

PREPARING FOR THE WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS EXAMINATION

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Worship and Sacraments examination provides an opportunity for the candidate to show how The Book of Confessions and the Directory for Worship provide direction for those seeking to lead God's people in worship, faithful to the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS are central to the development of faithful disciples within a community of faith. Because they are so central to our identity, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has always embraced the sense that our liturgical celebrations should be ordered according to constitutional standards. These standards are not so much "rules" as they are a communal discernment of, and reflection on, what God in Scripture would have us do and say in our worship.

II. WHAT THE EXAMINATION TESTS

In preparing for the standard 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."

III. THE FOCUS IN EACH SECTION OF THE EXAMINATION

The Worship and Sacraments Examination consists of three sections: Reformed Liturgical Heritage; Constructive Theological Reflection on Reformed Worship; and Application to Ministry.

Reformed Liturgical Heritage (One Hour, Required)

The worship life of our denomination reflects the conviction that the church's worship, witness and service are inseparable and that the worship of our churches is to be informed by Reformed theology. It is thus important for you to demonstrate your knowledge of the theological foundations for our worship. A well-grounded knowledge of The Book of Confessions is essential for answering some of those "why" questions that confront pastors in a parish setting. Moreover, the Directory for Worship was "Created in harmony with Scripture and The Book of Confessions."

This section of the examination is designed specifically to assess your ability to function as a practical theologian within the distinctive framework of a Reformed theological and liturgical heritage as these are expressed within The Book of Confessions and the Directory for Worship. Because this question always requires you to cite specific passages from The Book of Confessions, you will be permitted to use a clean, unmarked copy of that constitutional resource for this section of the examination only.

Ordinarily, the required responses will indicate the minimum number of citations from The Book of Confessions required for an acceptable response. In some cases you will discover a potentially large number of possible BOC citations from which to draw; in other cases, you may discover that the number of appropriate citations is more limited. In either case, you should always seek to cite those passages, which focus most directly on the issue at hand.

When the issue is addressed in several creeds or confessions - - or when the confessional tradition witnesses to differences in emphasis, particularly between one historical era and another

- - the citations offered by you should show that you are aware of the broad sweep of the Reformed confessional tradition.

The required responses do not call for you to cite specific passages from the Directory for Worship, but they do insist that you demonstrate a sufficient awareness of the Directory's provisions, which bear upon the issue under discussion. Some questions may move from a knowledge of The Book of Confessions to a particular liturgical situation, while others may arise within a worship context and need support from The Book of Confessions.

Constructive Theological Reflection on Reformed Worship (One Hour, Required)

The Directory for Worship, adopted in 1989, includes mandated and proscribed practices, but it also sets forth a fundamental practical theology of Christian worship, within which pastors and congregations are encouraged to explore new possibilities for worship that are appropriate to particular congregational contexts. Thus your ability to function as a practical liturgical theologian, to develop a Reformed theological framework within which to address difficult questions, concerns or issues is a necessary dimension of "readiness for ministry" and the focus of this section of the examination.

This section of the examination asks you to engage in constructive theological reflection on a significant issue or practice within the church's understanding and practice of worship. Thus reflection, which is to be shaped by the specific form of the required responses, must be done in a way that demonstrates familiarity with the provisions of the Directory for Worship.

In many instances, the specific issue or practice under consideration is not addressed directly in the Directory of Worship. In every case, however, it is possible to use the provisions of the Directory for Worship to develop or construct a theological framework within which the issue can be understood and addressed in ways faithful to the spirit of the Directory.

In constructing this theological framework, you will need to weave together provisions from a variety of places within the Directory, but the fundamental building blocks for this task can often be found most often in Chapter 1 (the dynamics of worship), Chapter 2 (the elements of worship) and Chapter 3 (ordering worship).

Application to Ministry (One Hour, Two questions: Choose One)

You will be expected to demonstrate "appropriate 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 people deserve.

This section of the examination requires you to answer one of two questions. The distinctive emphasis in this final section of the examination is your ability to apply provisions in the Directory for Worship to concrete situations, which might occur in the practice of ministry, and to do so in ways that demonstrate appropriate pastoral sensitivity to particular persons. This section of the examination is particularly important in discerning your readiness for ministry. While knowledge of the provisions of the Directory for Worship is essential, it is also insufficient. Your ability to respond to particular persons in a pastorally appropriate manner is also essential.

