

1  
2 20. 2004 Referral: Item 08-09. Recommendation 2. That the 216th General Assembly (2004)  
3 Authorize the Office of Theology and Worship, with Participation of the Trinity Working Group, to Invite  
4 Response and Comment to the Current Draft of the Theological Statement on the Doctrine of the Trinity,  
5 and to Conduct a Series of Consultations Throughout the Church to Encourage Fresh Engagement with  
6 the Fullness of the Doctrine of the Trinity—From the General Assembly Council (Minutes, 2004, Part I,  
7 pp. 17, 617).  
8

9 21. 2004 Referral: Item 08-09. Recommendation 3. That the Office of Theology and Worship, with  
10 Participation of the Trinity Working Group, Prepare a Final Draft of the Theological Statement on the  
11 Doctrine of the Trinity and Submit It to the 217th General Assembly (2006) for Action—From the  
12 General Assembly Council (Minutes, 2004, Part I, pp. 17, 617).  
13

#### 14 **Recommendations**

15  
16 **The General Assembly Council, upon recommendation of the Congregational Ministries Division,**  
17 **recommends that the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2006):**  
18

- 19 1. **Receive “The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing” and commend it to the church for study.**
- 20 2. **instruct the Office of the general Assembly to publish the full text of “The Trinity: God’s**  
21 **Love Overflowing” in the Minutes of 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2006).**
- 22 3. **instruct the Office of Theology and Worship, and Congregational Ministries Publishing**  
23 **and Christian Education, to prepare study materials for “The Trinity: God’s Love**  
24 **Overflowing.”**
- 25 4. **instruct the Office of Theology and Worship to make “The Trinity: God’s Love**  
26 **Overflowing” available to the church, with study guide, in both print and electronic forms.**
- 27 5. **encourage the Office of Theology and Worship to work with Congregational Ministries**  
28 **Publishing and/or Presbyterian Publishing Corporation to make available liturgical**  
29 **resources based on “The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing.”**
- 30 6. **encourage the Office of Theology and Worship to work with Congregational Ministries**  
31 **Publishing and/or Presbyterian Publishing Corporation to make available the historical**  
32 **resources on prayer and worship that underlie “The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing.”**  
33  
34

#### 35 **Rationale**

36  
37 These recommendations are in response to the following referrals:  
38  
39

40 20. 2004 Referral: Item 08-09. Recommendation 2. That the 216th General Assembly (2004)  
41 Authorize the Office of Theology and Worship, with Participation of the Trinity Working Group, to Invite  
42 Response and Comment to the Current Draft of the Theological Statement on the Doctrine of the Trinity,  
43 and to Conduct a Series of Consultations Throughout the Church to Encourage Fresh Engagement with  
44 the Fullness of the Doctrine of the Trinity—From the General Assembly Council (Minutes, 2004, Part I,  
45 pp. 17, 617).  
46

47 21. 2004 Referral: Item 08-09. Recommendation 3. That the Office of Theology and Worship, with  
48 Participation of the Trinity Working Group, Prepare a Final Draft of the Theological Statement on the  
49 Doctrine of the Trinity and Submit It to the 217th General Assembly (2006) for Action—From the  
50 General Assembly Council (Minutes, 2004, Part I, pp. 17, 617).  
51

## THE TRINITY: GOD'S LOVE OVERFLOWING

### Introduction

“The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing” is the product of more than five years of study, consultation, discussion, and prayer by a group of pastors, elders, and theologians. The 212<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2000) instructed the Office of Theology and Worship to constitute a task force to study the doctrine of the Trinity in Presbyterian theology, worship, and life. The task force report was due in 2003, but work was delayed by the events of September 11, 2001. In 2004, the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly approved the request of the Office of Theology and Worship to seek responses from the church before preparing a final draft. This was done, and the response was heartening. Many faithful Presbyterians were eager to enter into deep theological reflection, discussion and feedback that has strengthened the final report.

