

Overture RSE 2021

The overture was presented by the Flamborough–Redemption CanRC to Classis Central Ontario June 2021, which adopted it.

It was then presented by CCO June 2021 to Regional Synod East 2021, which adopted the overture in the light of certain considerations.

It is now being submitted by RSE 2021 to General Synod 2022, **along with the entire decision of RSE 2021 (appended below).**

Overture to the 2022 General Synod to provisionally adopt, for immediate use and testing in the churches, shorter liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper

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A. Current Practice

In the 2020 *Yearbook* for the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, 62 congregations are listed.¹ Five additional congregations, which came into existence after the publishing date, are unlisted: Devon AB, Pathway BC, Refuge BC, Niagara South ON, and Mercy ON. Of the 67 congregations/plants, 57 celebrate the Lord’s Supper on a bi-monthly basis; 6 on a quarterly basis;² and only 4 on a monthly basis.³

B. Greater Frequency Not Forbidden

Neither Holy Scripture⁴, the Confessions,⁵ nor the Church Order⁶ prohibit a local church from celebrating the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper more frequently than any Canadian Reformed congregations currently do.

¹ This number includes the non-instituted “plants” of Streetlight (Hamilton) ON, Prince George BC, Ambassador (Niverville) MB and Rivers MB.

² Attercliffe ON, Covenant (Grassie) ON, Houston BC, River MB, Orangeville ON

³ Redeemer (Winnipeg) MB, and the non-instituted “plants” of Streetlight (Hamilton) ON, Ambassador (Niverville) MB; Prince George BC.

⁴ The following synoptic Gospel accounts describe the institution of the Lord’s Supper: Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–23. None speak explicitly to frequency. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul addresses problematic issues related to praxis of the Lord’s Supper in Corinth (1 Corinthians 10—11). While there are no explicit instructions on frequency, it would seem from the fact that abuse of the Lord’s Supper was such a problem that the Supper was held frequently, perhaps even weekly. The repeated phrase of vv. 17, 18, 20, 33 “when you come together” suggests that when the Corinthian church gathered it ate a meal which was intended to be the Lord’s Supper. Finally, descriptive

C. Reformation Precedent (Frequency)

Among the reformers of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation it is clear that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was of the utmost importance in the church of Christ. There was the 'service of the Word' and the "service of the Lord's Supper."⁷ A number of these same reformers also favoured weekly communion, among whom was found, perhaps most notably, John Calvin.⁸

passages such as Acts 2:42 and Acts 20:7 have also been used to argue for a greater frequency of celebrating the Lord's Supper than any Canadian Reformed Churches currently does.

⁵ The *Heidelberg Catechism*, in Lord's Days 28–30, provides a theological framework for understanding the sacrament, but does not address the matter of frequency. In the *Belgic Confession*, Article 35 we find Guido de Brès' theological explanation about the Lord's Supper. An explicit discussion about frequency is absent, although, from his remarks about our "physical life" being sustained by daily bread, one could suggest de Brès implicitly argues for a greater frequency (rather than lesser) of eating and drinking the sacramental bread and wine.

⁶ Church Order, Article 60 stipulates the minimum number of times a congregation should ordinarily celebrate the Lord's Supper annually when it states, "The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated at least every three months."

⁷ In *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, (New Growth Press: Greensboro NC, 2018), pp. 57–59, under a heading, "Christian Worship Incorporates the Visible Word," Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earngey write, "Undergirding the significant theological debates between the Lutheran and Reformed camps over the presence of Christ, and the intramural debates among the Reformed camp itself, was the universal agreement on the importance of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Christian worship entailed two kinds of service: the service of the Word and the service of the Lord's Supper. While they were distinct, they were, for many of the Reformers, inseparable. Indeed, so often the service of the Word naturally led into the service of the Sacrament. The Lord's Supper was not hastily 'tacked on' to the 'end' of the service of the Word—a practice that modern evangelical churches would do well to remedy. Rather, the Reformers understood the Lord's Supper to be of great pastoral import—invaluable as a means of grace, and equal in importance to the service of the Word. For the Lord's Supper was not only a sign of Christ's body broken and his blood shed; it was also a means of spiritual strengthening through the same Lord Jesus. The differing approaches to the frequency of Communion did not necessarily reflect differing understandings of its importance. This is perhaps best seen in the carefully crafted words of the services of the Lord's Supper, which reflected the Lord's passion and death, climaxed in the various forms of distribution, and which found their denouement in the gentle and heartfelt words of the post-Communion praise. The liturgies of the Reformation intended for there to be a profound meeting with Christ at the table. For example, in his Form and Manner, Oecolampadius said that God's people were to reflect upon the words of institution in the Supper, 'as if you sat near Christ and heard it from him.' The spiritual profundity of encountering Christ in the Supper was captured well by Cranmer:

[O]ur Savior Christ has not only set forth these things most plainly in his holy Word, that we may hear them with our ears, but he has also ordained one visible sacrament of spiritual regeneration in water, and another visible sacrament of spiritual nourishment in bread and wine to be the intent, that as much as possible for man, we may see Christ with our eyes, smell him at our nose, taste him with our mouths, touch him with our hands, and perceive him with all our senses. For as the Word of God preached puts Christ into our ears, so likewise these elements of water, bread and wine, joined to God's Word, so after a sacramental manner, put Christ into our eyes, mouths, hands and all our senses.

Such effective (and affective) words challenge the modern minister to reflect on how he regulates this visible Word. If the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper presents Christ to his people with such pastoral profundity—to 'all our senses,' as Cranmer put it—why would any church minimize the pastoral ministry by neglecting or limiting the practice of Lord's Supper? The command of the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed to 'take and eat,' to 'drink and remember,' is as relevant today for the modern church as it was to the small apostolic church that met for the Last Supper. 'It is a visible word,' wrote English Reformer John Hooper, 'that preaches peace between God and man, exhorts to mutual love and godly life, [and] teaches to condemn the world for the hope of the life to come.'"

⁸ Calvin used surprisingly strong language in condemning the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper only one time per year. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.43–46 he writes, "Plainly this custom which enjoins us to take communion once a year is a veritable invention of the devil, whoever was instrumental in introducing it...For there is not the least doubt that the Sacred Supper was in that era [the early church] set before the believers every time they met together; and there is no doubt that a majority of them took communion... It should have been done far differently: the Lord's Table should have been spread at least once a week for the assembly of Christians, and the promises declared in it should feed us spiritually." Towards the end of his life Calvin continued to express regret that he was unable to convince the church in Geneva to adopt a more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. He wrote, "I have taken care to record publicly that our

D. Desire for Increased Frequency of Lord’s Supper Celebrations and Shorter Forms

Today, there is a growing desire among some ministers of the Word and many members within the Canadian Reformed Churches to celebrate the Lord’s Supper more frequently, even weekly.⁹ In connection with this first desire, there is a second desire for shorter liturgical forms.¹⁰

E. Approved Liturgical Forms

Church Order, Article 56 states, “The sacraments shall be administered only under the authority of the consistory, in a public worship service, by a minister of the Word, with the use of the adopted forms.” Currently, the Canadian Reformed churches have only two “adopted forms”: the “Form for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper” and the “Abbreviated Form for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper (For the Second Service).” Both of these forms are rather long. The “Regular” form is approximately 2600 words in length, while the “Abbreviated” form is approximately 1500 words in length.

