

Frequently Asked Questions about the Revised Directory for Worship

From the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Theology and Worship, July 2016

What is the Directory for Worship?

The Directory for Worship is part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *Book of Order*. It is the constitutional document that describes our theology and practice of worship. Our Directory for Worship has its roots in the 1645 Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God. Presbyterians in the United States used variations on that document for 170 years, until the 1960s, when the UPCUSA and PCUS wrote new Directories for Worship. In 1989, after the reunion that formed the PC(USA), those two Directories were combined and revised to form our current Directory for Worship.

Why is the Directory for Worship important?

We use the Directory for Worship like a compass—giving us our bearings, orienting us toward primary things in worship, and always pointing to the glory of God. Our *Book of Common Worship* is something like a map—showing us the liturgical landscape and providing reliable, faithful paths for the journey. The Directory for Worship helps us navigate the relationship between the freedom and form in worship. It guides us in the ongoing reform of worship according to God’s Word and Spirit. A Directory for Worship can also provide for a variety of worship styles and encourage diverse cultural expressions.

Why are we revising the Directory for Worship?

Our current Directory for Worship has served the church well for twenty-seven years. But over the years, some concerns have emerged. Some find the current Directory to be overly long and complicated in its organization. For example, the theology and practice of Sunday worship is divided between two chapters. The church is changing; we need a Directory for Worship that is more flexible and responsive to the needs of new worshiping communities and multicultural congregations. The past few decades have also brought a remarkable season of sacramental renewal and ecumenical convergence in worship. All of these factors have influenced the proposed revision.

How was this revision done?

In 2006, the General Assembly called for a draft revision of the Directory for Worship that would be “authentically Reformed,” “culturally appropriate,” “more accessible and helpful,” and “shorter and better organized.” The action was delayed during the work to revise our Form of Government. After *that* revision was approved, the Office of Theology and Worship prepared a first draft.

In 2013, a diverse consultation of pastors, professors, and mid-council leaders reviewed the draft and suggested further changes. A new version was sent to the General Assembly in 2014 with the recommendation of a year-long period of study and comment. The church responded with enthusiastic affirmation of the revision, but also helpful ideas for improving it. A second consultation made further revisions, and a new draft was prepared for consideration by the 222nd General Assembly (2016). After minor revisions, that draft was approved with overwhelming support. The proposed revision is now under consideration by presbyteries for inclusion in the *Book of Order*.

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What's new in this revision?

This is a revision, not a completely *new* Directory for Worship. It seeks to uphold and preserve the spirit and strength of our current Directory: giving glory to God; focusing on Jesus Christ, crucified and risen; insisting on the centrality of Scripture and the unity of Word and Sacrament.

Yet this *is* a significant and thorough revision, seeking to speak faithfully to the church in this time and place. It highlights the classic Reformed theme of grace and gratitude. It introduces new sections on worship and culture and the work of the Holy Spirit. It is rewritten with a variety of worshiping communities and cultural contexts in mind. The language is more accessible and the organization is more intuitive and user-friendly. The structure is simplified and streamlined, with five chapters instead of seven. Redundancies are eliminated. Last, but not least, the proposed revision is roughly 9,000 words shorter, two-thirds the length of the current Directory for Worship.

What else is important to know?

The work on the proposed revision didn't address marriage, since changes to that section were already being considered by a different committee at the 2014 General Assembly. The latest draft of the revision now reflects the changes on marriage approved at that Assembly. On the question of whether persons who are not yet baptized should be admitted to the Lord's Supper, the revision reflects pastoral guidance offered by the 2010 General Assembly: "All who come to the table are offered the bread and cup, regardless of their age or understanding. If some of those who come have not yet been baptized, an invitation to baptismal preparation and Baptism should be graciously extended" (W-3.0409 of the proposed revision).

What's next?

As noted above, the proposed revision has now been approved by the 222nd General Assembly (2016). If a majority of presbyteries also approve, the revision will become a part of the PC(USA) *Book of Order*. At that time the Office of Theology and Worship will update the online edition to include links to biblical and confessional sources, related documents and instructional videos, and other educational materials on worship in the Reformed tradition.

A Prayer for This Process

Holy God,
as in Jesus Christ
you came to show us the way,
the truth, and the life,
guide our steps
and direct our lives
so that we may worship you
in spirit and in truth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.