”The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing” does not present an exhaustive or new doctrine of the Trinity. It aims to assist the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in reclaiming the doctrine of the Trinity in theology, worship, and life. Often the church takes up a theological issue only when there is great controversy—a time when a lack of consensus on an issue embroils the church in an intractable debate. The doctrine of the Trinity is a pressing issue for contemporary Presbyterians for precisely the opposite reason. Despite the remarkable renewal of Trinitarian theology in recent decades, this doctrine is widely neglected or poorly understood in many of our congregations. The task force is convinced that the doctrine of the Trinity is crucial to our faith, worship and service. The Office of Theology and Worship and the task force pray that Presbyterians will once again find that the doctrine of the Trinity is good and joyful news!

“God’s Love Overflowing” is a metaphor, deeply rooted in scripture and Christian tradition, that speaks of the infinite ways the triune God loves all of creation, including humankind. Comparing God’s love to a waterfall or a stream may seem impersonal, yet biblical images of living water and rolling streams abound. “God’s Love Overflowing” is an attempt to express the amazing riches that flow boundlessly from the triune God who in loving freedom seeks and saves us, reconciles and renews us, and draws us into loving relationships that reflect the eternal oneness of God.

The General Assembly document, “A Report to the Church on Issues of Language and Gender” (2000), provided important background for the work of the task force. The document speaks of “inclusive” language for the people of God and “faithful” language for God, language that plumbs the depths of scripture for rich and varied imagery. Such “faithful” language for God affirms classic trinitarian doctrine while seeking fresh ways to speak of the mystery of the triune God. All theological reflection involves words and language, and so we must grapple with the limits and possibilities of language for God, but this was not the primary charge to the task force. The General Assembly asked for faithful and constructive theological reflection that could help the church renew its faith in the triune God.

As members of the task force prayed, worshiped and worked together, they sought guidance first from scripture, then from our confessions, from the Reformed and ecumenical theological tradition, and from the prayers of the church, past and present. In its reflection, the task force was mindful of the struggle to find faithful ways to speak of the God who is love overflowing, to address the Trinity in worship and prayer, and to do so in words that faithfully bear witness to the mystery and the presence of the One who is with us and for us. ”The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing” seeks to expand rather than limit the church’s vocabulary of praise and wonder. No one name, no single metaphor, no set of words or phrases—however thoughtful, poetic or profound can say everything that could be said about the mystery of God’s love made known to us - in Jesus Christ and sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Part I, “Confessing God’s Overflowing Love,” is confessional; it summarizes our sense of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s theological convictions. Part II, “Participating in God’s Overflowing

103 Love.” is liturgical; it seeks to show the ways all Christians participate in the life of God as we worship  
104 together. Part III, “Embodying God’s Overflowing Love,” is missional; it speaks of the concrete ways all  
105 Christians are called to embody the overflowing love of God in mission and service—in the life of faith,  
106 hope and love. The Trinity Task Force and the Office of Theology and Worship hope and pray that this  
107 report is found to be faithful to the triune God whom we seek to worship and serve with heart, soul, mind  
108 and strength.

109 \*\*\*

110  
111  
112 Members of the Trinity Working Group (2000-2005):

- 113  
114 **Edwin Andrade**, Pastor of Hispano-Latino Ministries, Riverside Presbyterian Church, Sterling, VA  
115 **Phil Butin**, Pastor of Shepherd of the Valley Presbyterian Church, Albuquerque NM; now President and  
116 Professor of Theology at San Francisco Theological Seminary  
117 **Daniel Migliore**, Professor of Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary  
118 **Sung Wook Chung**, Assistant Professor of Theology at Denver Seminary  
119 **Amy Plantinga Pauw**, Professor of Theology at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary  
120 **Rebecca Button Prichard**, Moderator, Pastor of Tustin Presbyterian Church, Tustin, CA  
121 **Cynthia L. Rigby**, Professor of Theology, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary  
122 **N’Yisrela Watts-Afriyie**, Contract Staff, Synod of Southern California and Hawaii and Candidate for  
123 Ministry of Word and Sacrament, Presbytery of the Pacific  
124 **Rebecca Harden Weaver**, Professor of Church History at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian  
125 School of Christian Education in Richmond, VA.  
126 **Charles Wiley**, Associate for Theology, Office of Theology and Worship

127  
128  
129 **I. CONFESSING GOD’S OVERFLOWING LOVE**

130  
131 Confident in the scriptural witness, in unison with the creeds of the ecumenical church, and guided by our  
132 Reformed confessions, we place our faith in the triune God alone.

