

“Profession Faith: Can It Be Revitalized?” (Sectional A 14)
Symposium 2009
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A. The Origins of Profession of Faith.

B. Current Debates in the Church.

C. The Purpose of POF – Actions of the professor...

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D. The Purpose of POF – Actions of God...

E. Issues to Consider for Revitalization of POF –

1.] Milestones of development

2.] Age-Appropriate

3.] Rites of passage

4.] Healthy Ritual

5.] Counter-cultural

6.] Other?

Part 1 – Baptismal Identity

Part 2 – Affirming Baptismal Identity as a Lifelong Practice

PART 3: STRENGTHENING PROFESSION OF FAITH

3.1 Profession of Faith as a Rite of Passage

As faith is formed in the life of a baptized person, we note there are usually significant milestones along the way, shaped by the stages of development and by the experiences of life. Passage from a stage of less responsibility to more responsibility should be noted and those baptized should be encouraged to make affirmation of their faith at such passages. We note that those specialized in child development are able to make us aware of strategic stages from elementary school through adolescence.

We call on churches to be sensitive to the openness often found in younger children, and to encourage younger children to considering professing their faith and seeking admission to the Lord's Table, as the Synods of 1988 and 1995 have encouraged.

We call on churches to see Profession of Faith not as an end but as the beginning of a new step forward in the journey of faith formation.

3.2 The Significance of Public Profession of Faith as an Affirmation of Baptism

Public profession of faith, while not a sacrament, is able to serve as a healthy ritual which is an occasion for publicly affirming what was already signed and sealed at baptism and serves to complete our baptism. It is a means of entering into the responsibilities and privileges of membership in Christ's body. Youth should be given the opportunity to exercise their office as believers appropriate to every stage of their growth in maturity and faith.

We call on churches to understand that we become members of the church at our baptism, and our Public profession is an occasion for affirming and responding to our baptism.

We also call on churches to recognize and affirm the gifts of youth and employ them in service both to the Christian community and to others.

3.3 Profession of Faith as a healthy ritual.

A public Profession of Faith serves as a rite of passage out of childhood and into adolescent or adult faith. Neither the current extension of adolescence as a distinct stage in one's life cycle nor a prolonged period of formal education should detract from the calling of each baptized person to respond to God's promises.

We call on churches to explore ways in which the ritual of a public Profession of Faith can be revitalized and become a memorable and encouraging event in the spiritual journey of each believer.

We call on all baptized persons to resist the temptation to unnecessarily delay or postpone their personal response to baptism, but to sense the urgency of such a response.

3.4 Young Children and Profession of Faith

Young children are people of faith. Little ones have much to teach us when we take time to listen to their simple, spontaneous expressions of love for Jesus—as Christ himself suggested (Mark 10). The Christian Reformed Church took Christ’s reminder seriously when it urged congregations to invite covenant children to affirm their baptisms and profess their faith at younger ages, rather than waiting until late high school. In 1988, synod encouraged covenant children “to make public profession of faith as soon as they exhibit faith and are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lords’ Supper.” (Acts 1988, p.559) In 1995 synod outlined a four step procedure for hearing such age-appropriate professions of faith. (Acts 1995, p.719-720)

We call on churches to embrace young children who have professed their faith and to heartily affirm her/his baptism, celebrate with great joy, and give thanks to God for his faithfulness throughout the generations.

3.5 Profession of Faith and Confirmation

While confirmation was considered a sacrament in pre-Reformation Days, the Reformers resisted the sacramental element and focused on a catechetical and confessional purpose. Consequently, Reformed churches have come to know this rite of passage as Profession of Faith. While not a sacrament, its importance must be carefully understood and embraced. Contrary to diminishing baptism, profession of faith completes one’s baptism. The journey prior to Profession of Faith should include catechetical instruction to provide an understanding of the Christian faith, a confession of the church’s common faith, a personal response to the grace of God and an expression of love for and commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior, and a pledge of obedience to the triune God.

We call on churches to shape ministries that will seek a meaningful and heartfelt faith response to their baptism.

