserve condemnation and grace is undeserved gift.
2. God's sovereignty.
3. Justice and love of God taken seriously.
4. Recognizes and explains why many don't believe.

Problems:

1. God is not eternally angry as this view implies (Romans 9:18, mercy on God's choice; Romans 11:32, God wills to have mercy on all; Ephesians 1:3-11).
2. God is not a separate, distant, and uncaring God as this implies.

3. Presumptuous that we can understand the nature of God and God's plan for humanity. Is this understanding with its problems a revelation of God's perfection or a limited human understanding of God's work?
4. God doesn't appear to be consistent—merciful to some and not to others.

UNIVERSALISM

God chooses all people for eternal life ultimately.
This was condemned early in the church's life as heresy.

Scriptural support: 1 Timothy 2:4 (desires all to be saved)
2 Peter 3:9 (wish all repent)
1 Corinthians 15:22 (all made alive in Jesus)
John 3:17, John 1:29, Romans 5:18, Colossians 1:19-20

Positive emphases:

1. God is sovereign.
2. God's grace is free and abundant.

Problems:

1. Ignores God's wrath and judgment (Matthew 25:31-46).
2. Jesus warns believers to higher standard.
3. Ignores responsibility of humanity to God in loving relationship.

PELAGIANISM

Pelagius—5th century in argument with Augustine
Modified version adopted by Roman Catholic Church

"Pure" Pelagianism

If we obey the laws set before us by God, God will save us.
God helps those who help themselves.

Semi-Pelagianism

We are undeserving of salvation, yet can turn to God and receive it.
God chooses those who choose him.
Salvation available to all, but effective to those who ask.

Scriptural support: Isaiah 1:19, Acts 2:21, Revelation 3:20

Positive emphases:

1. Acknowledges responsibility of relationship between God and humanity.
2. Salvation is available to all.
3. Grace saves us.

Problems:

1. Humanity has the control with the responsibility of initiation. Overestimates our ability. Finally, the Reformed and Catholic churches rejected this view, because they believe that even our ability to trust and receive is dependent on the grace of God.
2. Love is conditional. Is this self-salvation? Not “Did I do the right thing?” but “Did I have enough faith?”

After reflecting on these three perspectives on the issue of election and predestination, consider the following:

A GOOD APPROACH:

1. Consider all scripture.
2. Stick to overall theme of Bible— which is positive of justice and mercy combined. The Gospel is about Good News.
3. Think only in light of Jesus Christ. As Calvin did, consider Election after Salvation, not before in our analysis.
4. Remember predestination is helpful in looking back on life’s blessings especially so that we see all good begins with God.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. Need to be made free from sin.
Salvation brings freedom.
Jesus is truth and truth sets us free from slavery to sin and sets us free for genuine human actions as God originally intended.
God’s sovereignty is the source of human freedom.
Can’t do it on our own.
2. Non-Christians. God’s choosing is not equal to what we as limited humans can observe. God is at work to make them free, too.

2nd Helvetic Confession, Chapter X
“And although God knows who are his, and here and there mention is made of a small number of elect, yet we must hope well of all, and not rashly judge any man (person) to be reprobate.”

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) calls us to share the Gospel so that others may believe and obey because God loved and still does love them. In God’s plan may be our involvement in bringing another to salvation.
3. View as Christians. All is sheer grace, because truly we all deserve punishment. Our faith and new life are assurance that we are saved, not an easier life, but instead the ability to undergo suffering and still trust in God’s love for us. God’s grace in Christ is a gift and a task. We are called to be servants.

REFORMED THEOLOGY FOR CHURCH OFFICER TRAINING

Presbyterians, similar to most other mainline denominations, hold to the great central themes of Christianity. We affirm the historic Apostles' and Nicene Creeds with most of our sister communities. Beyond that, we join with fellow Protestants in emphasizing the great truths of the Reformation: salvation through grace, the authority of the scripture, the priesthood of believers. In particular, as English-speaking Presbyterians, we have as our creedal standards of the Westminster Confession of Faith and its Larger and Shorter Catechism.