According to the National Center for Voice and Speech, “The average rate of speech for English speakers in the United States is about 150 words per minute...”¹¹ Based on an average rate of speech (i.e. 150 wpm), the “Form for the Celebration of Lord’s Supper” will take, on average, 17.27 minutes to read, while the “Abbreviated Form for the Celebration for the Lord’s Supper (For the Second Service)” will take, on average, 9.8 minutes to read. In practice, however, the average rate of conversational speech is quicker than one might find in a corporate worship setting, including the reading of liturgical forms.¹² Taking this into consideration, along with the local variables in the actual celebration of the sacrament (communal cup at the table(s), or individual cups in the pew; length of

custom is defective, so that those who come after me may be able to correct it the more freely and easily” (cf. Bretschneider, *Corpus Reformatorum*, XXXVIII, i, p. 213).

⁹ Most recently, see Reverend James Zekveld’s 8-part blog series: “At Least Weekly” Accessed on April 19, 2021. Available online at <https://www.jameszekveld.com/2020/06/22/at-least-weekly-part-1-of-8/>

These blog posts were edited and published in subsequent issues of the *Clarion* magazine.

See also, Paul Aasman, “Celebration of the Lord’s Supper: How Often?: The Early Church Through the Middle Ages” in *Clarion* (February 21, 1991) and Paul Aasman, “Celebration of the Lord’s Supper: How Often?: From the Reformation to Today” in *Clarion* (March 7, 1997); Theodore E. Lodder’s four part article series “The frequency of the Lord’s Supper celebration” in *Clarion* (October 10, 2008; October 24, 2008; November 7, 2008; January 2, 2009); C.J. Smelik, “The Festive Meal in Christ’s Congregation” in *Diakonia* (March 4, 1991, Vol IV No. 3); T. Brienens, “The Lord’s Supper Celebration with Calvin” in *Diakonia* (June 2001, Vol. XV No. 1).

¹⁰ Beginning already in the 1970s there was a desire for shorter liturgical forms. In its considerations, GS 1977 spoke about “...taking into account the desirability of having an abbreviated version of the Form for the Lord’s Supper...” (*Acts* GS 1977, Art. 60, p. 26). GS 1983 received a request to “revoke the decision of the General Synod Smithville...” To add in the title of the Abbreviated Form, between brackets (For the afternoon service), and replace it by the following statement ‘It should be noted that the Abbreviated Form is not mean as a replacement of the original Form, but is to be used in addition to it for making it easier to have more celebrations of the Lord’s Supper that the minimum 4 or 6 times a year...’ (*Acts* GS 1983, Art. 145, Ovs. 6.2.2, pp. 97–98).

¹¹ “The National Center for Voice and Speech-Tutorials-Voice Production.” Accessed on April 19, 2021. Available online at: <http://www.ncvs.org/ncvs/tutorials/voiceprod/tutorial/quality.html>

¹² By way of comparison, according to Reverend A.B. Roukema, in a “live” worship service context at the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church of Burlington, the actual time for reading the forms, and celebrating the sacrament are as follows (individual cups in the pew with approximately 250 communicant members participating): Using the “Form for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper” the reading of the first section of the form took 16 minutes and 20 seconds, the actual celebration of the Lord’s Supper took 10 minutes 49 seconds (5:14 for the bread; 5:35 for the wine), and the remainder of the form (doxology/thanksgiving prayer) took 5 minutes and 41 seconds. A total of 32 minutes and 30 seconds. Using the “Abbreviated Form for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper (For the Second Service)” the reading of the first section of the form took 12 minutes and 28 seconds, the actual celebration of the Lord’s Supper took 11 minutes (5 minutes for the bread; 6 minutes for the wine), and the remainder of the form (doxology/thanksgiving prayer) took 4 minutes and 48 seconds. A total of 25 minutes and 4 seconds.

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table reading and singing), a congregation might expect the Lord's Supper celebration to take anywhere from 25–45 minutes.

While there are two “adopted” forms, the official *Acts* of General Synod 1980 and 1983 suggest that the “Abbreviated” form was never intended to be a stand-alone liturgical form. Instead, on Sundays when a congregation might require a second celebration of the Lord's Supper, the “Abbreviated” form is intended to be read in concert with the morning's reading of the “Regular” form.¹³ In essence, then, there is only one “adopted” form for regular celebrations of the Lord's Supper, rather than two.

F. Reformation Precedent (Didactic Forms) and Contextualization

It is understandable that lengthy didactic forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper were crafted and utilized in the years following the Protestant Reformation. Many members of Reformation churches had been raised in the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, these members needed (re)education in the basic aspects of the sacraments as a means of grace.¹⁴ For example, in the third edition of the German version of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, question and answer 80 was added to help church members see the theological distinction between the Lord's Supper and the papal mass. There it states unequivocally: “Therefore the mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry.”¹⁵

After nearly five hundred years much has changed in the composition of many Reformed churches, including the Canadian Reformed Churches. The vast majority of communicant membership has not been raised in a Roman Catholic context, nor is it comprised of first-generation believers. Instead, the majority of church membership is comprised of “cradle” Christians, born, raised and catechized¹⁶ in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Furthermore, Church Order, Article 52 prevents the confessions, specifically the *Heidelberg Catechism*, from collecting dust on a shelf.¹⁷ Each Sunday, the doctrines in

¹³ *Acts* GS 1980, Art. 136, p. 104: “It should be noted that the Abbreviated Form is not meant as a replacement to the original Form, rather as a help to be used in the p.m. service when also a sermon is delivered.” For this reason, GS 1980 adopted the following motion: “To add to the title of the Abbreviated Form, between brackets (For the Afternoon Service)” (Art. 136, Rec. 1, p. 104). In response to an appeal to remove the bracketed (For the Afternoon Service), *Acts* GS 1983, Art. 145, Cons. 4.E.1, p. 102): “Since this form is not meant to replace the longer form, a decision to say that ‘at least once a year the original form must be used’ would promote such replacing.”

¹⁴ The reformer John Knox, who was heavily influenced by the likes of John Calvin and the church in sixteenth century Geneva, writes a concluding note for readers of his lengthy liturgical form *The Manner of the Lord's Supper* [Form of Prayers 1556; Book of Common Order 1564]. It is clear from Knox's explanation that he was aware of how such a lengthy didactic form about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper might give rise to questions about its necessity. Again, the motive behind such a lengthy form was derived from an historical context in which many church members, who had been raised in a Roman Catholic context, required proper theological education about the right use of the Lord's Supper contra the Roman Catholic Mass. He writes: “If it so be, that any would marvel why we follow this order, rather than any other in the administration of the Sacrament, let him diligently consider, that, first of all, we utterly renounce the error of the papists; secondly, we restore to the Sacraments their own substance; and to Christ, his proper place. And as for the words of the Lord's Supper, we do not rehearse them because they should change the substance of bread and wine, or because the repetition of them with the intent of the sacrifice should make the Sacrament, as the papists falsely believe...” (Jonathan Gibson & Mark Earngey, *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, pp. 57–59).

