

II. The Book of Order & Book of Confessions

Presbyterian Distinctives

Presbyterians are, first and foremost, Christians. We have more in common with our brothers and sisters in Christ than we have differences.

We are distinctive in two major ways:

1. BELIEFS: “ Reformed Theology ”
2. POLITY (governing): Active, representational leadership of both ministers and church members.



Presbyterians are people of three books:

- *The Bible*
- *The Book of Order*
- *The Book of Confessions*

The last two comprise the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church. Local churches also have corporate bylaws, which make up the third part of our constitution.

Presbyterian Polity (governing)

presbuteroi (Greek)=

“Paul and Barnabas appointed **elders** for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.” - Acts 14:23

The Book of Order

Three Sections, G, W, D

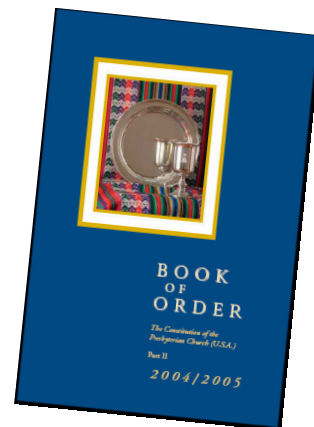
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G Form of Government

W Directory of Worship

D Rules of Discipline

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Four Governing Levels:

1. The General Assembly – The Presbyterian Church (USA)
2. The Synod - Synod of the Pacific

3. The Presbytery - Presbytery of the Redwoods
4. The Session - of First Presbyterian Church

Presbyterian Beliefs

What We Believe...A Brief Statement of Faith

From *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, the Book Of Confessions.*

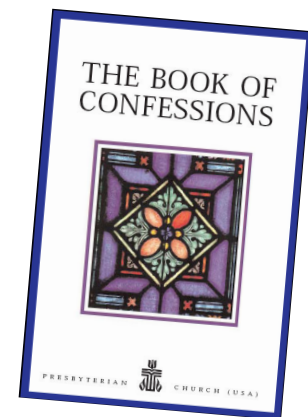
In life and in death we belong to God.
 Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 the love of God,
 and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
 we trust in the **one triune God**, the Holy One of Israel,
 whom alone we worship and serve.

**We trust in _____ Jesus Christ _____,
 fully human, fully God.**

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
 preaching good news to the poor
 and release to the captives,
 teaching by word and deed
 and blessing the children,
 healing the sick
 and binding up the brokenhearted,
 eating with outcasts,
 forgiving sinners,
 and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.
 Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
Jesus was crucified,
 suffering the depths of human pain
 and giving his life for the sins of the world.
God raised this Jesus from the dead,
 vindicating his sinless life,
breaking the power of sin and evil,
delivering us from death to life eternal.

We trust in God,
 whom Jesus called **Abba, Father _____.**

**In sovereign love God created the world good
 and makes everyone equally in God's image,**
 male and female, of every race and people,
 to live as one community.
But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
 Ignoring God's commandments.
 we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
 accept lies as truth,
 exploit neighbor and nature,
 and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
 We deserve God's condemnation.
 Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
 In everlasting love,



the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
to bless all families of the earth.
Hearing their cry,
God delivered the children of Israel
from the house of bondage.
Loving us still,
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.

We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
and binds us together with all believers
in the one body of Christ, the Church.
The same Spirit
who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.
In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Other Presbyterian Creeds:

1. The Nicene Creed
2. The Apostles' Creed
3. The Scots Confession
4. The Heidelberg Catechism
5. The Second Helvetic Confession
6. The Westminster Confession of Faith
7. The Shorter Catechism
8. The Larger Catechism
9. The Theological Declaration of Barmen
10. The Confession of 1967
11. A Brief Statement of Faith

The entire Book of Confessions is online (free) <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/constitution.htm>

WHY CONFESSIONS?

G-2.0100 Purpose of Confessional Statements

Declaration to Members and World

G-2.0100a. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states its faith and bears witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ in the creeds and confessions in the Book of Confessions. In these confessional statements the church declares to its members and to the world

who and what it is,
what it believes,
what it resolves to do.