Thus our belief system is CHRISTIAN, PROTESTANT, and PRESBYTERIAN. Within this larger framework there are certain crucial tenets, concepts of doctrine which are "favorites" of ours. They give our tradition its uniqueness. They provide our denominational personality as our special distinctive points of emphasis. Here are a few (*and you may want to add more*):

1. The Lordship and Majesty of God. (Could this mean "predestination"?)
2. The authority of scripture. The authority of the Holy Spirit speaking through scripture.
3. Salvation by grace through faith. (Is faith also a gift?)
4. The priesthood of believers. (Priests make offerings to God, stand in His presence . . . have responsibility before God for others . . . pray for and serve others.)
5. Obedience to God. The importance of conscious, deliberate decision and response in matters of faith. The "three uses of the law": convicts of sin, restrains us from evil, and guides us how we should live as Christ's disciples.
6. The life of the mind as the Service of God. Our stress on the importance of knowing what and why you believe.
7. The sanctity of the common life—"sacred" and "secular" not polar entities, but must interface.
8. Representative government—the right of people to share in decision making.

THE SIX GREAT ENDS OF THE CHURCH

The proclamation of the Gospel for the salvation of humankind. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Our faith is meant to be shared. Out of our love for God, we are called to share his love for others by sharing our faith.

Salvation is a term, however, that should not be defined too narrowly. In the Greek, the word also means “health.” God was in Christ reconciling the *world* to himself. That is, salvation that we proclaim is salvation for the entire created order. This is what we hope and work for.

The shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the children of God. (1 Corinthians 12:12-31)

Christian life is life together. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. To belong to Christ is to affirm that we need each other. It is to understand that we can only grow as God intends for us to grow when we are part of a vital, supportive community of faith.

Christian life is a journey. Faith is more of a process than a possession. We never “arrive” in this journey at a point where we have it all together. There is always more to learn and areas of our lives where we can grow. As children of God, we need a community of faith where we can be supported, challenged and stimulated to be all we have been created to be.

The maintenance of divine worship. (Psalm 27:4 and John 4:23-24)

Just as the human body lives by both food and drink, so does the human spirit live by worship. The church follows God’s command to “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy,” by setting aside a day and an appointed time each week for the worship of God.

“To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

—William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury

The preservation of the truth. (John 8:31-32)

Christians place the highest value on the truth. It is not something that we believe any one individual or church has in any complete sense. Yet God has not left us without evidence of who we are and how we are to live. Our commitment to truth frees us to search for deeper understandings of truth. Faith doesn’t have to be defensive, or concerned with protecting itself from outside threats. The light of truth shining on our faith can only strengthen it and give us a deeper grasp of the truth that sets us free.

The promotion of social righteousness. (Micah 6:6-8 and Matthew 5:6,9)

Since we affirm that God's salvation concerns the salvation of all of creation, it is natural that the church work for the side of justice and righteousness in social, political and economic realms. To be a faithful Christian is to care about the conditions of social structures as well as the conditions of individuals. This concern is to be active, so that many Christians may well find their calling in the pursuit of social justice in the world.

9.53 God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ embraces the whole of human life: social and cultural, economic and political, scientific and technological, individual and corporate. It includes humankind's natural environment as exploited and despoiled by sin. It is the will of God that his purpose for human life shall be fulfilled under the rule of Christ and all evil be banished from his creation.

9.55 With urgency born of this hope the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In steadfast hope the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.

—The Book of Confessions C.67

The exhibition of the Kingdom of heaven to the world. (Matthew 6:10)

We believe in a God who makes all things new. Eternal life refers more to a quality of life than of any length of time. Hence, the church is called to exhibit and give evidence of God's kingdom and of new life in Christ in the here and now. We believe that Christ is Lord of history and that his kingdom has and is breaking forth even in the present.

9.54 Biblical visions and images of the rule of Christ such as a heavenly city, a father's house, a new heaven and earth, a marriage feast, and an unending day culminate in the image of the kingdom. The kingdom represents the triumph of God over all that resists his will and disrupts his creation. Already God's reign is present as a ferment in the world, stirring hope in men and preparing the world to receive its ultimate judgment and redemption.