¹⁵ Andrew Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort and Joy: A Study of the Heidelberg Catechism* (CRC Publications: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1988), p. 183

¹⁶ Church Order, Article 16 states, “The specific duties of the minister of the Word are thoroughly and sincerely to proclaim to the congregation the Word of the Lord, to administer the sacraments... also to instruct the children of the church in the doctrine of salvation.” Under normal circumstances this implies that ministers of the Word will catechize the youth of the congregation in the doctrine of salvation, which typically includes a treatment of the sacraments.

¹⁷ Church Order, Article 52: “The consistory shall ensure that, as a rule, once every Sunday the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism is proclaimed.”

the *Heidelberg Catechism* are to be explained. Under normal circumstances this implies that a confessional treatment of the sacraments, including a full treatment of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, should take place, in the context of a public worship service, at least once every eighteen months. In this way the sacraments will be rightly understood and administered. Consequently, the necessity to always instruct members about the meaning of the Lord's Supper via liturgical forms is not what it once was.¹⁸

The era of Covid restrictions on worship gatherings (in Ontario, first a cap of 5 persons, then 30% capacity, then 10 persons, then 15%, then 10 persons) exposed the challenge posed by lengthy liturgical forms and the desire for multiple celebrations of the Lord's Supper at a frequency greater than the typical bi-monthly rate among the churches. Various consistories felt compelled to adopt unconventional approaches to the celebration of Lord's Supper. Some churches, in an effort to provide all communicant members the opportunity to participate in the Lord's Supper, held multiple celebrations each Sunday (2–3 services), or on consecutive Sundays. In an effort to avoid unnecessary duplication or repetition of reading from the lengthy forms some churches only read from the "Abbreviated Form." Others read one of the liturgical forms at the first celebration, and only the smallest of sections at subsequent celebrations. Still, other ministers paraphrased lengthy sections of the adopted forms. Clearly the various consistories agreed, different circumstances (more frequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper) required a modified approach to the use of the current liturgical forms.

G. Confessions

Two of the Canadian Reformed Churches' confessional documents provide extensive teaching on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.¹⁹ In the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 25, under its treatment of the 'means of grace' we confess the primacy of the Word over the sacraments. Through the Word, the Holy Spirit creates faith, while through the sacraments the Holy Spirit strengthens existing faith. It was this conviction that led the reformers to replace the altar of the papal mass with a pulpit at the front of the church auditorium for the preaching of the Word. This theological conviction continues to impact the liturgies of reformation churches to this day.

Interestingly, in the Palatinate Church Order (1563, Heidelberg), the preface to the original "Form for the Celebration of the Holy Supper," which is nearly identical to the adopted "Regular" form, there is an acknowledgment that the significant length of the didactic form should influence the length of the preaching of the Word within the worship service. The Word should be made "brief" in order to

¹⁸ See Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 2022), p. 164. Old writes: "In sixteenth-century Reformed Communion liturgies there was always a long Communion exhortation, in which unrepentant sinners were warned not to approach the Table and the faithful were encouraged to receive the sacrament. These exhortations normally went into considerable detail as to who was allowed to receive Communion and who was not. They usually elaborated the proper doctrine of the Lord's Supper at great length. Reading these exhortations must have taken ten to twenty minutes. They were quite necessary in those days, when the Reformers needed to explain again and again the reasoning behind their reforms. The Reformers strove valiantly to establish true church discipline. Besides, for the members of the congregation the exact formulation of Eucharistic doctrine was of great interest. It was a matter of public discussion, and the more alert members of the congregation could be counted on to follow these exhortations with the closest attention. It would be foolish to revive these long Communion exhortations. Today most of us would find them tedious... We do not have to copy everything that was done in Geneva in the mid-sixteenth century, but a celebration of Communion that ignores its moral implications has lost contact with the Reformed tradition.

¹⁹ *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Days 25, 28–30, and the *Belgic Confession*, articles 33 and 35.

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accommodate the sacrament.²⁰ No doubt the displacement of the Word by the sacrament in Lord's Supper services was justified by the infrequent celebrations throughout the year. Nevertheless, when the sacrament overshadows the preached Word, even if it is only occasionally, it communicates a theological message contrary to the convictions we confess in Lord's Day 25.

H. Sister Churches²¹

A number of sister churches have successfully adopted more than one or two liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) have adopted four different liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper (two long; two short). The Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) have adopted three different liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt (GKv) have adopted five different liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Of note is the fact that many of these "short" forms are *significantly* shorter than the Canadian Reformed Churches' "Abbreviated" Form (1500 words). The URCNA "Short Form 1" is 940 words in length; the RCNZ "Form 3" is only 810 words in length, and the GKv "Form for the Celebration of Holy Supper" (translated and slightly edited) is approximately 850 words in length.

Furthermore, in two instances, sister churches provide "flexibility" in how ordained ministers of the Word explain the sacrament. For example, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's (OPC) Directory of Public Worship outlines in detail how the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated. This explanation can be read verbatim or summarized by the minister.²² Similarly, the RCNZ "Form 2" allows ministers of the Word some freedom in choosing which sections of the form is read at each celebration of the Lord's Supper.²³

Section II: Overture

Redemption Church overtures Classis Central Ontario to overture Regional Synod East 2021 to overture General Synod 2022 to provisionally adopt, for immediate use and testing in the churches, at least two of the following liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, listed in terms of preference:

- 1. United Reformed Churches of North America Celebration for the Lord's Supper—Short Form 1 (see Appendix 1)**
- 2. Reformed Churches of New Zealand Lord's Supper Form 3 (see Appendix 2)**
- 3. United Reformed Churches of North America Celebration for the Lord's Supper—Short Form 2 (see Appendix 3)**
- 4. GKv Form for the Celebration of Holy Supper (see Appendix 4)**

²⁰ Jonathan Gibson & Mark Earngey, *Reformation Worship*, p. 617: "On those days, when the Supper is celebrated, a sermon shall be delivered on the death and Supper of the Lord, in which the institution, order, reasons, benefit, and fruit of the Holy Supper shall be treated. And in this sermon, the minister shall make an effort to be brief, because of the subsequent action, in which the Supper is sufficiently explained. And immediately after the sermon and the Sunday prayer is over (as mentioned below), before the singing, the minister of the Word—standing at the table, where the Supper is to be held—shall read out the following exhortation in a clear, explicit, and solemn manner

²¹ Including one former sister-church.

²² See Appendix 5.

²³ See Appendix 6.