Church as Community

G-2.0100b. These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions. They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation.

G-2.0200 Confessional Statements as Subordinate Standards These confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. While confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. The church is prepared to counsel with or even to discipline one ordained who seriously rejects the faith expressed in the confessions.

“Reformed, always reforming”

The church, in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as of governance. The church affirms “*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*,” that is, “The church reformed, always reforming,” according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.” - *Book of Order*, G-2.0200

"Thus the creeds and confessions of this Church reflect a particular stance within the history of God's people. They are the result of prayer, thought, and experience within a living tradition. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers." *The Book of Order*, Chapter II (G 2.0500)

Sources:

The Book of Order, The Book of Confessions

<http://www.irvinepres.org/>

For more information, visit:

<http://www.pcusa.org/101/>

Presbyterian 101 
A General Guide to the Facts About the PCUSA

The Questions of Ordination

Session must meet with you for "Examination" on _____. Be prepared to give a testimony of your faith in Jesus Christ.

"When persons have been elected to the office of elder or deacon, the session shall confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the office. The minutes of session shall record the completion of a period of study and preparation, after which the session shall examine them as to their personal faith: knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church, and the duties of the office. If the examination is approved, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation. If the examination is not approved for one or more elected officers, the session shall report its action to the congregation's nominating committee, which shall bring nomination(s) to a special meeting of the congregation for any office(s) not filled." --The Book of Order G-14.0205

There will be a Service of Ordination and Installation _____ during the Worship Service (*usually the first Sunday in January*)

G-14.0207 Constitutional Questions to Officers

The Questions of Ordination have been moved to W-4.4003 in the Book of Order, 2007-2009

The minister shall ask those preparing to be ordained or installed to stand before the congregation and to answer the following questions:

G-14.0207a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

G-14.0207b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?

G-14.0207c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?

G-14.0207d. Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?

G-14.0207e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?

G-14.0207f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?

G-14.0207g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

G-14.0207h. Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

G-14.0207i. (For elder) Will you be a faithful elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in governing bodies of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

G-14.0207j. (For deacon) Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need? In your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(For minister of word and sacrament) Will you be a faithful minister, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith, and caring for people? Will you be active in government and discipline, serving in the governing bodies of the church; and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

G-14.0208 Constitutional Questions to Congregation

The elders- and deacons-elect having answered in the affirmative, an elder shall stand with them before the congregation and shall ask the congregation to answer the following questions:

G-14.0208a. Do we, the members of the church, accept (names) _____ as elders or deacons, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ?

G-14.0208b. Do we agree to encourage them, to respect their decisions, and to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?

G-14.0209 Prayer and Laying on of Hands

G-14.0209a. The members of the church having answered these questions in the affirmative, those to be ordained shall kneel, if able, for prayer and the laying on of hands by the session. Those previously ordained ordinarily shall stand, along with the congregation, if able, for the prayer of installation. The session may invite other elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament to participate in the laying on of hands.

Statement

G-14.0209b. The moderator shall say to those who have thus been ordained and installed:

You are now elders and deacons in the Church of Jesus Christ and for this congregation. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Amen.