133  
134 In life and in death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the  
135 love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the  
136 Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve (Brief Statement of Faith, *BC*,  
137 10.1).

138  
139 In sovereign love God created the heavens and the earth and called and formed the people of Israel to be a  
140 light to all the nations. In costly grace the Lord Jesus Christ ministered among us and was crucified and  
141 raised for us and for our salvation. In transforming power the Holy Spirit renews and sanctifies us, draws  
142 us into new communion with God and each other, awakens our praise and worship, and equips us for the  
143 service of God in the world. The triune God does all this through “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the  
144 love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:14).

145  
146  
147 **The Doctrine of the Trinity as the Summary of the Gospel**

148  
149 We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained  
150 access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of  
151 God.... and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our  
152 hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:1-5).

154 The doctrine of the Trinity is a summary of the gospel of Jesus Christ—it cannot be understood apart from  
155 this gospel, and the gospel cannot be fully understood apart from the doctrine of the Trinity.

156  
157 According to the witness of scripture, God’s love comes to us in a threefold way: God loved the world  
158 and gave the Son for our salvation (Jn 3:16); Jesus Christ, God’s only Son our Lord, loved us and gave  
159 his life for us (Gal 2:20); the gift of God’s love in Christ has been poured into our hearts by the Holy  
160 Spirit (2 Cor 1:22). The church’s confession and praise of the triune God is rooted in the threefold self-  
161 revelation of the one God who is our creator, our redeemer, and our sanctifier.

162  
163 Even before the election of Israel and the coming of Christ, God’s creation of the world expressed  
164 overflowing love. The abundance and diversity of creatures display the majestic beauty of creation. Yet  
165 all creation groans for redemption, even as every human heart hungers for the fullness of life that only  
166 God can give (Rom 8:22-23). As sinful creatures, we know the triune God reliably neither by our  
167 observation of the world nor by our exploration of the marvels of our creaturely existence. Rather, we  
168 know the great love of the God who is three-in-one and one-in-three truly, tangibly, and decisively only  
169 through God’s own self-gift in the person and work of Jesus Christ and in the presence and power of the  
170 Holy Spirit.

171  
172 In continuity with God’s mighty acts among the people of Israel, but also with surprising newness, the  
173 Word of God was with us and for us uniquely in the person of Jesus who as an infant cried in the arms of  
174 Mary, who was baptized by John and received the Holy Spirit, who broke bread with sinners and tax  
175 collectors, who forgave and healed the paralytic in Capernaum, whose power flowed to the hemorrhaging  
176 woman, who taught with authority, who blessed the children, who prayed in agony at Gethsemane, who  
177 endured torture and death on the cross at Golgotha, who was raised bodily and in victory on Easter  
178 morning.

179  
180 Active in the history of Israel and singularly at work in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God  
181 continues to be present and active in and among us as the Spirit, who filled the believers at Pentecost,  
182 who empowered the apostles to do signs and miracles, who called Philip to evangelize and baptize the  
183 Ethiopian eunuch, who gave a variety of gifts to the church and formed the body of Christ, who has  
184 inspired faith, love, and hope in the church across the ages, and who continues to call women and men to  
185 all ministries of the church.

186  
187 The church’s confession of the triune God is embedded not only in the biblical witness but also in the  
188 early church’s prayer and practice. Christians are baptized (Mt 28:19) and blessed (2 Cor 13:14) in the  
189 name of the triune God. The apostle Paul describes common Christian prayer to God in trinitarian terms:  
190 “When we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of  
191 God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...” (Rom 8:15b-17a). The  
192 overflowing love of God comes to us through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

193  
194 The work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the foundation of all confessional  
195 statements about God, humanity, and the world (Confession of 1967, *BC*, 9.07).