—The Book of Confessions C.67

THE HISTORIC PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH ORDER

from Book of Order, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) 2004-2005

G-1.0300

In setting forth the following form of government, worship, and discipline, the Presbyterian Church (USA) reaffirms the historic principles of Church order which have been a part of our common heritage in this nation and which are basic to our Presbyterian concept and system of church government, namely:

G-1.0301 Right of Judgment

1.

a. That "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship."

b. Therefore we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: We do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and at the same time, be equal and common to all others.

G-1.0302 Corporate Judgment

2. That, in perfect consistency with the above principle of common right, every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ hath appointed; that in the exercise of this right they may, notwithstanding, err, in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet, even in this case, they do not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only make an improper use of their own.

G-1.0303 Officers

3. That our blessed Savior, for the edification of the visible Church, which is his body, hath appointed officers, not only to preach the gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline, for the preservation of both truth and duty; and that it is incumbent upon these officers, and upon the whole Church, in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing, in all cases, the rules contained in the Word of God.

G-1.0304 Truth and Goodness

4. That truth is in order to goodness, and the great touch-stone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness, according to our Savior's rule, "By their fruits ye shall know them." And

that no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man's opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it.

G-1.0305 Difference of Views

5. That, while under the conviction of the above principle we think it necessary to make effectual provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith, we also believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.

G-1.0306 Election by the People

6. That though the character, qualifications, and authority of Church officers are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, as well as the proper method of their investiture and institution, yet the election of the persons to the exercise of this authority, in any particular society, is in that society.

G-1.0307 Church Power

7. That all Church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no Church governing body ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God. Now though it will easily be admitted that all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity, yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws than from the right of judging upon laws already made, and common to all who profess the gospel, although this right, as necessity requires in the present state, be lodged with fallible men.

G-1.0308 Church Discipline

8. Lastly, that if the preceding scriptural and rational principles be steadfastly adhered to, the vigor and strictness of its discipline will contribute to the glory and happiness of any church. Since ecclesiastical discipline must be purely moral or spiritual in its object, and not attended with any civil effects, it can derive no force whatever but from its own justice, the approbation of an impartial public, and the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the Church universal.

OUR CONSTITUTION

G-1.0500 Definition of the Constitution

The *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)* consists of *The Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*.

G-1.0501 *The Book of Confessions* includes:

The Nicene Creed

The Apostles' Creed

The Scots Confession

The Heidelberg Catechism

The Second Helvetic Confession

The Westminster Confession of Faith

The Larger Catechism

The Shorter Catechism

The Theological Declaration of Barmen

The Confession of 1967

A Brief Statement of Faith—Presbyterian Church (USA)

G-1.0502 *The Book of Order* includes:

Form of Government

Directory for Worship

Rules of Discipline

A GUIDE TO WORSHIP

The worship of God is the heart of the Christian faith and the center of our life together in the church. The Westminster Shorter Catechism affirms that our chief end in life is “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” This places the worship of God at the very center of what it means to be God’s people, and makes worship the highest expression we can render of our God-given humanity. Christian worship is a corporate act of the people of God where we gather to realize God’s presence and respond with praise to his gift of love to us in Jesus Christ. Worship is the activity we share; the liturgy is the form or structure for that activity. Worship at PALMETTO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH begins with a theology, Presbyterian and Reformed in heritage, that is acted out within a liturgical framework.

Through a series of action, we express what we believe and who we are. The sequence of the service was developed in the church based on ancient Hebraic worship, shaped by early Christians, and confirmed by Christian congregations throughout our church’s history. By the second century A.D., a basic outline for Christian worship had emerged, with influence of synagogue worship in the form of praise, prayer, scripture and preaching. The sacraments of The Lord’s Supper and Baptism, as instituted by Christ, are the two distinctly Christian element of worship.

William Temple said, “To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

Our service of worship has four major parts. The separate acts within these major sections are described here in the confidence that our experience of worship can be enhanced by greater understanding of what we do in Christian worship and why we do it.