3.6 Profession of Faith and the Mission of God

Public profession of faith must be understood against the backdrop of the mission of the church. The Great Commission calls the church to a public testimony of faith as it disciples nations, “baptizing them . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28: 19-20) Therefore, the church’s profession of faith is ultimately designed to be a proclamation that reaches the lost and disciples the found. Further, at the very center of the Great Commission is the Great Command to love others and bring transformation to God’s world. We publicly profess our faith by our faith-filled actions in society (Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A. 86),

especially caring for “the least of these” with grace-filled words and deeds (Matthew 25:31ff) and serving as an advocate for the victims of injustice (Proverbs 31:8-9; Micah 6:8).

We call on churches to strengthen the understanding of Public Profession of Faith by placing it within the mission of the church in the world.

3.7 Profession of Faith and the Worship of the Church

Narrowly identifying public profession of faith with a single ceremony that provides access to the Lord’s Supper may have had the unintended consequence of undermining the reality it sought to highlight. Public profession of faith should be seen as a vital act that permeates the church’s entire worship experience. The celebration of the sacraments *already* involves a public profession of faith. The parents (and sponsors) presenting their children for baptism first publicly profess their faith (cf. the second question of the baptism formulary). The congregation professes the Apostles’ or Nicene Creed in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. A public profession of faith is involved in the ordination and installation of church leaders (cf. the second question of the formulary for Ordination). In the regular liturgical use of the creeds and confessions, in every song sung by the congregation, as well as the offering of a soloist or choral arrangement, the “Amen” or “Thanks be to God” responses of the congregation, a young person assuming the responsibilities of adult membership, the testimony of an individual, the welcoming of new members, the report of those returning from a mission trip, expressions of gratitude for ministry received and of course, the sermon as a means of grace—all are public professions of faith.

We call on churches to strengthen and revitalize Profession of faith by underscoring, celebrating, enhancing and multiplying these liturgical moments.

3.8 The Significant Role of Parents and Guardians

At baptism, parents make important vows about their role in the faith development of their children, specifically to instruct their children in the Christian faith and lead them by example to be Christ’s disciples. The primary biblical model for parental nurture of children remains Deuteronomy 6:4-9. We call on parents to nurture their children’s faith by faithfully teaching the truths found in Scripture, but also by using every possible means in everyday life to interact with their children on the questions and issues of faith. As a church we must move back to the biblical norm that Christian nurture is the primary responsibility of the parents with the church serving as a supportive role in this process. The key to a revived Christian nurture of children is a parental faith that is vital, involved, and communicated. Adult spiritual growth and discipleship is the foundation for children’s faith and its nurture. Alongside traditional church based Christian Education programs, congregations must emphasize training parents for this enormous responsibility. Whether through classes, workshops, or mentoring, congregations need to walk alongside parents to assist them in their task of Christian nurture in the home from birth until the child leaves the home. A strong denomination wide effort is needed to invite and exhort parents to accept this responsibility with renewed commitment and joyful hope.

We call on parents to understand that the faith development of their children is primary among all the tasks of parenthood.

We call on churches to take an active supportive role with parents, not only reminding them, but also providing support, encouragement, counsel and training in their tasks of faith formation.

3.9 Profession of Faith and Lifelong Discipleship

Profession of Faith is a significant mile-marker in the lifelong journey of discipleship. Congregations should not view Profession of Faith as a “graduation” from church-based education programs, but rather, Profession of Faith should further encourage and stimulate the individual towards greater levels of maturity in faith formation. Profession of Faith should further awaken the entire congregation to challenge and stretch Christian believers of all ages in ways that make faith formation a priority in every stage of life.

We call on churches to emphasize the life-long nature of Christian discipleship and develop ministries to aid this awakening.

3.10 Persons with Disabilities and Profession of Faith

Healthy congregations welcome and include *all* who seek to belong to the body of Christ by professing faith in him—particularly persons who, by birth or by accident, live with disabilities. “Come to Jesus. Belong to the people of God. Give and receive love and acceptance—and participate by sharing *your* gifts with brothers and sisters in this faith community.” The invitation to profess one’s love for Christ and to live in community with fellow believers is offered to all in the measure in which they are able to respond to it—with no age requirement, no physical, emotional, or cognitive prerequisite! The invitation has no higher goal than to extend Christ’s love to all, to deepen the fellowship of believers, and to strengthen the witness and work of the church in this world.

