

Book of Church Order

Sandy Springs OPC summer Sunday school class • October 24, 2021

PREVIOUS LESSONS

The BCO contains our “tertiary standards” (derived from, and subordinate to, Scripture and Westminster): i.e., our versions of historic Presbyterianism’s Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory for Worship. The DW prescribes worship that’s engaged by the whole congregation, overseen by a session, and led by a minister. Our worship is Christ-mediated, gospel-focused, spiritually simple, biblically regulated, and dialogically structured:

- Parts “from God to the people” include calls to worship, Bible reading, preaching, sacraments, and blessings.
- Parts “from the people to God” include praying, singing, confessing our faith, and bringing offerings.

THIS LESSON: *Directory for Public Worship III-V (pp. 141-168) and Suggested Forms (pp. 181-211)*

III. The Administration of the Sacraments

A. General Provisions

1. participants should meditate beforehand on biblical and confessional teaching
- 1b, 4. pastor should preach on sacraments sometimes, on Christ always; explain meaning; use these forms
- 2, 3. baptize infants ASAP, adults when they profess faith; do Supper “frequently” as session says edifying

B. Baptism

1. The Baptism of Infants

- a. Prerequisites: one communicant member parent; apply to session first; parents must be taught

b. The Administration of Baptism to Infants

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| i. The Institution of the Sacrament (read Matthew 28:18-20) | vii. The Baptism (“I baptize you into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” while applying water) |
| ii. The Meaning and Nature of the Sacrament | viii. The Covenant Commitment of the Congregation |
| iii. Exhortation to the Members of the Congregation to Improve Their Baptism | ix. Charge |
| iv. The Ground of Baptizing Infants | x. Prayer |
| v. The Covenant Commitment of Parents | |
| vi. Prayer | |

2. The Baptism of Adults

- a. Prerequisites: follows a public profession of faith (cf. DW IV.A.3); both follow suitable teaching

b. The Administration of Baptism to Adults

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| i. The Institution of the Sacrament (read Matthew 28:18-20) | v. Prayer |
| ii. The Covenant Commitment of the One Receiving Baptism (i.e., profession of faith) | vi. The Baptism (cf. III.B.1.vii) |
| iii. The Meaning and Nature of the Sacrament | vii. The Covenant Commitment of the Congregation |
| iv. Exhortation to the Members of the Congregation to Improve Their Baptism | viii. Welcome and Charge |
| | ix. Prayer |

C. The Lord’s Supper

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| 1. The Institution of the Sacrament (read 1 Cor. 11:23-29, Matt. 26:26-29, or parallels; cf. John 6, 1 Cor. 10) | 6. Partaking of the Elements (“Our Lord Jesus, the same night he was betrayed... Our Lord Jesus said...”) |
| 2. The Meaning and Nature of the Sacrament | 7. Response of Thanksgiving and Commitment (pray again, sing a gospel hymn, and collect a diaconal offering) |
| 3. Invitation and Fencing the Table [note: this section assumes a three-part, verbal-only fencing] | 8. Blessing (Heb. 13:20-21 recommended) |
| 4. Exhortation | |
| 5. Prayer | |

IV. Public Reception of Church Members

A. General Provisions

- 1, 8. baptism and public profession of faith required for communicant church membership
2. session first teaches classes in “Christian doctrine and life” for noncommunicants and others interested
3. credible professions: session examines in knowledge, faith, and life, then announces on a prior Sunday
- 4, 5, 9. this chapter executes BD II.B.2; session must use vows exactly, or record and defend modifications
- 6, 7. children should join as noncommunicants along with their parents, but can only do so by baptism

B. Reception into Full Communion of Noncommunicant Members by Profession of Faith

1. minister explains to the person and congregation what's happening
2. person "professes faith" in **5 vows** (Bible, God, faith, godliness, church); personal testimony may be added
3. minister exhorts congregation to support person professing faith
4. minister welcomes person to communicant membership, and prays

C. Reception by Letter of Transfer from Another Orthodox Presbyterian Church: may be welcomed per IV.B.4

D. Reception by Letter of Transfer from Another Church of Like Faith and Practice: IV.B but modify explanation

E. Reception by Reaffirmation of Faith: IV.B but modify explanation

F. Reception of New Members by Public Profession of Faith: excerpted and repeated from III.B.2.b.ii (cf. IV.B)

V. Special Occasions of Public Worship

note: only the Lord's Day is holy, but responding to special providences is biblical and pastoral [and confessional]

A. Prayer and Fasting

1. occasions: lamenting calamity or sin; seeking some special blessing; ordaining a pastor (per FG XXIII.7)
2. judicatory declares a corporate (versus a private) day of fasting and prayer; consider civil calls for them
- 3, 4. announce corporate day of fasting in advance; ideally, gather for worship at some point during it

B. Thanksgiving

- 1, 2. judicatory declares a corporate (versus a private) day of thanksgiving; consider civil calls for them
- 3, 4. announce corporate day of thanksgiving in advance; ideally, gather for worship—and maybe feasting

SUGGESTED FORMS FOR PARTICULAR SERVICES

I. The Solemnization of Marriage

A. Guiding Principles

- 1, 2a, 5. follow the Bible's rules for marriage—and those of civil society, insofar as they don't contradict
- 2b. minister should offer the couple premarital counseling; he should focus on spiritual compatibility
- 3, 4. it's public: announce in advance, use certificates and witnesses, don't mix with Lord's Day worship

B. Suggested Form for a Wedding Service [*the following steps include "stage directions" and optional scripts*]

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| 1. Declaration of Purpose | 6. Homily ("a brief message ... appropriate to the occasion") | 9. Prayer |
| 2. Public Determination of Lawfulness | | 10. Declaration |
| 3. Public Declaration of Consent | | 11. Kiss |
| 4. Public Transfer of Authority | 7. Exchange of Vows | 12. Blessing |
| 5. Invocation | 8. Exchange of Rings, if desired | 13. Presentation |

II. The Burial of the Dead

A. Guiding Principles

- 1, 2. circumstances and timing can vary widely (e.g., funeral separated from burial), and require flexibility
 - a, d. exalt God (acts of worship should more prominent than "personal reference"), point to Christ
 - b, c. do not declare the dead to have been finally lost, nor imply the fruitless to have been saved
3. this OPC service assumes the dead was a Christian or a child of such, whose pastor normally officiates

B. Suggested Form for the Burial Service [*the following steps include "stage directions" and optional scripts*]

1. The Funeral
 - a. Opening Scripture Sentences
 - b. Prayer
 - c. Psalm or Hymn
 - d. Scripture Reading: Psalms
 - e. Scripture Reading: Gospel
 - f. Scripture Reading: Particular Needs (covenant children; sudden death; the elderly; notably godly)
 - g. Psalm or Hymn
 - h. Scripture Reading: Resurrection
 - i. Sermon ("It is appropriate that it be brief")
 - j. Psalm or Hymn
 - k. Prayer
2. The Interment
 - a. Scripture Sentences
 - b. Committal
 - c. Affirmation
 - d. Prayer

III. Thanksgiving for a Church Building

A. Guiding Principles: places *per se* aren't holy now—but thank God for providing one, maybe on the Lord's Day

B. A Service of Thanksgiving for a Church Building: session designs it; BCO suggests prayers and benediction