Assemble in God’s Name

The Prelude marks the beginning of the service of worship. How we prepare for worship can determine the quality of the experience. In silent prayer and with a meditative spirit we are invited to prepare ourselves for worship.

The Introit, which comes from the Latin word, “to enter,” is a choral call marking our entry into worship.

The Call to Worship draws our attention from our many concerns to the primary concern of the moment. Through words spoken by the pastor or congregational response drawn from scripture, we are led toward God, and invited, “Come, let us worship.”

The Hymn of Praise reflects the fundamental purpose of Christian worship. Praise is the people's joyful response to God's gift in Jesus Christ. The hymn is chosen to be uplifting and vibrant, reflecting the praise we seek to offer to our God.

The Prayer of Adoration follows our Hymn of Praise on some Sundays. This prayer focuses upon the actions and attributes of God, continuing the theme of praise that is our glad response to God's gracious generosity. To come into the presence of God is to sense his holiness and to be "lost in wonder, love, and praise."

The Prayer of Confession takes place early in the service, suggesting that both the individual and the corporate body need to be cleansed in order to hear and receive Word and Sacrament. To come into the presence of God dramatizes how far we fall short of his intended glory, so together we openly acknowledge our need for repentance, forgiveness and grace.

The Silent Confession affords the worshiper a time of reflection and prayer upon our brokenness and failings, with resolve to place these things into the hands of a gracious God.

The Declaration of Pardon reminds us of God's promise that forgiveness follows the sincere confession of and repentance for our sins. Drawn most often from scripture, this declares the amazing grace God in Christ offers to each of us who truly are sorry for our sins and desire to live a more faithful life.

The Gloria Patri is sung in response to the good news that we, in Jesus Christ, stand forgiven. Drawn from the early centuries of the Christian church, it acknowledges the power of the Trinity whom we gather to worship and adore.

The Invitation, Concerns of the Church and Time of Fellowship is an interlude for the purpose of welcoming visitors, making necessary announcements, and bringing to the attention of the membership timely events in the life of our church.

The Anthem, sung by the choir who leads us in singing and offers praise on our behalf, is really the worship of the congregation sung through the voice of the choir.

Time with Children provides an important time each week for the younger children of our congregation to spend a choice learning period, before leaving for Children's Church. The themes for both Time with Children and Children's Church are carefully chosen, and usually reflect what is being done that day in worship.

Proclaim God's Word

The Scripture Lessons begin this section of the service, which is drawn from the ancient synagogue service concerned primarily with the reading and preaching of God's Word. While the synagogue service consisted of readings from the Old Testament, as Christians began to

develop their own scriptures, readings from the New Testament were added. Most weeks at PALMETTO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH will include a reading from each testament, reflecting the biblical center of our worship. The lessons are usually followed by a choral response.

The Sermon is proclamation of the Word of God as set forth in scripture. Drawn from one or both of the scripture lessons, and using these texts as a foundation, the sermon seeks to make the messages of these texts come alive in the faith and life of the hearers. The sermon provides a bridge between the ancient, abiding truths of scripture and our contemporary experience. The faithful proclamation of the Word has been a central concern and strength of Presbyterian and Reformed worship.

Give Thanks to God: God's People Respond

The Hymn of Dedication is an affirmation that what we do in response to hearing God's Word is crucial. This hymn is usually more reflective and meditative, and often is tied to the theme of the morning's scripture and sermon.

The Apostles' Creed is recited as a corporate reaffirmation of what we believe and serves to place the contemporary church in the tradition of Christendom, which has endured through the centuries. On occasion, some other confessional statement, drawn from our denomination's Book of Confessions, may be used.

The Offering is our response to God's Word by giving and is one of the most significant acts within the liturgy. As we bring our gifts to the Table, we bring our lives and acknowledge once more that we are God's and what we have is but a gift to be held in trust.

The Doxology is a Trinitarian song of praise we sing as our gifts are brought forward. Doxology is Greek for "words of praise," and we sing it to the Geneva Psalter tune of "Old Hundredth," which is probably the most familiar tune sung in Protestant congregations.