We call on churches to practice the full welcome of God to all those whose disabilities make it necessary for them to express their faith in their own appropriate way.

3.11 Cultural Differences and Public Profession of Faith

We celebrate the many ways that the formation of children and youth comes to expression in the various cultures represented in the CRC and acknowledge that "the church, in its unity and diversity, is God's strategic vehicle for bringing into being his new creation." (Acts of Synod 1996, p.230)

While we recognize that race, ethnicity, and culture are significant for self-identification, we uphold that "Christians find their deepest identity in union with and in the service of Christ." (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 232) We embrace the nurturing patterns that teach and unfold Scriptural truths e.g. various cultural expressions that emphasize: family and inter-generational relationships, education and discipleship, passion for prayer, a narrative style of communication, etc.

We encourage Christians from various backgrounds to develop faith formation practices that reflect their cultures and are compatible with His kingdom. We celebrate a variety of cultural practices that express and challenge the church's work in this area, such as: First Nations naming rites.

We call on churches to encourage all youth to give urgent and careful attention to their affirmations of and response to their baptism, and to consider that neither a prolonged time of education nor an extended period of adolescence absolves one from expressing our faith responses to God and his church.

3.12 Profession of Faith and Contemporary Culture

Public profession of faith goes hand in hand with the church's calling to be a prophetic voice in contemporary culture. Obligated to speak out against injustice and wickedness in the world, the church errs seriously when it suppresses the faith by remaining silent. It must sound a loud and clear voice for the voiceless that embraces all, without exception, with the love of Christ (Proverbs 31:8-9; I Corinthians 14:8). In the faith formation of its members, young and old, the body is equipped to profess its faith, staking the claims of Christ in every sector of modern society. The profession of its members ought not be a world-flight Christianity that trumpets platitudes over a fortified wall of isolationism, nor a profession submerged by or indistinguishable from the deafening noise of this world. The church's public profession of faith and the faith formation of its members must be in line with the Bible and the Reformed tradition, but, as truly reformed and reforming, the church must be determined to be a voice for today with an ear for the times.

We call on all who have professed their faith to be committed to the task of the Body of Christ to be his transforming presence in the world.

Part 4 – The Lord's Supper

**CRC Faith Formation Committee
Fall, 2008**

Helpful Practices in the Churches for Strengthening Public Profession of Faith

Recent conversations in the church have revealed a high degree of interest in learning from each other as we shape and reshape our ministries for effective faith formation. The sacrament of baptism, growth in faith, age-appropriate professions of faith, and admission to the Lord's Table have all been the subject of careful study and of many new efforts.

It has become clear to us that revitalizing Public Profession of Faith requires understanding that our profession of faith is an affirmation of our baptism, and serves as a healthy "rite of passage" from one level of faith to another. The age at which this takes place has often been discussed in the church and the Synod of 1988 encouraged covenant children to "to make public profession of faith as soon as they exhibit faith and are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lord's Supper." In 1995 synod outlined a four step procedure for hearing age-appropriate professions of faith. (See Acts of Synod 1995, p.719-720) Parents, Guardians, Elders and Pastors will all have a part in preparing children for this step.

We attempt here to help the churches learn from each other as they have sought to make their Public Profession of Faith practices meaningful and vital. We hope that by observing the efforts of each other we can all grow.

We have observed that efforts to strengthen Profession of Faith often center on three elements in the process:

1. One-on-one mentoring both before and after profession of faith.

-at 14th St. CRC in Holland all teens, including those who have made an early expression of faith, will be urged to meet with a personal mentor to discuss the church and the creeds and the responsibilities of adult membership. The mentor will encourage an Adult Faith Commitment which involves signing a letter of agreement and inclusion of the Adult Faith Commitment in public worship.

-South Bend CRC, South Bend, IN, provides a yearlong mentoring program called Credo.

-Seymour CRC, Grand Rapids, MI, has developed helpful guidance for parents and mentors as they prepare children to seeking admission to the Table.

2. Age-appropriate preparation for professions of faith.

-All Nations CRC in Halifax, NS, is nurturing professions of faith at multiple ages in a child's life, rather than at only one time.

-At 14th St. CRC in Holland, MI, the Director of Children's Ministries supplies the Elders with a list of children who have not made known their desire to participate in

the Lord's Supper; the Elders are encouraged to take the initiative in calling the families of these children and discuss the matter with them.

