

**Amended Proposed Revised Version of the  
OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God  
Preface and Chapter I  
as amended by the 74th General Assembly**

**Stated Clerk's Note:** The 74th General Assembly passed the following motion:

That the 74th General Assembly request the Stated Clerk to print the text of the "Preface" and "Chapter One" of the APRV as amended in the *Minutes*, and post the full document, as amended thus far, on the website.

**OUTLINE**

**PREFACE**

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### SUGGESTED FORMS FOR PARTICULAR SERVICES

- I. The Solemnization of Marriage
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### PREFACE

The purpose of this *Directory* is to express the Church's common understanding of the principles and practice of public worship that is reformed according to the Scriptures and, subordinately, to the Confession and Catechisms. Where practices are understood by the Church to be required by the Word of God, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence, they are mandated. In matters of circumstance and form in worship not specifically provided for in Scripture, the *Directory* provides guidance for their ordering according to the light of nature and Christian prudence, consonant with the general rules of the Word. The *Directory* seeks to make clear this distinction in its use of language. The following denotations used in the *Directory* are to be understood as indicated. "Shall," "will," "is to be," "must," and "are to be" denote practice that is mandated. "Should," "ought to," "is desirable," and "is advisable" denote practice that is not mandated, but is strongly recommended. "Is appropriate," "is well," and "is fitting" denote practice that is commended as suitable. "May" denotes practice that is permissible. Other imperative forms occur in the *Directory*, and sometimes the forms in the list above are varied by modifying words or are put in the negative, either of which alters their force. For example, "may not" and "may only" are mandatory prohibitions, even though "may" is permissive. The meaning of these additional and altered forms is to be determined by the rules of English usage, with due respect to the fourfold system outlined above.

The Suggested Forms for Particular Services are by definition, suggested. The fourfold system outlined above does not apply to the Suggested Forms.

Scripture quotations in the *Directory* and the *Suggested Forms* are drawn from the King James Version with a few variations, indicated by brackets, where deemed advisable for current understanding, without prejudice to other translations. In the use of the *Directory*, any accurate, faithful translation may be substituted.

## CHAPTER I – THE PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

### A. God's Institution of Public Worship

1. The living and true God, our triune Creator, has instituted the worship of himself by all people everywhere in spirit and in truth.
  - a. Because man's chief end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever, all of life is to be worshipful. Nevertheless, worship itself consists primarily in specific acts of communion with God.
  - b. One can worship God only because through God's grace his heart has, by the work of the Holy Spirit, been made new.

c. While believers are to worship in secret as individuals and in private as families, they are also to worship as churches in assemblies of public worship, which are not carelessly or willfully to be neglected or forsaken. Public worship occurs when God, by his Word and Spirit, through the lawful government of the church, calls his people to assemble to worship him together.

2. In his Word, God has specially appointed one day in seven as a Sabbath to be kept holy to him. It is the duty of every one to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ the Sabbath was the last day of the week, marking the completion of six days of work, anticipating eternal rest in the coming Messiah. By raising Christ from the dead on the first day of the week, God sanctified that day. And from the time of the Apostles the church, accordingly, has kept the first day of the week holy as the Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day, and as the day on which it is to assemble for worship. Now each weekly cycle begins with the people of God resting in Christ in the worship of his name, followed by six days of work. The Lord's Day thus both depicts that the Christian's rest has already begun in Christ, and anticipates the eternal rest of his sons and daughters in the new heaven and the new earth.

3. God's covenant people are to devote the entire Lord's Day as holy to the Lord.

a. In order to sanctify the day, it is necessary for them to prepare for its approach. They should attend to their ordinary affairs beforehand so that they may not be hindered from setting the Sabbath apart to God.

b. It is advisable for each individual and family to prepare for communion with God in his public ordinances. Therefore they ought to do this by reading the Scriptures, by holy meditation, and by prayer, especially for God's blessing on the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

c. They are then to observe a holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts concerning their everyday employment and recreations, and to devote themselves to delighting in the public and private exercises of communion with God and his people, in showing mercy and doing good in his name, and in works of necessity.

d. They shall so order works of necessity on that day that they do not improperly detain others from the public worship of God, nor otherwise hinder them from sanctifying the Sabbath.