The Prayer of Dedication, after the offering is received, dedicates our gifts to the work of the church universal and our lives to the service of Christ.

The Prayers of the People begin often with the salutation, "The Lord be with you." This is an ancient Hebrew greeting and has been used as a call to prayer since Christians have gathered to worship. This is followed by the *sursum corda* ("Lift up your hearts"), drawn from the communion liturgy of the church. Prayer is indeed a lifting up of our hearts to the Lord, who invites us to ask, seek and knock. In prayer we approach God in openness of mind and heart to experience his power and presence. The prayer of intercession asks for God's guidance and blessing on all his people. It seeks to express the spiritual needs, the longings and the thanksgiving of the whole body of Christ.

The Lord's Prayer concludes our series of prayers. This prayer, taught by Jesus to his disciples, is the prayer which binds all Christians together in service and devotion.

Go in God's Name

The Parting Hymn moves us from our worship into the world with renewed commitment to our faith and service to God's world.

The Benediction, a blessing spoken by the pastor, sends us out into the world to enact the Christian faith we have confessed. The pastor's hand is symbolically raised to place the blessing of God upon each one who is gathered.

The Choral Response to the benediction offers a moment for quiet reflection and prayer.

The Postlude concludes our service of worship with a triumphal affirmation of God's majesty and power. It sends us on our way, inspired and rejoicing.

The Sacraments

The Sacraments observed by Presbyterians are Holy Communion (or the Lord's Supper) and Baptism. Both sacraments were instituted by Christ, who invited his disciples to observe them. A sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace. Both point to the incarnate Word and declare the Jesus Christ is present.

The Lord's Supper is the re-enactment of Jesus' last meal in the Upper Room as described in the Gospels and in 1 Corinthians. It is a holy celebration of the presence of Christ, who is risen and alive. Holy Communion points to our union with Christ as we live and work within the community of faith.

Baptism, the act of cleansing, marks our reception into the household of God. Following the New Testament practice, the baptism of infants, adults, and children requires or the congregation a commitment to nurture the Christian growth of each individual as a member of the family of faith.

SACRAMENTS

Most Protestant churches agree that the Bible prescribes two “sacraments” – special rituals that Jesus Himself commanded, for practice within the Church, that signify something dramatic about the meaning of his life and death. They are *Baptism* and *Communion*. Roman Catholics assert that other events also have sacramental significance, including Marriage, Confirmation, Ordination, etc. Presbyterians believe that while those events are important, they do not have the power and meaning of true sacraments.



This sacrament unites us with Jesus Christ and makes us members of God's family, the church.

BAPTISM

For Presbyterians:

- Baptism is an initiation into the church community, as ordered by Christ. Baptism with water was the early church’s way of letting new believers publicly declare their allegiance to Christ.
- Baptism itself does not make us right with God; it is and “outward sign of an inward grace,” an external picture of the internal and invisible cleansing of our hearts by Christ. It is a public confession, not a private one—it’s a statement of faith made in the presence of others.
- As sharers of the New Covenant of Christ’s love, our children may also be baptized; in that case, their parents and the congregation make public commitments to God on their behalf; we pray that one day they will receive Christ on their own.
- Baptism does not guarantee access to heaven—unbaptized people are not denied salvation.
- There is no “right way” to administer water; our church usually sprinkles, but we will also immerse when requested.
- We believe that one needs be baptized only once; we recognize the validity of any Christian baptism of the past; normally, unbaptized adults are baptized when they join the church.



COMMUNION

Also called, The Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, or The Eucharist – is a time to renew faith and strengthen participants for the duties and privileges of Christian service.

TO SUM IT UP . . .

What is a Presbyterian?

In the New Testament, *presbuteros* means elder, and refers to the democratic custom of choosing leaders and advisors from among the wisest members of the church.

Presbyterians are a group of Protestants whose church is founded on this concept of democratic rule under the Word of God.

The Presbyterian Denomination is a form of Christianity democratically organized to embrace the faith common to all Christians.