Section III: Grounds

1. With increased frequency of the Lord's Supper the adopted liturgical forms have potential to decenter the Word of God. Based on what we confess about the means of grace (cf. LD 25), our lengthy celebrations of Lord's Supper, though infrequent, can convey an inconsistent message. The sacrament should not displace the Word. The Word should not be made "brief" to accommodate the sacrament.
2. The length of the adopted liturgical forms impedes a more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. There is a desire among many ministers and members within the Canadian Reformed Churches to celebrate the sacrament of Lord's Supper more frequently than every 2 or 3 months (see p.3 footnote 9). Nevertheless, only 4 out of 67 churches, celebrate the Lord's Supper more frequently than bimonthly—three of which are in missional/plant settings.
3. The adopted liturgical forms include unnecessarily lengthy expositions of the Lord's Supper. Since the Church Order regulates how the catechism is to be used in the worship services, and how ministers of the Word are required to instruct the youth of the congregation, it is unnecessary to always read lengthy didactic liturgical forms at each celebration of the Lord's Supper. Through the regular catechetical instruction each year, the congregation will be taught repeatedly how to understand and use the sacraments of holy baptism and the Lord's Supper.
4. The adopted liturgical forms are too inflexible for unique contexts. The unconventional "creativity," or "bending" of the Church Order employed by many congregations during Covid restrictions highlights the need for shorter forms. The existing forms are not intended to be "split up" over multiple services. Nor should multiple celebrations of the Lord's Supper be considered one celebration. New, shorter liturgical forms would eliminate the need for "creativity."
5. Additional liturgical forms will permit each congregation the necessary flexibility in determining how (and how often) it administers the Lord's Supper in its local context. At the same time, approved forms are still used during the celebration of Lord's Supper.
6. The adopted "Abbreviated" form is inadequate to function as a short form: in fact, according to GS 1980 and 1983, it was never designed or intended to function as a wholesale replacement for the regular form.
7. The "Abbreviated" form isn't much of an abbreviation or an abridgement of the regular form. At nearly 1500 words in length, it is still more than half the length of the long form (almost 2600 words in length). Furthermore, the "Abbreviated Form" is almost twice as long as some of the short forms used in other sister churches.
8. There are much shorter and theologically sound liturgical forms used by other Reformed churches that could be adopted for immediate use in Canadian Reformed churches.
9. It is unnecessary to constantly reinvent the wheel, even in the liturgical context. There is no need for the long drawn-out process of appointing a synodical sub-committee to begin drafting new forms for use in our worship services when other trusted churches have already done much of the work for us.

Section IV: Appendices

Appendix 1
Celebration of the Lord’s Supper – Short Form 1 URCNA
(940 words)

Preparation

To all of you who have with godly sorrow confessed your sins and who have affirmed true faith in Christ, the promise of Jesus is sure: *“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink”* (John 6:54–55). For *“the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”* (1 Cor. 11:23–25)

While remaining bread and wine, these sacred elements nevertheless become so united to the reality they signify that we do not doubt, but joyfully believe, that we receive in this meal by the Spirit through faith nothing less than the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For all who live in rebellion against God and in unbelief, this holy food and drink will bring you only further condemnation. If you do not yet confess Jesus Christ and seek to live under his gracious reign, we admonish you to abstain. But all who repent and believe are invited to this sacred meal, not because you are worthy in yourself, but because you are clothed in Christ’s perfect righteousness. Do not allow the weakness of your faith or your failures in the Christian life to keep you from this Table. For it is given to us because of our weakness and because of our failures, in order to increase our faith by feeding us with the body and blood of Jesus Christ. As the Word has promised us God’s favor, so also our heavenly Father has added this confirmation of His unchangeable promise. So come, believing sinners, for the Table is ready. *“Taste and see that the Lord is good!”* (Ps. 34:8)

The Consecration

Let us pray:

Almighty and everlasting God, who by the blood of Your only begotten Son has secured for us a new and living way into the Holy of Holies, cleanse our minds and hearts by Your Word and Spirit that we, Your redeemed people, drawing close to You through this holy sacrament, may enjoy fellowship with the Holy Trinity through the body and blood of Christ our Savior. We know that our ascended Savior does not live in temples made by hands, but is in heaven, where He continues to intercede on our behalf. Through this sacrament, by Your own Word and Spirit, may these common elements now be set apart from ordinary use and consecrated by You, so that, just as truly as we eat and drink these elements by which our bodily life is sustained, so truly we receive into our souls, for our spiritual life, the true body and true blood of Christ. We receive these gifts by faith, which is the hand and mouth of our souls. Amen.

Apostles’ Creed (optional)

As we draw near to the Table of our Lord, let us confess our Christian faith:

Congregation:

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into

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hell. The third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Christian church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

The minister then says:

Let us now go to our heavenly Table and receive the gift of God for our souls. By the promise of God, this bread and wine are for us the body and blood of Christ.

Minister: Lift up your hearts!

Congregation: We lift them up to the Lord.

Communion

The elements are distributed, and the minister may use the formula:

The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the blood of Christ. Take, drink, remember, and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Thanksgiving Prayer

Our gracious heavenly Father, we thank You for the blessing of this holy feast. Although we are unworthy to share this meal with You, it is by Your invitation and dressed in Christ's righteousness that we have come boldly into the Holy of Holies. Instead of wrath, we have received Your pardon; in the place of fear, we have been given hope. Our High Priest and Mediator of the new covenant has reconciled us to You and even now intercedes for us at Your right hand. Please strengthen us by these gifts, so that, relying only on Your promise to save sinners who call on Jesus' name, we may, by Your Spirit, honor You with our souls and bodies, to the honor and glory of Your holy name. Amen.

Appendix 2

Reformed Churches of New Zealand

Lord's Supper: form 3

(810 words)

In this service our Lord Jesus Christ offers us the opportunity of coming to his table to declare his death.

First hear, however, what is written in the gospels concerning the institution of the holy supper. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."²⁴ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the

²⁴ Matthew 26:26

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forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."²⁵

The Lord's Supper was given to us by Jesus Christ himself, and is to be observed until he comes again. It is a remembrance of his sacrifice, once for all, in his death. The bread and the wine represent the crucified body and the shed blood of the Saviour; they are received by true believers as signs and seals of all the benefits of his sacrifice on the cross. Those benefits include the forgiveness of sins, our nourishment and growth in faith, and communion with Christ and with all who believe in him. Furthermore, as signs and seals of the covenant of grace, they guarantee that God is faithful and will fulfil all his promises. They also summon us to deeper gratitude for our salvation, to renewed dedication to Christ, and to more faithful obedience.

Those who do not trust in Jesus for their salvation and have not repented of their sin, but live in disobedience to the Lord, are warned not to take part in the Lord's Supper, lest they eat and drink judgment on themselves.²⁶

Nevertheless, this warning is not designed to keep the humble and contrite from the table of the Lord, as if the supper were for those who are free from sin. On the contrary, we come as guilty sinners. We confess that we are dependent for pardon on the sacrifice of Christ and base our hope of eternal life on his perfect obedience and righteousness. We come resolved to deny ourselves, crucify our old nature, and follow Christ as is fitting for those who bear his name.