Often, the questions for this section of the examination focus upon your understanding of the material in chapter 4 (ordering worship for special occasions), chapter 5 (worship and personal discipleship), chapter 6 (worship and the church's ministries of nurture and pastoral care) and sometimes used to test your

ability to apply your knowledge of the Directory's understanding and practice of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

You will not have access to either The Book of Confessions or the Directory for Worship for this portion of the examination. Thus, while you are expected to demonstrate familiarity with the provisions of the Directory, you are not expected to be able to cite or quote specific passages. Moreover, the readers do not expect that you will be able to deal with all the possible issues and directory provisions.

IV. HELPFUL HINTS FOR ANSWERING EACH SECTION OF THE EXAMINATION

Perhaps the most important preparation you can make is to pay attention to the language of the Preface to the Book of Order, particularly the hermeneutical or interpretive framework for reading the Constitution which is set forth in the Preface.

- (1) SHALL and IS TO BE/ARE TO BE signify practice that is mandated,
- (2) SHOULD signifies practice that is strongly recommended,
- (3) IS APPROPRIATE signifies practice that is commended as suitable.
- (4) MAY signifies practice that is permissible but not required.

Liturgical Heritage

Begin your preparation by studying those sections of The Book of Confessions, which are referenced in footnotes throughout the Directory for Worship. These references indicate how the committee that developed the Directory attempted to do its work in conversation with our Reformed theological heritage. These references are important in seeing the connections between particular provisions of the Directory and particular creedal or confessional texts. Expand your preparation by reflecting upon the relationship between particular doctrinal themes and the Directory's discussion of particular liturgical elements or celebrations. For example, the Directory lifts up the theological significance of "covenant" in its descriptions of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Marriage, etc.

Prepare for the Theological Competence and Worship and Sacraments examinations at the same time. What you learn preparing for one will almost always help you in your preparation for the other, since both examinations require a discussion of BOC citations.

Pay attention to the specific instructions in each of the required responses. If the response requires you to identify and discuss at least three confessional citations, then identify and discuss at least three citations, making certain that each of them is central to the issues or questions involved. If these three citations are on target, citing and discussing additional references will often lead a reader to raise the grade for this section. Failure to identify and discuss at least three citations, however, or simply listing without discussing any number of citations will result in a failing grade for this section of the examination. In addition, when the instruction require you to do something in the second part of the answer on the basis of your answer in the first part, make sure you show the connection.

Readers are given these or similar instructions in grading this section of the examination:

"One key to be considered in assigning a grade for this section is the extent to which the required responses cohere with one another. In other words, does the candidate's answer in the second part of the question really flow from and reflect the answer given in the first section. Candidates do have access to a clean, unmarked copy of The Book of Confessions during this portion of the examination. By contrast, candidates never have access to the text of the Directory for Worship for any section of the examination. As a result, they should not be expected to cite or quote specific passages from the directory in their

answers, though they should clearly demonstrate their knowledge of its provisions. Candidates will need to build links between the confessions' and creeds' teaching and the church's understanding and practice.

It is not necessary for the candidate to cite and discuss every possible BOC reference, but those references cited and discussed should be central to the issue under discussion.”

Constructive Theological Reflection on Reformed Worship

In one sense, it is difficult to prepare for this section of the examination. In Section I, the focus upon the relationship between the church's worship and its confessional heritage provides a kind of road map for how to proceed. Likewise, in Section III the need to address a specific series of comments and questions and respond to particular persons in a pastorally appropriate manner sets up the answer in a very concrete way. Section II, by contrast, is more open-ended. The situation identifies a problem or concern that you will need to address, but asks that you first set up a theological framework within which you will attempt to address the problem or problems. In order to do that, you will need to make use of the Directory as whole, and not just those sections that may deal specifically with the topic at hand.

The most important thing to do is to focus upon the way the Directory for Worship is structured or organized, because it provides a model for how to construct a theological framework within which specific issues of understanding and practice can be addressed. The Directory begins (cf. Chapter 1) by outlining the theological foundations for Christian worship. It then moves on (cf. Chapter 2) to identify and discuss the essential elements of Christian worship. Next it discusses how worship is to be ordered in both ordinary contexts (cf. Chapter 3) and in special contexts (cf. Chapter 4). The remaining chapters are devoted to the relationship between the church's common worship and personal discipleship (cf. Chapter 5); the church's ministries of nurture and pastoral care (cf. Chapter 6); and the church's mission in the world (Cf. Chapter 7).