4. The Lord's Day is a day of holy convocation, the day on which the Lord calls his people to assemble for public worship.

a. Although it is fitting and proper that the members of Christ's church assemble for worship on other occasions also, which are left to the discretion of particular sessions, the Lord calls the whole congregation of each local church to the sacred duty and high privilege of assembling for public worship each Lord's Day. He expressly commands his people to draw near to him, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together.

b. It is highly advisable that a congregation assemble for public worship at the beginning and the ending of the Lord's Day. God established this pattern for his Old Testament people when he commanded morning and evening sacrifice and incense burning. Moreover, he sanctifies the entire Lord's Day to himself and gives his people in it a foretaste of their eternal enjoyment of him and his people.

## **B. The Nature of Public Worship**

1. An assembly of public worship is not merely a gathering of God's children with each other but is, before all else, a meeting of the triune God with his covenant people. In the covenant, God promises his chosen ones that he will dwell among them as their God and they will be his people.

a. The triune God is present in public worship not only by virtue of the divine omnipresence but, much more intimately, as the faithful covenant Savior. Through Christ, God's people have access by one Spirit to the Father.

b. In an assembly of public worship, the triune God is not only the One to whom worship is directed, but also the One who is active in the worship of the church. Through his public ordinances, the covenant God actively works to engage his people in communion with himself. In public worship, God and his people commune with each other in a manner which expresses the close relationships of the Father and his redeemed children, of the Son and his beloved bride, and of the Holy Spirit and the living temple in which he dwells.

c. Pastors and ruling elders are to endeavor to inculcate in themselves and the congregation expectations for, attitudes concerning, and behavior during public worship which are appropriate to the glorious fact that public worship is covenantal communion between God and his people in his public ordinances.

2. Because Christ is the Mediator of the covenant, no one draws near to God except through him alone.

a. God's people enter the Most Holy Place, the heavenly sanctuary, by the redeeming blood of Jesus, by the new and living way opened for them through the curtain, that is, his flesh. They draw near through him as their great high priest who has not entered a man-made sanctuary but heaven itself, now to appear for them in God's presence.

b. Public worship is to be conducted in a manner that plainly expresses conscious reliance upon the mediation and merits of Jesus Christ. To this end, it is well that there be a prayer of confession of sin early in the worship service. It is fitting that the minister, as God's ambassador, then declare an assurance of God's grace in Christ, reminding each worshiper that he can have boldness to approach the holy God only through the mediation and merits of Jesus Christ.

3. By the Spirit of the exalted Christ, God draws near to his people and they draw near to their God. They come by grace to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, joining innumerable angels and all the people of God in joyous and reverent communion with him.

a. God's people not only are to come into his presence with a deep sense of awe at the thought of his perfect holiness and their own exceeding sinfulness, but also are to enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise for the great salvation that he has so graciously wrought for them through his only begotten Son and which he applies to them by his Holy Spirit. All are therefore to worship with sincere devotion, reverence, and expectation.

b. Public worship is to be conducted in reliance on the gracious working of the Spirit of the exalted Christ, which alone can make anyone capable of such sincerity, reverence, devotion, awe, expectation, and joy. Hence, from its beginning to its end, public worship should be conducted in that simplicity which manifests dependence on the Spirit of Christ to bless his own ordinances.

c. Accordingly, the whole congregation should assemble promptly, that all may be present and may join together for the entire worship service. Unless necessary, none should depart until after the benediction. All should refrain from any behavior that would distract other worshipers or detract from their communion with God.

