



How Did the Presbyterian Church Get Started?



Session Objective

In this session, participants will learn about the rich history of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and how that history influences its identity.

Faith Statement

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) identifies with the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation. The focus of these affirmations is the rediscovery of God's grace in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant watchwords—grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone—embody principles of understanding which continue to guide and motivate the people of God in the life of faith.

—Book of Order (G-2.0400)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- How did the Presbyterian Church get started?
- What do you know about the Protestant Reformation?
- How does the history of the Presbyterian Church connect with the history of the United States?
- How are Presbyterians similar to other Christian churches? How are Presbyterians unique?



Explore

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and explore these questions:

- What does this Scripture passage tell us about God?
- What does this Scripture passage tell us about Jesus Christ?
- What does this Scripture passage tell us about our relationship with the triune God?
- How is this Scripture passage contrary to the practice of selling indulgences that Martin Luther experienced in the 1500s?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

- Who created us? Why were we created? What should our way of life be?
- How is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) connected to the Reformers of the sixteenth century?
- How is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reformed and always reforming?



Exit

Close the session in prayer, thanking God for the time that you have had together.





Why Are We Called Presbyterians?



Session Objective

In this session, participants will learn the meaning of the word *Presbyterian* and how the polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) relates to its name.

Faith Statement

... good policy and order should be constituted and observed in the [church] where, as in the house of God, it becomes all things to be done decently and in order.

—*The Scots Confession* (3.20)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Why are we called *Presbyterians*?
- How is your congregation similar to and different from other Christian congregations in your community? How is your congregation similar to and different from other Presbyterian churches in your community?
- How do various Christian denominations relate to their names? (Examples: Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans)
- How does the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) connect to its name?



Explore

Explain to the participants that the name *Presbyterian* comes from the Greek word *presbuteros*, which means “elder” and that our denomination is named after our form of government. Read 1 Corinthians 14:40 and explore these questions:

- How does this verse connect with the polity (government) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?
- In what ways does your congregation function “decently and in order”?
- In what ways does the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) function “decently and in order”?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they’ve learned.

- How are we better equipped for ministry by placing a high priority on organization?
- Since we are a connectional church, what could happen if we didn’t function “decently and in order”?
- How would you respond to someone who asks you, “Why is your church called *Presbyterian*?”



Exit

Give each person an opportunity to share one thing that he or she learned during the session. Then ask each person to think of a prayer request that can be shared with the whole group. Ask each person to share the prayer request with the person on his or her left. Close in prayer, giving each person an opportunity to share the prayer request from the person on his or her right.





How Is Worship in a Presbyterian Church Different from Other Churches?



Session Objective

Today's session will help students understand the uniqueness of Presbyterian worship as they consider worship as a drama with God and themselves.

Faith Statement

The church gathers to praise God, to hear God's word for humankind, to baptize and to join in the Lord's Supper, to pray for and present the world to God in worship, to enjoy fellowship, to receive instruction, strength, and comfort, to order and organize its own corporate life, to be tested, renewed, and reformed, and to speak and act in the world's affairs as may be appropriate to the needs of the time.

— *The Confession of 1967, Inclusive Language Text (9.36)*



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- How is worship in a Presbyterian church different from other churches?
- What part of your congregation's regular worship services do you most resonate with? What part of your congregation's regular worship services do you least resonate with?
- If you have been to worship in a non-Presbyterian church, how was the worship experience similar to or different from your congregation's regular worship services?
- If you have been to worship in other Presbyterian churches or at Presbyterian-related events, how was the worship similar to or different from your congregation's regular worship services?



Explore

If possible, review a worship service bulletin or recent order of worship with the participants. Read Isaiah 6:1-8 and explore these questions:

- What is easy to understand or challenging to understand in this Scripture passage?
- What elements of worship do you see in this Scripture passage?
- How does this Scripture passage connect with Presbyterian worship?



Express

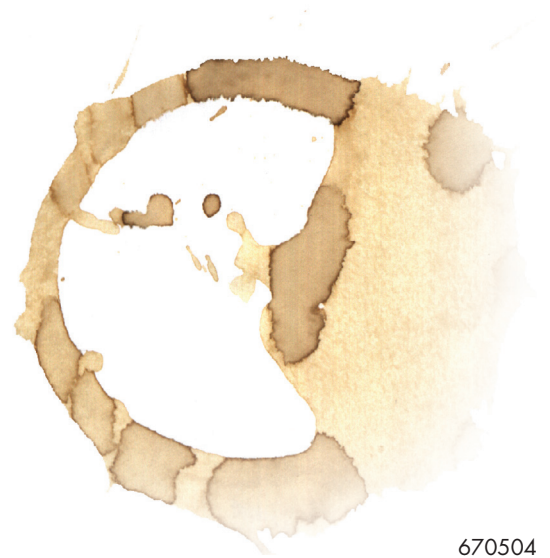
Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

- What priorities are evident in Presbyterian worship services? What is missing?
- What is the most important part of the Presbyterian worship service?
- How would you respond to someone who asked you how your congregation's worship service is different from other worship services?