So that we may partake to the glory of God and grow in the grace of Christ, let us set our hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.²⁷

Prayer

So let us pray:

Merciful God and Father, work in our hearts by your Holy Spirit as we celebrate this supper, so that, more and more, in true faith, we may give ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ. Feed our contrite hearts with him, our only heavenly bread. Strengthen our faith. Gracious Father, care for us, your children and heirs. Supply all our needs, in both body and soul. Grant us your grace to turn from our sin; to live in him, as he lives in us. Help us to take up our cross, deny ourselves and follow the Lord Jesus. While living in a broken world, we long for his return when all will be put right and made new. We pray, heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus, who was delivered up for our transgressions and raised for our justification, knowing that he is always praying for us in your presence. Amen. Now lift up your hearts to heaven where Jesus Christ is, at the right hand of the Father. Believe that you shall be fed and refreshed with his body and blood by the working of the Holy Spirit, as you receive the bread and the wine in remembrance of him.

At this point the minister should indicate who may partake of the sacraments according to synodical regulations and local practice.

²⁵ Matthew 26:27–29

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:27–32

²⁷ Colossians 3:1

Communion

The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was given for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

The cup of blessing for which we give thanks is a communion of the blood of Christ. Take, drink, remember and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Let us now together pray the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Appendix 3

Celebration of the Lord's Supper – Short Form 2 URCNA (968 words)

Exhortation

Brothers and sisters, you who desire to come to the Holy Communion of the body and blood of our Savior must consider how the apostle Paul exhorts us diligently to “*examine*” ourselves before we “*eat of the bread and drink of the cup*” (1 Cor. 11:28). For as the benefit of this sacred meal is great, if we receive the sacrament with a penitent heart and lively faith, so is the danger great, if we receive it “*in an unworthy manner*” (1 Cor. 11:27). For then we are “*guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord*” (1 Cor. 11:27), we eat and drink to our own “*judgment*” (1 Cor. 11:29) and we kindle God's wrath against us (1 Cor. 11:30). But “*if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged ... by the Lord*” (1 Cor. 11:31–32). Therefore, truly repent of your sins, place a lively and steadfast faith in Christ our Savior, and live in love with all people, so that you will be worthy partakers of this holy sacrament.

Above all things, you must give most humble and sincere thanks to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for the redemption of the world by the passion and death of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Give thanks that He who is God became man. Give thanks that the Son humbled himself to death upon the cross for us, miserable sinners. Give thanks that we, who walk in this dark world and in the shadow of death, have been made the children of God and exalted to everlasting life. Because of this, we should always remember the exceedingly great love of our only Savior, Jesus Christ, and the innumerable benefits that He has obtained for us by His precious blood. This is why He instituted and ordained holy sacraments, as pledges of His love and for a continual remembrance of His death, to our great and endless comfort. To Him, therefore, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, let us give continual thanks, submitting ourselves completely to His holy will and pleasure, and seeking to serve Him in true holiness and righteousness all the days of our life.

To all of you who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who embrace Jesus by faith as your Savior, and who desire more and more to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, draw near and take this holy sacrament to your comfort.

Comforting Words

Hear what comforting words our Savior, Jesus Christ, speaks to all that truly turn to Him:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

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“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Tim. 1:15).

“If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1–2).

Then is said:

Minister: Lift up your hearts!

Congregation: We lift them up to the Lord.

Prayer of Humble Approach

We do not presume to come to this table, O merciful God, trusting in our own righteousness, but in Your great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under the table of Your Son. But You are our merciful and gracious Father. Grant us, therefore, that we may feed on our crucified Lord by faith, and that He may be united to us, and we to Him, who, with You and the Holy Spirit, is worthy of eternal thanks and praise. Amen.

Words of Institution

“The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’” (1 Cor. 11:23–25).

Communion

In eating the bread, the minister says,
May the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on Him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

In drinking the wine, the minister says,
May the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ’s blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Almighty and ever-living God, we most heartily thank You. You have fed us, who have rightly received this holy sacrament, with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. You assure us, by this bread and wine, of Your favor and goodness toward us, that we are members of the body of Your Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people. You have made us heirs of Your everlasting kingdom by the merits of the most precious passion and death of Your dear Son. And we most humbly pray, O heavenly Father, assist us with Your grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship and do all such good works as You have prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with You and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

Appendix 4

GKv Form for the Celebration of the Holy Supper (translated)

(922 words using entire form)

(817 using “Thanksgiving 1”)

(847 using “Thanksgiving 2”)

Institution

Let us hear how the institution of the sacrament is described in the Holy Gospel:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the^[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.” (Matt. 26:26–29)

Remembering Jesus

We remember that Jesus, our Lord, gave his body and blood on the cross for his own. By his great love for us, he sacrificed himself so that we could begin to live a new life and that death would no longer have power over us.²⁸ The sacrament focuses our attention on this sacrifice of the Lord. It fills us with shame for our sins, but also fills us with gratitude for his love that reconciles us before God.

Fellowship and expectation

At this table we experience the joyful union with Christ and with each other. Eating and drinking together at Christ's table fills us with a desire to love one another. Furthermore, the sacrament fills us with anticipation for the return of our Lord. At the Lord's Supper we experience a foretaste of the joy that the marriage of the Lamb will give. Soon our Lord will drink the wine new with us in the kingdom of his Father²⁹.

Therefore, we should not celebrate the sacrament indifferently and without sincere faith. On the contrary, we must do just this with reverence for God and in holy, eager expectation. Soon the Lord will wipe away all tears from our eyes³⁰ and all brokenness and distress will come to an end.³¹ He will rule over everything and everyone.³²

Prayer

God, our Father, we thank you for the gift of the sacrament. We bless you for the love of Christ who gave His life for us. We acknowledge our guilt and thank you for forgiving our sins. We ask you to send us your Holy Spirit so that we may be nourished with Jesus Christ, the bread from heaven. We look forward to the return of our Lord, to the wedding of the Lamb. Encourage us with that hope as we experience trouble, guilt, and brokenness in this life. Answer our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Confession of Faith

The Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed is sung or recited.

²⁸ Rom. 6:4

²⁹ Mark 14:25, Rev. 19:6–9

³⁰ Isaiah 25:4; Rev. 7:17; 21:4

³¹ Isaiah 2:4; 11:4–9; 1 Cor. 15: 54

³² 1 Cor. 15:26–28

Sursum Corda

This bread and wine pictures the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us therefore lift up our hearts to him who is King in heaven and Host at this table.

Celebration

When the pastor breaks and distributes the bread, he says:

The bread, which we break, unites us with the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord is given for the forgiveness of all our sins.³³

And when he gives the cup:

The cup of wine, for which we praise and thank God, unites us with the blood of Christ. Take, drink from it all of you it, remember, and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for the forgiveness of all our sins.³⁴

During the celebration the words concerning the bread and wine can be combined into the following:

The bread we break unites us with the body of Christ. The cup of wine, for which we praise and thank God, unites us with the blood of Christ. Take this bread and this cup, eat and drink, remember and believe that our Lord Jesus Christ gave His body and blood to forgive all our sins.