All that is required to be a Presbyterian:

- ✦ Confess the Christian faith.
- ✦ Trust in Christ as our forgiving savior.
- ✦ Promise to follow Christ and Christ's example for living.
- ✦ Commit oneself to attend church and to become involved in its work.

What is the Presbyterian Church?

It is a representative democracy governed by elders elected from and by the congregation.

Authority resides with the duly elected representatives of the congregation in the appointed church governing bodies. The local church governing body is the session.

The Local Session oversees the day-to-day work of the church.

The Overall Church Structure is made up of four governing bodies:

- ✦ **Session** or local governing body—ordained ministers (ministers of the Word) and elders, all elected by the congregation.
- ✦ **Presbytery**—elders and ministers from congregations who oversee several churches.
- ✦ **Synod**—representatives elected from each presbytery to oversee several presbyteries.
- ✦ **General Assembly**—the national governing body made up of equal numbers of laypeople and clergy chosen by the presbyteries.

BEING A PRESBYTERIAN MEANS:

Maintaining Christian habits, such as regular church attendance, Bible reading, prayer and participation in church activities and service.

Setting a worthy example for the world, as a person who strives to be more worthy of Christ.

Giving regularly, of the time, money and abilities given to one by God.

Becoming informed about Christian work around the world, and supporting this work.

KNOWING WHAT WE BELIEVE!

I know many of us go to church every week, we pray, and we profess our faith when asked. What I wonder, though, is how much do we really know about our faith?

Presbyterian theologian and Union Seminary Professor John Leith believed every Presbyterian should know the following by heart:

1. The Apostles' Creed
2. The Lord's Prayer
3. The Ten Commandments
4. The books of the Bible in order
5. Psalm 23
6. Matthew 5:3-11 (The Beatitudes)
7. Matthew 6:25-34 (Do not be anxious . . .)
8. Luke 2:1-14 (The birth of Christ)
9. John 3:16 (For God so loved the world . . .)
10. John 14:1-7 (In my father's house are many mansions . . .)
11. Romans 8:28-39 (We know that in everything God works for good . . .)
12. 1 Corinthians 13 (The Love Chapter)

In addition Leith believed every Christian should know at least two of the great hymns of the church by heart.

Besides memory verses, he also believed we ought to be familiar with the basic Biblical narratives. This includes the story of Adam and Eve; the story of Noah; the Tower of Babel; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph; the story of Moses and the Exodus; the giving of the Law at Sinai; the stories of Samuel and David. He also expects that every Presbyterian could tell the story of the life of Jesus, the story of Peter, and that of Paul. Leith also thought every Presbyterian ought to be able to tell the parable of the prodigal son, of the Good Samaritan, and the parable of the lost coin. He also expected that every Presbyterian should have some knowledge of the history of the church and be familiar with significant Christians who have immeasurably enriched the church.

Knowledge is not an end in itself, for knowledge does not make us Christian. But it does provide a universal vocabulary for the Christian life. Without some basic knowledge of the Bible and religious history, we have no hope of knowing God's wonderful plan of Salvation and of the life Christ offers.

All Christians, regardless of our denominational affiliation, should **know** what we believe.

Dr. Michael Lee Fitze
PALMETTO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

Globally:

- ✦ 6 Continents
- ✦ 82 Countries
- ✦ 16 Synods
- ✦ 171 Presbyteries
- ✦ Over 11,000 Congregations
- ✦ Over 2.3 Million Members



The Synod of South Atlantic
Georgia, Florida & South Carolina
www.synodofsouthatlantic.org

- ✦ 16 Presbyteries
- ✦ Over 950 Churches
- ✦ Over 290,000 Members

Charleston-Atlantic Presbytery
Presbyterian Church (USA)
www.chas-atlpresbytery.org

- ✦ 18,085 Presbyterians
- ✦ 49 Churches
- ✦ 9 Counties

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from Me you can do nothing.

 John 15:5



AS A MEMBER OF
PALMETTO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
I COVENANT TO:

Worship Regularly

Pray Faithfully

Serve Willingly

Give Cheerfully

Live Joyfully

Love Unconditionally