Exit

Give each participant an opportunity to share one thing that they have learned from today's session. Close in prayer, thanking God for the time that you have had together.





Session Objective

In this session, participants will learn about some of the theological concepts that unite the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as well as some of the areas in which Presbyterians disagree.

Faith Statement

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord.

— *The Apostles' Creed* (2.1-2.2a)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What do Presbyterians believe about God?
- What beliefs do all people of faith hold in common?
- What beliefs do all Christians hold in common?
- What beliefs make Presbyterians unique?



Explore

Read Daniel 2:20-23a and explore these questions:

- What does Daniel think God is in charge of? Is Daniel correct or is he exaggerating poetically?
- What other things that God controls could Daniel have added to his prayer?
- Is there anything that God is not in charge of because God doesn't have enough power or control?

Say something like the following to the participants:

The passage from Daniel speaks to God's sovereignty, which is a core belief of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Presbyterians trust that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and always in charge.

Explore the following questions together:

- How is God's sovereignty related to the creation of the universe? to the orbit of planets? to history on Earth? to your personality? to every little thing you do? to the way a flower blooms? to the way a rock sits still?
- Are humans more related or less related to God's sovereignty than other things in the world?
- Is God in charge of your choices? If the answer is *yes*, what statement are you making about the phrase *in charge*? If the answer is *no*, what statement are you making about God?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

- How would you respond if someone asked you, "What do Presbyterians believe?"
- What questions do you still have about Presbyterian beliefs?



Exit

Give each person an opportunity to share one thing that he or she learned in today's session. Then close the session in prayer.





Session Objective

In this session, participants will learn what Presbyterians believe about themselves and what they can do to respond to God's grace.

Faith Statement

Now it is most certain that all of us are by nature sinners and godless, and before God's judgment-seat are convicted of godlessness and are guilty of death, but that, solely by the grace of Christ and not from any merit of ours or consideration for us, we are justified, that is, absolved from sin and death by God the Judge.

—The Second Helvetic Confession (5.107)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What do Presbyterians believe about the people of God?
- What is God's relationship with humanity?
- Does God have a different relationship with Christians compared to non-Christians? Why or why not?
- What do Presbyterians believe about the role of humanity in God's world?



Explore

Read the first and third chapter of the book of Jonah and explore these questions:

- Why did Jonah first disobey God? Why did he eventually obey God?
- Why do people obey God?
- Does God command the right things because they are right, or are they right because God commands them?
- When you care about someone, why do you do things that they would appreciate?
- When you think about God giving you a life full of blessings, how should you respond?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

- In what ways do you currently live your life as a thankful response to God's grace? In what ways do you fall short of living your life as a thankful response to God's grace?

- In what ways does your congregation thankfully respond to God's grace? In what ways does your congregation fall short of thankfully responding to God's grace?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "What do Presbyterians believe about the people of God?"



Exit

Toss a wadded-up napkin to someone in your group. Have the participants continue tossing the napkin to people in the group so that everyone receives the napkin only once. When all of the participants have had the napkin tossed to them, have the last person toss it back to you. Repeat the same pattern of tossing among the participants until everyone knows who tosses the napkin to them and to whom they toss the napkin after it is received. Explain to the participants that in the closing prayer, they will have the opportunity to pray for the person they tossed the napkin to. Close in prayer, giving the participants an opportunity to pray for their assigned person in the same order that the napkin was tossed.





Session Objective

God commands us, as individuals and as a church, to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly” (Micah 6:8). Jesus commissioned us to make disciples, baptize, and teach the gospel (Matthew 28:16-20). Your participants will learn how the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) understands and lives out these commands.

Faith Statement

The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

—Book of Order (G-1.0200)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What do Presbyterians do?
- As Reformed Christians, what priorities do Presbyterians have in their various ministries?
- How do the priorities of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) compare to the priorities of other Christian denominations?
- How is your congregation at work in the world?



Explore

Read John 21:15-17 and explore these questions:

- What exactly does Jesus mean when he tells Peter to “feed my lambs”? In what ways does your congregation follow this instruction?
- What exactly does Jesus mean when he tells Peter to “tend my sheep”? In what ways does your congregation follow this instruction?
- What exactly does Jesus mean when he tells Peter to “feed my sheep”? In what ways does your congregation follow this instruction?

Read the Faith Statement together and explore these questions:

- What is another way to say *great ends*? (*goals, purpose statements*)
- What is this paragraph about? (*the things God has called the church to do*)
- Why is it a good idea for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be organized around these great ends?
- Which of the great ends connect with the instructions found in John 21:15-17?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they’ve learned.

- How would you respond if someone asked you, “What do Presbyterians do in the world?”
- How is your congregation active in the life of your community?
- Based on all that you’ve learned in this mini-course, how would you describe Presbyterianism to someone who had never heard of it?



Exit

Give each person an opportunity to share one thing that he or she has learned about being Presbyterian while you’ve been using this curriculum. Close in prayer, remembering those in the world who are in special need of God’s love.

