

Golden Rules for Worship and Sacraments Examination

The Worship and Sacraments exam provides an opportunity for the candidate to show how the Directory for Worship provides direction as he or she seeks to lead God's people in worship, faithful to the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS testifies to the core of life in the community of faith and our Presbyterian sense that there are standards for our celebrations which represent the wisdom of our heritage of working out the implication of Scripture in the practicalities of celebrating God's presence.

In preparation for taking the Standardized examination in Worship and Sacraments, it would be helpful to know and on occasion to review what the examination is testing. The Book of Order states:

"Worship and Sacraments. This examination shall assess the candidate's understanding of the meaning and purpose of corporate worship and the sacraments, familiarity with the Directory for Worship and the Book of Confessions, and their application to the life of worshipping communities."

It is our judgment that each examination should be crafted in such a way that candidates are required to demonstrate the following:

1. An ability to articulate specific provisions of the Directory for Worship and to apply them in concrete contexts for ministry.
2. An ability to illustrate the connection between the contemporary understandings and practices of worship set forth in the Directory for Worship and the theological heritage of the Reformed tradition as it is expressed in the Book of Confessions.
3. An ability to construe or articulate a theological framework for addressing issues and practices related to worship and sacraments that arise from contemporary contexts for ministry.
4. An ability to reflect theologically on the many different relationships between the church's worship and celebration of sacraments and how it carries out its ministry and mission in the world.
5. An ability to respond to individuals or groups in given situations with sensitivity to their needs, while also expressing the spirit of the constitutional standards.

The best resources for study of a particular subject are the original documents. That holds true for the Worship and Sacraments Examination. In preparation for taking the exam, there is no substitute for a thorough knowledge of the Directory for Worship. This is the constitutional document that forms the basis for the examination. At this time, the examination is closed book and with the increase of material contained in the new Directory, it is imperative that the candidate have as thorough a knowledge of it as possible.

The worship life of our denomination reflects conviction that the church's worship, witness and service are inseparable, and that the worship of our churches is informed by Reformed theology. It is important for the candidate to have a knowledge of the theological basis for our worship, therefore, a knowledge of the Book of Confessions helps us to answer some of those "Why?" questions that not only appear in the examination, but also confront the pastor in the parish setting. The candidate will find helpful that the Directory for Worship has been "created in harmony with Scripture and the Book of Confessions," and that when possible the biblical texts or the confessional material that gave rise to a section in the Directory for Worship is noted in the text.

The candidate will be expected to demonstrate "pastoral sensitivity" to those persons involved in the situation. The readers will be looking for sincere and concrete expressions of the care and understanding that our people deserve. There is no real way to prepare to be examined in this, simply to be aware of what people in a given situation are feeling. At times, it might be necessary to "read between the lines" of the situation to get at what is really going on. Many students have said that the best way to prepare for the Worship and Sacraments Examination in general, and this component of the exam, is to practice using old examinations. Actually "taking" the exam, writing out the answers and having those answers graded has been found to a good way to mentally prepare. Talking through questions and situations is another good way to prepare. This also helps to sharpen one's focus on different pastoral issues in given situations.

It is expected that the candidate in taking the exams will be able to apply their understanding of Reformed worship to situations involving other liturgical traditions. As stated in the instructions, a knowledge of these other traditions is not required. The candidate will not be asked to compare and contrast the Presbyterian understanding of sacramental theology with that of the Pentecostal or Roman Catholic traditions. What is expected is that the candidate will have an informed knowledge of what we as Presbyterians hold to be the "meaning and purpose of corporate worship and the Sacraments."

Worship and Sacraments Task Group
Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee
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April 1994 (Revised)

Preparation Suggestions for Worship and Sacraments Exam

1. The questions will often be framed in such a way that it appears you must choose between being pastoral and being constitutional. Do not fall for this. Your task is to show how the constitution is ultimately very pastoral. (Which it is!) For instance: if someone comes to you and asks to become a member, and requests baptism, though they were baptized as an infant, the constitution forbids it. If their reason is that they have really had no connection with the church since they were a small child, and now after decades of absence, they have really come to faith, and feel baptism would now be appropriate, the answer is still no. But the question may be phrased in such a way that their feeling of need for baptism really makes you want to be able to do it, and the fact that something negative is thereby being said about all the other infant baptisms in the congregation is overlooked. A simple "I cannot do it because the Directory for Worship does not permit it" is not good enough. Imagine all sorts of situations--especially about requests for baptism and the Lord's Supper--that violate the Directory, and give responses that show how the constitution is really guarding the most significant meanings of the sacraments. This could best be done in a small group.
2. Be very clear who is in charge of making what decisions. Who decides what hymnbook the congregation uses? Who decides what hymns shall be sung on Sunday morning? Who decides how communion will be served? Who decides what shall be prayed for? Who decides who will be baptized? Who decides what scripture will be read on Sunday? Who decides how baptisms will be performed--by immersion, etc.? In this regard, do not look only at the Directory for Worship, but check also in the duties of elders.
3. Be aware of the most significant changes that have occurred in the past thirty years or so in the Directory itself. Many things are now permitted that were not earlier, i.e. baptized children at communion, anointing with oil in baptism, wine served in communion, people coming forward for communion, liturgical dance, members other than elders serving communion, session making the decision as to what infants will be baptized, etc. These are items that members are likely to assume are still to be done "the old way" and they are not prepared for the changes. Many of these opinions will be voiced in the questions. There is need not only to explain the Directory as it stands, but to be sympathetic to those who are doing what they assume is still required. Some word about why the changes have occurred would be helpful.
4. When the question gives a list of people who are voicing opinions, they each need to be addressed by name in the answer. The trouble is the answers have to be brief, and there is danger of appearing condescending. Be careful to address each separate concern carefully, showing both pastoral sensitivity and the requirements of the Directory.
5. The church has produced many resources that are in accord with the Directory but are not required. For instance, the Book of Common Worship offers services that are in accord with the Directory, but almost none of the specific wording of the services given is required. There are also services of Daily Prayer that are very new to most people. You need to be aware that many of the newer items--liturgical year, lectionary, daily prayer written out, etc.--are viewed by some Presbyterians as "much too Catholic" and therefore unPresbyterian. The reasons for these

resources, and their usefulness in the church need to be clearly thought through.

6. There is a new stress in the Directory on intergenerational worship, which involves not dismissing the children to a special children's church. This involves changing many things in the worship and is a major source of consternation to many older members. Think about what could be done to make this work, as well as reasons why it is stressed.

7. There will definitely be a question on one of the sacraments. There will probably also be a question that deals with chapter 7 and the new emphases that the Directory includes. Review these issues carefully.

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August, 1998