4. In public worship, God's people draw near to their God unitedly as his covenant people, the body of Christ.

a. For this reason the covenant children should be present so far as possible as well as adults. Because God makes his covenant with believers and their children, families should be taught and encouraged to sit together as families.

b. For the same reason no favoritism may be shown to any who attend. Nor may any member of the church presume to exalt himself above others as though he were more spiritual, but each shall esteem others better than himself.

c. The unity and catholicity of the covenant people are to be manifest in public worship. Accordingly, the service is to be conducted in a manner that enables and expects all the members of the covenant community—male and female, old and young, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, healthy and infirm, people from every race and nation—to worship together.

d. Because God's people worship not as an aggregation of individuals, but as a congregation of those who are members of one another in Christ, public worship is to be conducted as a corporate activity in which all the members participate as the body of Christ.

5. The triune God assembles his covenant people for public worship in order to manifest and renew their covenant bond with him and one another. The Holy Spirit engages them and draws them into the Father's presence as a living sacrifice in Christ. God himself has fellowship with them, strengthening and guiding them for life in his presence and service in his kingdom.

a. Public worship should be conducted in a manner that reflects God's initiative in the covenant itself, making clear that God establishes and renews his covenant with his people, assuring God's people of those things which they so easily forget unless Christ crucified is portrayed before their eyes week after week, cultivating the expectation that God himself meets his people in Christ as the Holy Spirit works through the public ordinances, always keeping central the persons and works of the triune God.

b. Consequently, it is well that public worship be so conducted that it is apparent that God summons his church to assemble in his presence, that he assures his people of his receiving and cleansing them through Christ the Mediator, that he consecrates them to himself and his service by his Word, that he communes with them and gives them grace to help in time of need through his means of grace, and that he sends them out to serve with his blessing.

6. The triune God reveals the way of knowing and worshiping him in his Word, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

a. The principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible, either explicitly or by good and necessary consequence, and from no other source.

b. God may not be worshiped according to human imaginations or inventions or in any way not prescribed by his Word, nor may the church require her members to participate in elements of worship that God's Word does not require. Only when the elements of worship are those appointed in God's Word, and the circumstances and forms of worship are consonant with God's Word, is there true freedom to know God as he is and to worship him as he desires to be worshiped.

7. The end of public worship is the glory of the triune God. To that end, Christ builds his church by perfecting the saints and adding to its membership such as are being saved—all to the glory of God.

a. Through public worship on the Lord's Day, God calls his people to serve him all the days of the week in their every activity, and enables them, whether they eat or drink or whatever they do, to do all to the glory of God.

b. God's people are to be led to engage in all the elements of worship with a single-minded focus on God's glory and with a humble and dependent expectation that the exalted Lord Jesus Christ himself will edify them and build his church through his appointed means of grace— all to the glory of God.

### **C. The Parts of Public Worship**

1. Because a service of public worship is in its essence a meeting of the triune God with his chosen people, a worship service consists of two principal parts: those elements which are performed on behalf of God (through a representative voice) and those elements which are performed by the congregation (through their own or a representative voice).

a. By his Spirit working through the ministry of the Word, God addresses his people in the call to worship, in the salutation and benediction, in the reading and preaching of the Word, and in the sacraments.

b. His people, enabled by the Holy Spirit, address God in prayer, in song, in offerings, in hearing the Word, in confession, and in receiving and partaking of the sacraments.

c. It is advisable that these two parts be made to alternate.

2. The triune God is not a passive spectator in public worship, but actively works in each element of the service of worship. Neither are the people of God to be passive spectators in public worship, but by faith are to participate actively in each element of the service of worship.

a. Public worship should be conducted in a manner that enables and expects God's people by faith actively to embrace the blessing of the Lord in the salutation and benediction; to pray with him who leads in prayer, so that the prayer being uttered aloud becomes their prayer; to attend, in the reading of God's Word, to what God reveals of himself, his redeeming actions for them, and his will for their lives; to confess together with all the people the faith of the church; to heed the Word of truth as the sermon is preached and to appropriate it to their lives as God, through his servant, proclaims and applies it; to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to the praise of God and the edification of one another; to offer their possessions and themselves together as a living sacrifice to the Lord.