Thanksgiving

When giving thanks, the minister can choose from the following alternatives or use both.

Thanksgiving (1)

Let us praise the Lord.

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us...[Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.³⁵

Thanksgiving (2)

Lord our God, we thank you sincerely for celebrating this sacrament. You provide us assurance that through Jesus Christ we have forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. We pray, let us grow in faith through your Holy Spirit. Give us the strength to fight against sin and resist temptation in our lives. Make us look forward to the return of Jesus Christ. Fulfill all your promises. We pray all this in his name. Amen.

Song of Praise

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is to be concluded by the singing of a psalm or hymn.

Appendix 5

OPC: From the Directory of Public Worship of God

³³ 1 Cor. 10:16; Matt. 26:26; Luke 22:19; Gal. 1:4

³⁴ 1 Cor. 10:16; Matt. 26:27, 28

³⁵ Rom. 8:32–39

**Under the Heading, “The Sacraments”
(1584 words)**

The Lord's Supper

1. The Institution of the Sacrament

The minister shall read the words of the institution and instruction of the Lord's Supper as found in 1 Corinthians 11:23–29 or one of the Gospel accounts (Matthew 26:26–29, Mark 14:22–25, or Luke 22:14–20). In addition, he may read words of instruction from passages such as John 6 and 1 Corinthians 10.

2. The Meaning and Nature of the Sacrament

The minister shall then summarize before the congregation the teaching of the Word of God as to the meaning and nature of the sacrament in the following or like words:

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper as an ordinance to be observed by his church until he comes again. It is not a re-sacrificing of Christ, but is a remembrance of the once-for-all sacrifice of himself in his death for our sins. Nor is it a mere memorial to Christ's sacrifice. It is a means of grace by which God feeds us with the crucified, resurrected, exalted Christ. He does so by his Holy Spirit and through faith. Thus he strengthens us in our warfare against sin and in our endeavors to serve him in holiness. The sacrament further signifies and seals the forgiveness of our sin and our nourishment and growth in Christ. The bread and wine represent the crucified body and the shed blood of the Savior, which he gave for his people. In this sacrament, God confirms that he is faithful and true to fulfill the promises of his covenant, and he calls us to deeper gratitude for our salvation, to renewed consecration, and to more faithful obedience. The Supper is also a bond and pledge of the communion that believers have with him and with each other as members of his body. As Scripture says, "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). The Supper anticipates the consummation of the ages, when Christ returns to gather all his redeemed people at the glorious wedding feast of the Lamb. As we come to the Lord's Table, we humbly resolve to deny ourselves, to crucify the sin that is within us, to resist the devil, and to follow Christ as becomes those who bear his name.

3. Invitation and Fencing the Table

The minister shall then declare who may come to, and who are excluded from, the Lord's Table according to the Word of God. He may use the following or like words:

It is my privilege as a minister of Christ to invite all who are right with God and his church, through faith in the Lord Jesus, to come to the Lord's Table. If you have received Christ and are resting upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to you in the gospel, if you are a baptized and professing communicant member in good standing in a church that professes the gospel of God's free grace in Jesus Christ, and if you live penitently and seek to walk in godliness before the Lord, then this Supper is for you, and I invite you in Christ's name to eat the bread and drink the cup.

At the same time, God's Word says, "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats] and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor. 11:27–29). If you are not trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior, if you are not a member of a faithful Christian church, if you are not living

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penitently and seeking to walk in godliness before the Lord, then I warn you in the name of Christ not to approach the Holy Table of the Lord.

This warning is not aimed to keep the humble and contrite from the Table of the Lord, as if it were for those who were free from sin. In fact, it is for sinners that our Lord gives this Supper as a means of grace. Through the elements of bread and wine, our Lord graciously gives himself and all his benefits to everyone who eats and drinks in a worthy manner, discerning the body of the Lord. It is one thing to eat and drink in a worthy manner. It is very different, however, to imagine that we are worthy to eat and drink. We dare not come to the Lord's Table as if we were worthy and righteous in ourselves. We come in a worthy manner if we recognize that we are unworthy sinners who need our Savior, if we consciously discern his body given for our sins, if we hunger and thirst after Christ, giving thanks for his grace, trusting in his merits, feeding on him by faith, renewing our covenant with him and his people.

Let us examine our minds and hearts to determine whether such discernment is ours, to the end that we may partake to the glory of God and to our growth in the grace of Christ. Come then with joy and thankfulness to the Lord's Table. The Lord's Supper is medicine for poor, sick souls. Come to Jesus and find rest, refreshing, and nourishment for your weak and weary soul.

4. Exhortation

If desired, the minister may exhort the people of God, in the following or other words, to embrace in the sign the thing that is signified:

Beloved congregation, lift up your hearts from these visible elements even to heaven itself, where Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, from where we look for him to return and perfect our redemption. All the promises of God are yes and amen in him. Every spiritual blessing is found in him. With joyful hearts, in Christian love, partake of his Table, giving thanks for the great love that he has shown to us.

5. Prayer

The distribution of the elements shall be preceded by prayer. It is well in such prayer to praise God for his mighty power and grace in bringing salvation; confess our unworthiness to come to the Table because of our own utter lack of righteousness; reaffirm our trust in God's grace and in Christ's righteousness and mediation; plead for the Lord to grant the gracious, effectual working of his Spirit in us; thank God for the elements, request him to use them for their intended purpose; and ask him to grant that by faith his people may feed upon Jesus Christ, crucified and raised for them, so that, being strengthened by grace, they might live in him and for him.

6. Partaking of the Elements

After prayer and thanksgiving, the minister shall take the bread, saying in the following or like words:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, as I, ministering in his name, give this bread to you.

The minister shall then break the bread and give it to the people. The bread may be eaten either upon reception of it, or in unison when all have been served, as the session may judge most conducive to edification. The minister may continue, before the bread is eaten, saying:

Our Lord Jesus said, "Take, eat, this is my body, which is for you; this do in remembrance of me."

Having given the bread, the minister shall take the cup and give it to the people, saying in the following or like words:

In the same manner, our Savior also took the cup, and having given thanks as has been done in his name, he gave it to his disciples, as I ministering in his name give this cup to you.

The minister shall then give the cup, as in the distribution of the bread. The minister may continue, before the cup is drunk, saying:

Our Lord Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins; drink of it, all of you."

7. Response of Thanksgiving and Commitment

When all have partaken, prayer should be offered. It is well in such prayer to give thanks for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, through whom we have the forgiveness of sins; recommit God's people to Christ and to each other; present them as a living sacrifice to God; and plead that the Holy Spirit will make the sacrament effectual to the edifying and strengthening of God's people.

It is well that the congregation respond by singing a psalm or hymn that focuses on the benefits of Christ's death and the triumph of the gospel, bringing forth gratitude and joy and renewed commitment of the believer to his Lord, and that an offering be taken for the relief of the poor or for some other sacred purpose.