-In a number of churches parents or a child inform the pastor or elder, and a private brief meeting is arranged in which the child's expression of faith is heard. The elder or pastor reports on this at the next meeting and permission is granted to come to the Lord's Table.

-LaGrave CRC of Grand Rapids involves a three step process: baptism, declaration of faith, and profession of faith. "Table Fellowship" is granted after a declaration of faith which involves a class dealing with the meaning of the Lord's Supper and the significance of expressing one's faith publicly, an interview with two elders, and a welcome during a worship service (with their parents). During the senior year of high school, all those who have been "Admitted to Table Fellowship" but have not taken the next step of Profession of Faith will be visited by an elder or pastor to encourage them to take the third step on their journey of faith.

-At Faith CRC in Nashville, TN children are encouraged to seek admission to the Lord's Table by making a profession of faith at a minimum of 8-10 years old. This will involve attending a class with the pastor, an interview with the elders, and profession and reception in a public worship service.

-South Bend CRC, South Bend, IN, includes an instruction/interview with an elder and pastor, child and parents, in preparation for seeking admission to the Table, coordinated with instruction on the sacrament as part of Children's Worship.

-Seymour CRC in Grand Rapids, MI, has helpfully outlined guidelines for the process of preparation with mentors and youth leaders in different age groups (elementary school, junior high school, high school, and post high school). A Profession of Faith curriculum of five sessions has been developed in preparation for profession, to be adjusted for each age group.

3. Age-appropriate liturgical materials for use with professions of faith.

-Seymour CRC, Grand Rapids, MI, has developed five different liturgical forms for use with professions of faith of different ages and circumstances.

-LaGrave CRC, Grand Rapids, MI, has written a "Liturgy for Table Fellowship Admission" for use in a public worship service.

CRC Synodical Decision re Children/Youth and Profession of Faith

Synod 1988 declares:

- a. The church is warranted in admitting to the Lord's Supper covenant children who give evidence of faith and are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lord's Supper.

Grounds:

- 1.) The Bible makes clear that participation in the Lord's Supper is a result of status in the covenant (Matt.26:28; Luke 22:20; cf. Exodus 12; 13; 24:4-11; I Cor.10:1-4; Eph.2:11-13) and also entails an act of faith on the part of those participating (I Cor.11:23-29; John 6:35; Luke 22:19).
 - 2.) In baptism God seals the promise of the covenant made with Abraham. Participation in the Lord's Supper indicates an individual acceptance of these covenant promises through faith.
 - 3.) Our confessions teach the necessity of faith for participation in the Lord's Supper. The Heidelberg Catechism explains that participants in the sacrament, "accept with believing heart the entire suffering and death of Christ" (Q/A 76). The Belgic Confession states that the sacrament of the Holy Supper was instituted, "to nourish and sustain those who are already born again and ingrafted into His family: His Church" (Art. XXXV).
- b. The church is to assure itself of such faith through a public profession of faith on the part of covenant children.

Grounds:

- 1.) Confessing with one's mouth that Jesus is Lord (Rom.10:9; Phil.2:9-11) in the presence of God and his people (I Tim.6:12-13; Matt.10:32) allows the church to witness the work of God's Spirit in the lives of covenant children and joyfully receive them in the fellowship of the table.
 - 2.) A public profession of faith of covenant children enables the consistory to faithfully supervise the Lord's Supper.
- c. Covenant children should be encouraged to make public profession of faith as soon as they exhibit faith and are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lords' Supper.

Grounds:

- 1.) Since the Bible establishes no specific age requirement, the common practice of delaying profession of faith even though faith is present has no biblical warrant.
- 2.) Faith created by the Holy Spirit through the gospel ought to be professed, celebrated by the church, and nourished at the Lords' Supper.

- d. The profession of faith of covenant children required for admission to the Lord's Supper is not necessarily an acceptance of adult responsibilities within a congregation; therefore:
 - 1.) The church shall continue to instruct these children in the Word and in the Reformed confessions;
 - 2.) Adult responsibilities of membership are to be granted by the church council and assumed by professing individuals at age eighteen or as granted by the Articles of Incorporation of the congregation.