b. Accordingly, it is appropriate that worshipers at times respond with brief spoken or sung expressions of praise or affirmation such as "hallelujah" or "amen." The former is a heartfelt declaration that the living God alone is worthy of adoration. The latter grows out of the responsibility of God's people to affirm solemnly and earnestly the truthfulness of his Word and the permanence of his character. It is especially fitting for the congregation to join in an "amen" at such times as a response to a blessing, a Scripture reading, a psalm or hymn, a confession of faith, or a prayer. When believers sing or say "amen" they are testifying to their wholehearted agreement with what has been spoken as being in harmony with God's permanently valid Word.

3. The Lord Jesus Christ has not prescribed a set order for public worship, but he has given his church a large measure of liberty in this matter. It may not be forgotten, however, that there is true liberty only where the rules of God's Word are observed and the Spirit of the Lord is, so that all things are done decently and in order, and God's people approach him with reverence and in the beauty of holiness.

a. While Christ has not prescribed a set order for public worship, this does not mean that it is fitting to ignore proper and scriptural patterns of worship that have been historically observed by the church, particularly in the Reformed tradition. The order of worship should be so structured that there will be an enlightened movement on the part of the congregation from one element of the service to the next. When each act of worship is full of meaning, the order of the elements will assume a coherent, edifying form.

b. Worship should be conducted with regard to the time, taking care that neither reading, singing, praying, preaching, or any other ordinance be disproportionate one to the other, nor the whole rendered either too short or too tedious.

4. The session does well to ensure that the public worship assembly space is so arranged as to reflect and reinforce God's initiative in drawing near to and gathering his people through the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

a. Because the pulpit, baptismal font, and communion table facilitate the Word and sacraments, the part of worship which is performed on behalf of God, it is fitting that they be positioned so as to draw the focus of the congregation upon the Word and sacraments, and that they be easily accessible and visible to the entire congregation throughout the worship service. Because the Word is primary and the sacraments serve to seal the Word, it is fitting that the pulpit be in the position of prominence.

b. Because musicians and musical instruments serve the part of worship that is performed by the congregation, it is fitting that they be positioned with or behind the congregation.

#### **D. The Oversight and Conduct of Public Worship**

1. Public worship is Christian not only when the worshipers consciously recognize that Christ is the Mediator by whom alone they can come unto God but also when they honor the exalted Christ as the living and only Head of the church who rules over public worship.

a. He rules over public worship by his Word and Spirit, not only directly, but also through the ministry of officers in their ruling and teaching his church.

b. The exalted Christ thus applies himself and his benefits to the elect through his Spirit working in human hearts by and with his Word, especially in its public reading, its preaching, its sealing by the sacraments, and as it is received in faith by prayer.

2. For this reason:

a. The session is responsible to give immediate oversight to the conduct of public worship in the local church.

b. Public worship is ordinarily to be conducted by those who have been ordained to represent the Lord Jesus Christ in the administration of his Word and sacraments. The pastor of the church is ordinarily responsible to plan and conduct public worship.

c. Men who have been licensed by a presbytery to preach the gospel may plan and conduct worship as probationers in order that the churches may form a better judgment respecting the fitness of those by whom they are to be instructed and governed. They may not, however, pronounce the salutation or the benediction or administer the sacraments.

d. When the session deems it fitting, ruling elders may lead the congregation in prayer, read the Scriptures to the congregation, lead unison or antiphonal readings of Scripture by the congregation, lead congregational singing, or on occasion,

exhort the congregation as part of public worship. They may not, however, pronounce the salutation or the benediction or administer the sacraments.

e. On occasion, with the approval of the session and under the close supervision of a minister, exceptions may be made for other men being prepared for the gospel ministry in Christ's church who are either members of the congregation governed by that session or are ministerial interns under that session. They may not, however, pronounce the salutation or the benediction or administer the sacraments.

f. No others should take such leadership in overseeing or conducting public worship.