

P.H. Holtvlüwer
Clerk of Regional Synod East November 11, 2020
203 Fallingbrook Drive
Ancaster, ON
L9G 1E7
pholtvluwer@gmail.com

Consistories of All Canadian and American Reformed Churches

November 26, AD 2020

Re: Overture to Remove the Bracketed Qualifier from the Abbreviated Lord's Supper Form

Dear Brothers,

Regional Synod East 2020 received an overture from Classis Central Ontario (June 5, 2020) requesting that RSE overture General Synod Guelph (Emmanuel) 2022 to remove the bracketed qualifier "For the Second Service" from the abbreviated Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper. After due deliberation, RSE decided to adopt this overture without modification (*Acts of RSE 2020*, Article 11) and send it to GS 2022. It may therefore be expected that said overture will, in due time, appear on the agenda for GS 2022.

Meanwhile, the regulations of RSE state that "The clerk shall distribute to all the churches any overture adopted by Regional Synod East for submission to a general synod" (Regulations, II.C.3.). This is in accord with the Guidelines for General Synods which state, "Since matters on the agenda of general synod involve the churches in common, regional synods shall distribute copies of adopted overtures to all the churches in the federation no later than five months prior to the convening of a general synod" (*Guidelines for General Synods I.F.*, as found in the *Acts of GS 2019*, Appendix 20). Hence as clerk of the recent RSE I am sending the overture to each consistory as below.

Given that there is still some eighteen months to go till GS 2022 (expected to be held in May of that year), the churches have more than ample time to reflect on and interact with the overture as they wish. In due time the churches may expect to receive official notification from the convening church for the next general synod (Guelph Emmanuel) along with an address to which all correspondence concerning that synod may be sent. Here follows the overture of Regional Synod East 2020:

We hereby present **an overture to remove the bracketed qualifier "For the Second Service" from the abbreviated Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper and to allow the use of the abbreviated Form at the discretion of the local church.**

We offer the following observations and considerations in coming to this overture.

Observations

1. The abbreviated Lord's Supper Form came about as a result of General Synod Coaldale 1977. As part of general information, GS 1977 stated that "More than once the desire has been expressed that a shorter form for the celebration of the Holy Supper be introduced..." (*Acts GS 1977*, Art. 60, p. 26). 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, Cons. 10, p. 27). The abbreviated Form was first presented at General Synod Smithville 1980. GS 1980 considered that "It should be noted that the Abbreviated Form is not meant as a replacement of the original Form, rather as a help to be used in the p.m. service when also a

sermon is delivered” (*Acts GS 1980*, Art. 136, Cons. 4, p. 104). GS 1980 adopted the following motion: “To add in the title of the Abbreviated Form, between brackets (For the afternoon service)” (*Acts GS 1980*, Art. 136, Rec. 1, p. 104).

2. General Synod Cloverdale 1983 changed “For the afternoon service” to “For the second service” (*Acts GS 1983*, Art. 145, Obs. 6.e.1, p. 97 and Cons. 4.E.2, p. 102.), giving the rationale that there is no objection to changing the phrase. There was also a request at GS 1983 to “revoke the decision of the General Synod of 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 meant 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 than the minimum of 4 or 6 times a year. Therefore, at least once a year the original Form must be used” (*Acts GS 1983*, Art. 145, Obs. 6.e.2, pp. 97,98). This suggestion was not adopted, based on the consideration that “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” (*Acts GS 1983*, Art. 145, Cons. 4.E.1, p. 102).
3. The matter also came up at General Synod Carman 2013 when the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise (SCBP) suggested that the bracketed qualifier be deleted for the following reasons: a church had requested that this be deleted; few if any churches still celebrate the Lord’s Supper in both services; and because the bracketed words were never a SCBP proposal, did not come as a proposal from a church, and arose as a motion on the floor of GS 1980 (*Acts GS 2013*, Art. 101, Obs. 2.2.2.1, p. 103). GS 2013 disagreed with this suggestion and considered: “Burlington-Ebenezer correctly points out that removing the subtitle `For the Second Service’ would present the Abbreviated Form as an alternative or replacement of the original form; the Abbreviated Form is not meant to be such, according to Synod Smithville 1980” (*Acts GS 2013*, Art. 101, Cons. 3.2.2, pp. 105,106; see also Obs. 2.2.2.2, p. 103). GS 2013 then went on to say: “If the SCBP wishes to pursue this further and is not convinced by this line of reasoning, it needs to interact with the decision of Synod Smithville 1980 (or a church should take up the way of appealing the decision of that Synod)” (*Acts GS 2013*, Art. 101, Cons. 3.2.2, p. 106). GS 2013 decided “Not to adopt the recommendation of the SCBP to remove the words `For the Second Service’ from the Abbreviated Form” (*Acts GS 2013*, Art. 101, Rec. 4.2.2, p. 107).
4. It is clear from the above observations that the purpose of the abbreviated Lord’s Supper Form, as articulated by GS 1980, is that it be used if there is a second celebration in the afternoon of the same Sunday. The use of the abbreviated Form allows for a (full length) sermon to be delivered. According to GS 1980, the abbreviated Form is not intended to replace the long Form.
5. General Synod Carman 2013 said that the proper way to remove the qualifier “For the Second Service” would be by way of appealing the decision of GS 1980 (*Acts GS 2013*, Art. 101, Cons. 3.2.2, p. 106). General Synod Edmonton 2019 reasoned pertaining to another decades-old decision that the proper way would be by overture through the ecclesiastical assemblies. “The fact that the decision of GS 1983 has served in the churches for more than 30 years is also significant. During all that time, the 1983 decision was honoured as settled and binding. Also for this reason, the request...should come in the form of an overture that follows the ecclesiastical route..., seeking support. In this way, all the churches will have ample time and opportunity to interact with it through this filtering process” (*Acts GS 2019*, Art. 64, Cons. 4.4, p. 51; see also Rec. 5.1, p. 51). Therefore, rather than go directly to General Synod Guelph-Emmanuel 2022 with an appeal, we are going the route of the ecclesiastical assemblies with this overture.