8. Blessing

The following benediction is particularly appropriate when the Lord's Supper has been celebrated:

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Appendix 6 Reformed Churches of New Zealand Lord's Supper: form 2 (1230 words + the word count of the various parts)

Beloved in the Lord, it is our joyful privilege and solemn duty to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Hear the words of the apostle Paul with respect to this supper: "I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."³⁶

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

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Use one or more of the following four parts:

Part A—Remembering Christ’s sacrifice (189 words)

When Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me,”³⁷ he ordained this holy supper as a perpetual memorial of his death. The apostle Paul also teaches us that as often as we eat the bread and drink the cup we “proclaim the Lord’s death.”³⁸ As we eat and drink we declare that our Lord Jesus was sent by the Father into the world, took upon himself our flesh and blood, and bore the wrath of God on the cross for us. We also confess that he came to earth to bring us to heaven, he was condemned to die that we might be pardoned, he died for us that we might live through him, and he was once forsaken by God that we might forever be accepted by him. The sacrament thus confirms God’s abiding love and covenant faithfulness. It is a seal of God’s promises and assures us that we belong to his family. Let us therefore eat and drink, believing that God will always love us, accept us as his children, and keep all his promises to us for the sake of Jesus Christ his Son.

Part B—Union with Christ (122 words)

[Moreover] As we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are fed with our Lord’s crucified body and shed blood by his Spirit, through whom the body and blood of our Lord give life-giving nourishment to our souls. Thus Christ unites us with himself and so imparts the precious benefits of his sacrifice to all who partake in faith. The holy sacrament is also a means of grace that unites us with one another in the bond of the Spirit. For the apostle says that “we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”³⁹ Thus, even as Christ unites us with himself, he strengthens the bond of communion between us, his children.

Part C—Christ’s return (78 words)

The remembrance of our Lord’s death [also] revives in us the hope of his return. Since he commanded us to do this until he comes, the Lord assures us that he will come again to take us to himself. As we share now in the Lord’s Supper, we are assured that we shall one day see him face to face, and rejoice in the glory of his appearing. Our Lord Jesus will surely do what he has promised.

Part D—Confessional teaching

Appropriate segments of teaching regarding the Lord’s Supper from our confessions may be used (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 75–79, 81–82; Belgic Confession 33, 35; Westminster Confession of Faith 27, 29).

Invitation

For all who live in rebellion against God and in unbelief, this bread and wine will only bring further condemnation. If you do not yet confess Jesus Christ and seek to live under his gracious reign, the Scriptures warn you to abstain.⁴⁰ However, all who repent and believe are invited to this sacred meal,

³⁷ Luke 22:19

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:26

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 10:17

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:27–32

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not because you are worthy in yourself, but because you are clothed in Christ’s perfect righteousness. Do not allow the weakness of your faith or your failures in the Christian life to keep you from this table, for it is given to us because of our weakness and because of our failures—in order to increase our faith by feeding us with the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Let us draw near to his table, then, believing that he will strengthen us in faith, unite us in love, and establish us more firmly in the hope of his coming. “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”⁴¹

Prayer

Let us pray. Almighty God, we thank you for all the blessings of your grace. Above all we thank you for the most precious gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. We praise you for the gift of your Holy Spirit, for the gospel of reconciliation, for the church universal, for the ministry and the sacraments of the church, and the gift of eternal life. Gracious Father, by your Spirit feed our souls with the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grant us the full assurance of your grace and fill our hearts with humble gratitude for your rich mercy. Unite us more fully with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, and with each other. Enable us, in newness of life, to pledge ourselves in service to Christ and others. Invigorate our hearts with living hope as we look forward to the coming of our Saviour in glory.

Answer us, O God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying:
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Optional: As we draw near to the table of our Lord, let us confess our Christian faith (Apostles’ Creed):

At this point the minister should indicate who may partake of the sacraments according to syndical regulations and local practice.

Having approached the table, the minister shall say:

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”⁴² And elsewhere, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty ... Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”⁴³ Jesus also encouraged us with these words: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”⁴⁴

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, let us lift up our hearts to the Lord; let us lift them up to the God of our salvation.

⁴¹ Revelation 1:5b–6

⁴² Matthew 11:28–29

⁴³ John 6:35, 37b

⁴⁴ Matthew 5:6

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As he breaks the bread, the minister shall say:

“The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’”⁴⁵ At the appropriate time, the minister shall say: Take, eat, remember and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was given for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

As he takes the cup, the minister shall say:

“Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’”⁴⁶

At the appropriate time, the minister shall say:

Take, drink, remember and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

When the communion is completed, the minister may read an appropriate passage of Scripture, such as the following:

Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits— who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion.⁴⁷

God deserves the greatest praise. And so we say with the psalmist: “Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.”⁴⁸ With all of God’s people, here and everywhere, we declare: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”⁴⁹ And, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!”⁵⁰ Amen. One day every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them will sing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!”⁵¹

Prayer

Let us pray:

Almighty God, we offer you our most humble and hearty thanks that you have shown mercy to us. Thank you for giving us your Son to be our saviour. We praise you for giving us this opportunity to declare his death and share it through the holy sacrament. We praise you for uniting us more fully with the body of Christ, and for assuring us that we are heirs of your heavenly kingdom. May our

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:23b, 24

⁴⁶ Matthew 26:27–28

⁴⁷ Psalm 103:1–4

⁴⁸ Psalm 145:21b

⁴⁹ Revelation 4:11

⁵⁰ Revelation 5:12

⁵¹ Revelation 5:13

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commemoration of his death increase our faith, renew our hope, and strengthen our love. Enable us always to live for him who gave his life for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

END OF OVERTURE

From Acts of RSE 2021, the article containing the assembly's decision on the overture:

ARTICLE 16: OVERTURE CCO (SHORTER L.S. LITURGICAL FORMS)

1. Material:

- 1.1. Overture from Classis Central Ontario, June 10–11, 2021 (originating from Flamborough–Redemption CanRC) to adopt shorter liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper (6.1)
- 1.2. Dunnville – re: overture from CCO (5.13)
- 1.3. Niagara South – re: overture from CCO (5.14)
- 1.4. Ancaster – re: overture from CCO (5.15)
- 1.5. Grand Rapids – re: overture from CCO (5.16)
- 1.6. London–Pilgrim – re: overture from CCO (5.17)
- 1.7. Fergus North – re: overture from CCO (5.18)
- 1.8. Grand Valley – re: overture from CCO (5.19)

2. Admissibility

- 2.1. Synod declares this admissible.