(Acts of Synod 1988, articles 72 and 76, pages 557-560.)

Synod 1995 declares:

- a. That churches be encouraged to implement the decision of Synod 1988 (Art. 72, C, 33, A, B, c and Art. 76, B, 3, d) by use of the four-step procedure outlines in Report A, with a modification in Step 3.

Step 1: The child expresses interest in participating in the Lord's Supper to his/her parent(s) or perhaps to a church-school teacher or another faith mentor within the church.

Step 2: The parent(s) discusses with the child the meaning of the sacrament and assesses the motivation of the church for participating. Convinced that this inquiry arises from a genuine stirring of the Spirit in the heart of the child, the parent(s) contacts an elder and/or pastor.

Step 3: The elder and/or pastor meets with the child and parent(s) to hear the testimony of the child with respect to his/her faith and desire to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is recommended that the child then participate in a short process of preparation for profession of faith taught by a pastor, elder, church-school teacher, or potential faith mentor. This training will focus on the nature and meaning of the sacrament and on a basic explication of the Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. It will be carried out at the cognitive level appropriate to the child. When satisfied with the faith commitment of the child, the elder and/or pastor will recommend to the council that this child be admitted to the table of the Lord. If the elder or pastor is unable to make such a recommendation, he will provide clear counsel and advice to the child and parent(s) on how to address the area(s) of concern. It may also be helpful to assign an adult faith mentor to nurture a child toward full adult responsibilities in the church after he/she is recommended for profession.

Step 4: The child makes a public profession of faith in a simple and appropriate manner during a regular worship service. Since baptism is commemorated during a worship

service, the appropriation of the baptismal promises should also be celebrated during a public worship service. Furthermore, a regular worship setting offers an opportunity for the people of God to celebrate a child's first communion and to make public promises of support.

b. That the modified trial form of 1989 (printed above [Acts of Synod 1995, pages 715-716]) be accepted as a suggested form for public profession of faith by children.

c. That each congregation devise an appropriate means for securing a commitment to the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church and to the responsibilities of adult membership in the local congregation from confessing members who, having attained the age of 18, have not yet made such a commitment.

d. That membership in the Christian Reformed Church be counted in two categories:

1.) Baptized members – persons who have been baptized but not admitted to the Lord's Supper.

2.) Confessing members – persons who have been admitted to the Lord's Supper on the basis of a personal expression of faith ("profession of faith"). Confessing members who have reached the age of 18 and who have made a commitment to the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church and the responsibilities of adult membership in the church shall be accorded the full rights and privileges of such membership.

(Acts of Synod 1995, art. 69, pages 714-717)

Synod 2006 – Acts of Synod, 2006, Article 71, p.730

1. That synod allow for the admission of all baptized members to the Lord's Supper on the basis of their full membership in the covenant community.

Grounds:

a. The five grounds of Overture 16 along with the Report B of 1995 show that there are valid theological reasons to consider membership in the covenant as the basis for participation in communion just as membership in the old covenant was the basis for participation in the Passover.

b. Opening communion to all baptized members is not a denial of the need of an expression of faith (i.e., age-appropriate profession) but is a healthier understanding that such faith is expressed in many ways and at many levels within and through the covenant community and not only through a verbal affirmation of beliefs.

c. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper, like preaching and the sacrament of baptism, is a means of grace to all members of God's covenant.

The essential question is: What is evidence of faith in a covenant member?
The very act of hearing the “invitation” to communion and responding in faith by participating is an age-appropriate expression of knowing that communion is about being part of a community that receives the gift of life from the Jesus who said, “Let the little children come to me.”
—*Adopted*

Synod 2007. Acts of Synod 2007, Art.67, p.657

That synod, during the five year period of the Faith Formation Committee’s mandate, grant to congregations the freedom to admit all baptized members to the Lord’s Table upon approval of the consistory.

Ground: Synod 2006 was persuaded that the study of committee reports of 1986, 1988, and 1995 provide sufficient biblical and theological grounds for the admittance of baptized members to the Lord’s Table on the basis of Reformed covenantal theology. *-Defeated*

Art.71

That synod affirm the church’s commitment to the practice of covenant baptism. *Adopted.*

That synod discourage the practice of infant dedication. *Adopted.*