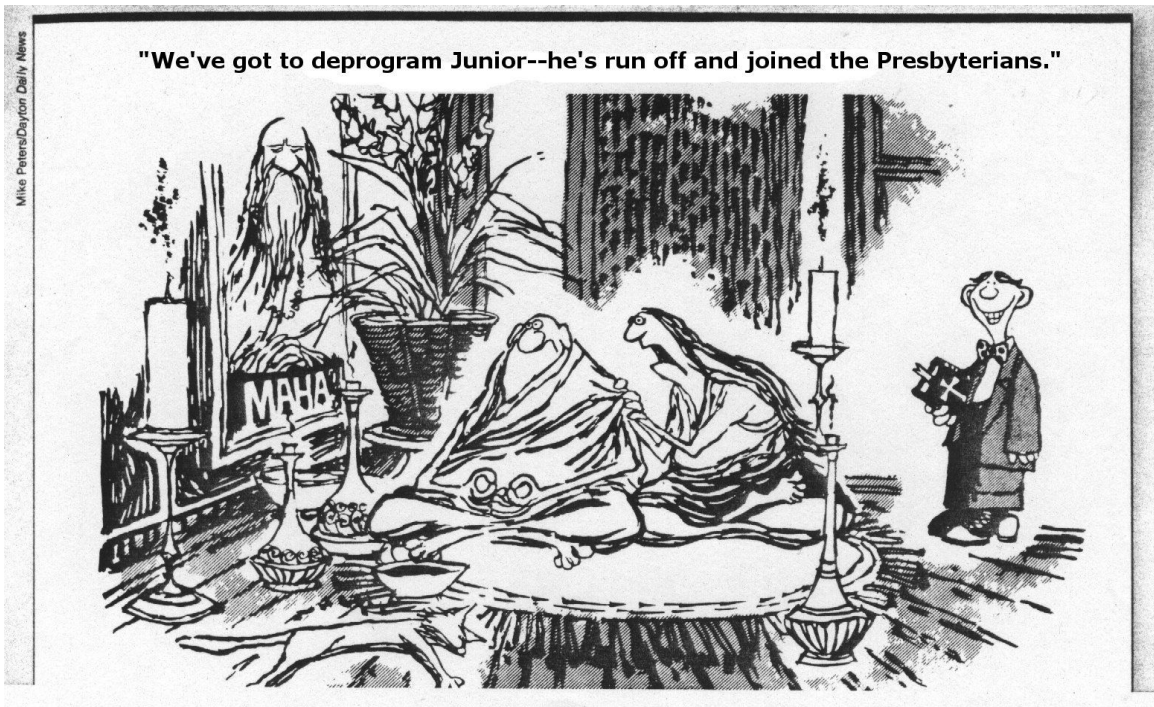
Session Welcomes

G-14.0209c. Then the members of the session, and others as may be appropriate, shall welcome the newly ordained and installed, or newly installed, elders and deacons into their fellowship in ministry.

Congregation Greet

G-14.0209d. After the service, it is appropriate for the members of the congregation to greet their new elders and deacons, showing affection and support.

From more information on standards for church officers, see this document
“Life Together in the Community of Faith: Standards of Ethical Conduct for Ordained Officers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” at
<http://www.pcusa.org/pcusa/oga/ethics/officers.htm>



What Are the Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith?

G-14.0207 Constitutional Questions to Officers

G-14.0207c. **Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith** as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?

From Irvine Presbyterian Church website: <http://www.irvinepres.org/>

The Book of Order lists ten doctrines (beliefs) which we Presbyterians take to be essential to our faith:

Two are shared with the one catholic, apostolic Church:

1. The mystery of the **Trinity**.
2. The **Incarnation** of the Word of God in Jesus Christ. (John 1:1-14)

Two are identified with our affirmation of the Protestant Reformation:

3. **Justification** by grace through faith. (Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:8-9)
4. The **Scriptures** as the final authority for salvation and faithful living. (II Timothy 3:16)

Sola gratia -- grace alone

Sola fide -- faith alone

Sola scriptura -- Scripture alone

Six express the faith (or emphases) of the Reformed tradition:

5. The **Sovereignty** of God. (Psalm 103:19)
6. **God's choosing** (Election) of people for service and for salvation. (Ephesians 2:10)
7. The **Covenant** life of the Church, ordering itself according to the Word of God.
8. A faithful **Stewardship** of God's creation.
9. The sin of **Idolatry**, our tendency to make created things ultimate, rather than worshipping only the Creator.
10. The necessity of **Obedience** to the Word of God.

"Thus the creeds and confessions of this Church reflect a particular stance within the history of God's people. They are the result of prayer, thought, and experience within a living tradition. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers." *The Book of Order*, Chapter II (G 2.0500)