3. Observations

- 3.1. The overture proposes the following: to overture General Synod 2022 to provisionally adopt, for immediate use and testing in the churches, at least two of the following liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, listed in terms of preference:
 1. United Reformed Churches of North America Celebration for the Lord's Supper – Short Form 1 (see Appendix 1)
 2. Reformed Churches of New Zealand Lord's Supper Form 3 (see appendix 2)
 3. United Reformed Churches of North America Celebration for the Lord's Supper – Short Form 2 (see appendix 3)
 4. GKv form for the Celebration of Holy Supper (see Appendix 4)
- 3.2. Along with background comments, the overture lists the following grounds:
 1. With increased frequency of the Lord's Supper the adopted liturgical forms have potential to decenter the Word of God. Based on what we confess about the means of grace (cf. LD 25), our lengthy celebrations of Lord's Supper, though infrequent, can convey an inconsistent message. The sacrament should not displace the Word. The Word should not be made "brief" to accommodate the sacrament.
 2. The length of the adopted liturgical forms impedes a more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. There is a desire among many ministers and members within the Canadian Reformed Churches to celebrate the sacrament of Lord's Supper more frequently than every 2 or 3 months (see p.3 footnote 9). Nevertheless, only 4 out of 67 churches, celebrate the Lord's Supper more frequently than bimonthly—three of which are in missional/plant settings.
 3. The adopted liturgical forms include unnecessarily lengthy expositions of the Lord's Supper. Since the Church Order regulates how the catechism is to be used in the

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worship services, and how ministers of the Word are required to instruct the youth of the congregation, it is unnecessary to always read lengthy didactic liturgical forms at each celebration of the Lord's Supper. Through the regular catechetical instruction each year, the congregation will be taught repeatedly how to understand and use the sacraments of holy baptism and the Lord's Supper.

4. The adopted liturgical forms are too inflexible for unique contexts. The unconventional "creativity," or "bending" of the Church Order employed by many congregations during Covid restrictions highlights the need for shorter forms. The existing forms are not intended to be "split up" over multiple services. Nor should multiple celebrations of the Lord's Supper be considered one celebration. New, shorter liturgical forms would eliminate the need for "creativity."

5. Additional liturgical forms will permit each congregation the necessary flexibility in determining how (and how often) it administers the Lord's Supper in its local context. At the same time, approved forms are still used during the celebration of Lord's Supper.

6. The adopted "Abbreviated" form is inadequate to function as a short form: in fact, according to GS 1980 and 1983, it was never designed or intended to function as a wholesale replacement for the regular form.

7. The "Abbreviated" form isn't much of an abbreviation or an abridgement of the regular form. At nearly 1500 words in length, it is still more than half the length of the long form (almost 2600 words in length). Furthermore, the "Abbreviated Form" is almost twice as long as some of the short forms used in other sister churches.

8. There are much shorter and theologically sound liturgical forms used by other Reformed churches that could be adopted for immediate use in Canadian Reformed churches.

9. It is unnecessary to constantly reinvent the wheel, even in the liturgical context. There is no need for the long drawn-out process of appointing a synodical sub-committee to begin drafting new forms for use in our worship services when other trusted churches have already done much of the work for us.

- 3.3. Dunnville states it cannot support the overture in its current state. It questions the validity of ground #2 citing inadequate support for its strong statements. Dunnville suggests the removal of ground #4 as ground #5 covers the same material sufficiently. In reference to ground #8 Dunnville feels that the matter of testing is very important in an analogous way as we handled the songs of the church.
- 3.4. Niagara South finds the overture wanting in several aspects. It finds the overture hollows out the sacredness of the sacrament by focusing on the length of the form. It engages in a vague generalization concerning how consistories have modified the forms. It does not prove that the forms from the sister churches are theologically sound. It speaks of the desire of some ministers of the Word, which is not church orderly.
- 3.5. Ancaster supports the overture but suggests that General Synod appoints a temporary committee to test the forms chosen by synod. Ancaster gives the following reasons:
- 1) This is in keeping with our past practice to take due care with our liturgical forms. Whenever existing liturgical forms had to be significantly updated or adjusted, a separate subcommittee was appointed (e.g. GS 1980 & 1983). Further, in the more recent past such a committee was appointed to study the matter of liturgical forms jointly with their counterparts in the United Reformed Churches with a view toward unity (GS 2007 Arts. 98 & 159). As our federation now considers new forms coming from various sources outside the federation, a similar approach is warranted that much more.

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2) The forms for Lords Supper that will be under consideration should be carefully studied for how they fit in and align with not only the doctrine and theology expressed in our existing Lord’s Supper forms but also with the terminology and mode of expression thereof. The liturgical forms of the URCNA, RCNZ, and the GKv understandably have their own origin and their own manner of expression. Such forms should be gone over with a “fine-toothed comb” and, where necessary, amended to align with our existing forms more smoothly. This is best done by a dedicated committee of skilled persons.

3) The Standing Committee for the Book of Praise may be thought the appropriate standing committee to be appointed for this task but in our view, the SCBP already has a considerable mandate to manage. Of late the SCBP has been coordinating the mass testing of new psalms (alternate tunes) and hymns and it is unclear whether this task will be completed by GS 2022. To keep the workload of the SCBP manageable it would be better to appoint a temporary, dedicated liturgical forms committee to study this matter in-depth.

3.6. Grand Rapids is against this overture, giving seven reasons:

- A. There is an inadequate basis given for making the change.
- B. The argument that early Reformed history argues for more frequent celebration has less probative value than it may initially appear.
- C. It is questionable that there is a strong desire for a shorter form.
- D. They find the overture dismisses the strength and beauty of the current forms.
- E. The overture fails to prove that the current forms are burdensome in terms of time.
- F. They find that the overture will work against the unity in the churches.
- G. We ought to write our own forms rather than just use the ones of our sister churches.
- H. It is not wise to adopt forms from the GKv churches, given the state of our relationship with them.
- I. The URCNA short form one has a prayer of consecration that is problematic.
- J. The OPC form leads to too much freedom for the minister and cannot truly count as an adopted form.

3.7. London–Pilgrim is in favour of this overture because this will facilitate a more frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper for those churches desiring to do so.

3.8. Fergus North is in favour of this overture but believes that the suggested forms need further refining. We need to do due diligence and not sacrifice content or substance. They cite a number of examples.

3.9. Grand Valley does not endorse this overture. Should the overture pass they wish the removal of the phrase “for immediate use and testing in the churches.” They would also like to add a paragraph that stipulates that only members of the congregation and guests of sister churches with an attestation may attend.

4. Considerations

- 4.1. Scriptural rationale can be given for more frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper.
- 4.2. Given how the church order states that the sacraments need to be celebrated with the use of the adopted form (CO 56), additional shorter forms as requested by CCO will facilitate the more frequent celebration for those churches that desire this.
- 4.3. Some churches worry that the adoption of additional shorter forms calls into question our unity as churches. Dealing with this request in a church orderly way to facilitate more frequent celebration does not necessarily undermine the unity of the churches.
- 4.4. Exceptional circumstances (such as COVID–19) should not serve to give grounds for changing our forms.

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- 4.5. We need to do due diligence to ensure that adopted forms are acceptable and sound. The proposal of the church of Ancaster, to appoint a separate synodical committee, would serve well for this.
- 4.6. Regarding Grand Valley’s suggestion, this falls outside the intent of the overture.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1. With the above considerations, RSE 2021 adopt the overture from CCO.

ADOPTED