Considerations

1. The *Acts* of GS 1977 do not suggest any restriction on the use of the desired abbreviated Form so as to limit it to the second service. There is also no evidence in the *Acts* of GS 1980 that any church wrote to GS 1980 to suggest such a restriction, nor that the report to GS 1980 suggested it. That restriction pops up in the considerations of GS 1980 – apparently arising from within GS 1980 itself (*Acts GS 1980*, Art. 136, Cons. 4, p. 104). Moreover, the bracketed qualifier arose as a motion on the floor of GS 1980 (*Acts GS 1980*, Art. 136, Rec. 1, p. 104). One of the reasons the SCBP suggested to GS 2013 that the bracketed qualifier be removed was regarding its origin: the bracketed words were never a SCBP proposal, did not come as a proposal from a church, but arose as a motion on the floor of GS 1980 (*Acts GS 2013*, Art. 101, Obs. 2.2.2.1.3, p. 103). Since the bracketed qualifier restricting the use of the abbreviated Form did not come about in the proper way, its origin is reason enough to remove it from the abbreviated Form. The decision of GS 1980 (and subsequently also of GS 1983, which simply changed the wording of the bracketed qualifier) restricting the use of the abbreviated Form should have no standing. In case this is not convincing, however, we will proceed to offer further considerations in support of removing the bracketed qualifier.
2. Although the abbreviated Form was used to allow time for a (full length) sermon in the afternoon worship service – and perhaps also out of consideration for those who had heard the long Form when celebrating the Lord’s Supper in the morning worship service -- this does not detract from the fact that the abbreviated Form was considered sufficient for those who would be celebrating the Lord’s Supper in the afternoon service. This means that there is not a *principled* objection to using the abbreviated Form also for the entire congregation.
3. In 1980 it was more common for churches to celebrate the Lord’s Supper only four times per year. Presently almost all the churches celebrate the Lord’s Supper six times per year, and probably one of the reasons why the Lord’s Supper is not celebrated anymore in the afternoon service is because there is more opportunity annually to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. This increased celebration of the Lord’s Supper speaks in favour of leaving the use of the long or short Form at the discretion of the local church, since presently we are hearing the long Form more than we did before.
4. It is important that the proclamation of the Word precede the celebration of the Lord’s Supper because the sacrament confirms what is promised in the Word. The abbreviated Form provides better opportunity to have the proclamation of the Word before the sacrament when there are concerns about time restrictions which some churches face due to shared facilities or many “tables” because of the congregation’s large size.
5. Some churches would like to celebrate the Lord’s Supper more frequently but feel hampered by the obligation to use the long Form because it does not leave much time for a sermon and leads to a long service. Removing the bracketed qualifier “For the Second Service” would allow them to use the abbreviated Form at their discretion and celebrate the Lord’s Supper more frequently. GS 1983, when not adopting the request to broaden the use of the abbreviated Form, did not interact with the request’s rationale that this would allow for more frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper.
6. Some churches and church plants in our federation struggle with the length of the Form with respect to the ability of some of their members and guests to maintain attention and absorb all the detailed instruction provided in the long Form. Opening up the use of the abbreviated Form at local discretion would accommodate their situation without compromising the importance of all the components of the instruction provided prior to the Lord’s Supper celebration.

7. Making it possible to alternate between the long and short Form will enable congregants to hear with fresh ears the teaching regarding the Lord's Supper. Hearing the same lengthy Lord's Supper Form constantly may lead people to tune it out. It is a good principle of education to change it up and say it with different words. Removing the qualifier would make this possible.
8. The section in the Form that is most abbreviated is the "Invitation and Admonition" because the abbreviated Form does not go through the commandments as the long Form does. However, the Lord's Supper is usually celebrated in the morning service, in which the Ten Commandments are read as part of the worship liturgy. Moreover, we receive almost annual instruction on the Ten Commandments in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 34-44.
9. We receive almost annual instruction on the Lord's Supper in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 28-30. This speaks in favour of leaving the use of the abbreviated Form at the discretion of the churches.
10. GS 1980 and GS 1983 did not interact with any of our points made in Considerations #2-9 and these can be taken as new grounds allowing this matter to be revisited.
11. To our knowledge, presently there are no longer any churches which still celebrate the Lord's Supper twice on a Sunday. This means that the abbreviated Form, although still in the *Book of Praise*, is not used. We can put it to good use.

Yours in our Lord Jesus Christ,

On behalf of Regional Synod East Nov 11, 2020

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter H. Holtvliuwer', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Peter H. Holtvliuwer (clerk at that time)