Ordinary, a passing answer in Section II of the examination will depend minimally upon your ability to work constructively with the provisions in the first three (sometimes four) chapters of the Directory. Occasionally, Section II will involve a situation which is discussed quite specifically in one of the later chapters of the Directory, but even in such cases, you can develop a perfectly acceptable passing answer just by drawing upon your knowledge of the provisions in the Directory's first three or four chapters. If your answer demonstrates your knowledge of all sections of the Directory, however, it will often merit you a superior score.

Work together with someone else (or several others) in your preparation, using questions of this type drawn from previous standard examinations or from questions developed by the members of the group. Focus upon pastoral situations that may seem to challenge the normative language of the Directory.

Remember that the first task is almost always to articulate a Reformed understanding or theological framework within which to address the specific issue, request or problem raised in the question. Absent that theological framework, the answer to the question will fail, even though the response to the specific situation might be in compliance with the Directory for Worship.

Readers are given these similar instructions to guide them in assessing answers in Section II:

“This section of the examination asks the candidate to engage in constructive reflection and on some liturgical topic or issue as this is informed by Reformed theology and practice. This constructive statement is to be shaped by the specific form of the two required responses. The answer must be one that demonstrates familiarity with the provisions of the Directory for Worship, but not The Book of Confessions. In order to receive a passing grade on this section of the examination, the candidate must fulfill both required responses. The first required response asks the candidate to articulate a Reformed

theological framework for understanding some matter within the worship life of the church. The second required response ask the candidate - - informed by his or her answer in the first required response - - to engage in a practical theological task (e.g., writing a newsletter article). The range of possible answers to the second required response will depend upon the number and quality of the directory resources chosen by the candidate in developing the theological framework. In every case, however, the answer to the second required response must grow out of the theological framework offered in the first required response. In this section of the examination, there is no explicit rubric requiring the candidate to demonstrate “appropriate pastoral sensitivity” in responding. Thus, one may not grade a candidate’s answer higher or lower because of the pastoral sensitivity issue here. On the other hand, if the candidate shows either remarkable pastoral sensitivity or frighteningly high insensitivity in responding, you would be fully justified in pointing it out in a note to the CPM. One could argue the readiness for ministry includes demonstrating appropriate pastoral sensitivity all the time, not merely when one is “on duty.” Demonstration of appropriate pastoral sensitivity is specifically at issue in Part III of the examination; because of the need to bring together many ideas from the Directory in a very brief time, however, it is not central in this section of the examination.

Application to Ministry

Questions in this section are taken from every part of the Directory for Worship.

One of the things that makes this section of the examination distinctive is the focus upon liturgical and sacramental practices - - including some practices with which you may be unfamiliar - - within a variety of congregational contexts. Thus, one of the first steps in preparing for this section of the examination would be to review chapters three and four, where the many ways in which the ordering of such “practices” is set forth. Pay attention to three things in particular: first, norms regarding sacramental celebrations; second, the fundamental patterns or frameworks for ordering Christian worship; and third, the wide variety and distinctive character of services appropriate for special purposes.

Pay attention to the ways in which the directory links the whole of the Christian life to worship, such that worship shapes and is shaped by personal discipleship, communal nurture and care, and the church’s mission in the world. Note the explicit ways in which patterns and norms from earlier chapters in the directory take form in the directory’s discussion of the relationship between, e.g., worship and the church’s ministry of evangelism or social justice.

This section of the examination is focused in a very particular way by the setting of the question. Often, the comments or questions of other persons will lift up the issues to be explored and you will be required to show “appropriate pastoral sensitivity” in responding to these persons. Pastoral sensitivity includes both affirmation and confrontation, but it never involves manipulating or demeaning the persons involved.

Readers of the examinations are reminded that there are often multiple issues that could be addressed on the basis of the situation, and that candidates may choose from among them in answering the question. If the situation involves several people and you asked to discuss at least one issue raised by each of them, your answer needs to show that you have done so. Occasionally, the questions in this section of the exam will ask you to discuss particular types of worship services or to write prayers appropriate for sacramental celebrations, based on the provisions of the Directory for Worship. In such cases, readers are advised of the possible alternative ways that candidates may take in developing passing answers.