196  
197 The love of the triune God made known to us in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is plentiful beyond  
198 measure (Rom 5:20). It is given freely and extravagantly, utterly unmerited and unexpected. It is always  
199 greater than we can imagine or conceive. Like a gushing fountain, God’s love overflows toward us. (Jer  
200 2:13; Jn 4:14). It freely pours forth in an inexhaustible stream, never diminished in the giving, never  
201 drying up. It is constant and trustworthy. It is more powerful than all the forces of sin and evil that deny  
202 and resist the gift and call of the love of God given to us in Jesus Christ and shared with us by the Holy  
203 Spirit. It cannot be quenched, even by death itself (Song 8:6-7).

204

205 Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor  
206 powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us  
207 from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:38-39).  
208

209 The trinitarian understanding of God has been at the heart of the church's message and prayer since its  
210 beginnings. Far from an ivory tower doctrine, it is a doctrine concerned with the truth of God and the  
211 reality of our salvation. Only God can save us and sanctify us. When we speak of the three distinct but  
212 inseparable persons of the Trinity, they are not to be understood, as modalism teaches, as mere masks or  
213 temporary roles that hide God's deepest reality. Nor are Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit secondary  
214 deities or mere creatures of a supposedly solitary supreme God, as subordinationism teaches. The  
215 trinitarian faith of the church rejects both these views because they deny that God is truly present as our  
216 savior in Jesus Christ and truly present among and in us as the life-giving Spirit. Against the views of  
217 modalism and subordinationism the church declares in its doctrine of the Trinity that Jesus Christ and the  
218 Holy Spirit are, together with God the Father, fully and eternally God. As the Nicene Creed affirms,  
219 Jesus Christ is "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God," and the Holy Spirit is to be  
220 worshiped and glorified as "the Lord, the giver of life" (Nicene Creed, *BC*, 1.1-3).  
221

### 222 **A Mystery Revealed**

223  
224  
225 The doctrine of the Trinity testifies to a mystery beyond human comprehension. It speaks of the very  
226 being of God that exceeds our understanding.  
227

228 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."... This is my name forever, and this is my title  
229 for all generations (Ex 3:14-15).  
230

231 Our minds cannot fully comprehend and our words and images can never fully explain the mystery of  
232 God. But while the name of God is inexhaustible and exceeds our grasp, we are not left in ignorance. We  
233 are invited to participate in this mystery that has been opened to us by God's own self-disclosure in Jesus  
234 Christ and in the coming of the Holy Spirit who binds us to Christ.  
235

236 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who  
237 has made him known (Jn 1:18).  
238

239 What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
240 nor the human heart conceived,  
241 what God has prepared for those who love him--  
242 These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit;  
243 for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God (1 Cor 2:9-10).  
244

245 The mystery of the Trinity is an open and radiant mystery. It is the mystery of the truth that God is holy,  
246 abundant, overflowing love both in relationship to us and in all eternity. We meet God's threefold love in  
247 the astonishing faithfulness of the Holy One of Israel, in the costly grace given to us in Jesus Christ our  
248 Savior, and in the new life in communion with God and others that has come to us in the gift of the Holy  
249 Spirit.  
250

251 We dare to speak of God as eternally triune because this is the way the Holy One has come to us. The  
252 triune God is self-giving not only in relation to us, but also in the depths of the eternal divine life. In the  
253 unity of their mutual love the three persons of the Trinity are the divine reality from before the earth was  
254 formed and to all eternity. We know this to be true because God is faithful. God is not one way in  
255 relation to us and another way in God's own eternal being. There is no God behind the One who has

256 come to us in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. We therefore confidently affirm that the doctrine of the  
257 Trinity is neither presumptuous speculation nor mathematical nonsense. About this the church must have  
258 no doubt: the doctrine of the Trinity proclaims to us the very heart of God. Using the language of  
259 Christian tradition, we proclaim that the Father so loved the world, sending the Son for us and our  
260 salvation, which we receive in and through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

261  
262 When we confess with the creeds of the universal church that God is “one in substance, and yet distinct in  
263 three persons” (The Scots Confession, *BC*, 3.01), we use terminology that is strange and perhaps off-  
264 putting to many members of the church today. However, the intent of these words is to declare that the  
265 mystery of the Trinity cannot be reduced either to a solitary individual or to a close-knit group of  
266 individuals. Trinitarian faith witnesses to the divine reality as living, active, dynamic, and relational.  
267 Relationship is at the heart of God’s being. One yet richly differentiated, God’s being is in communion.  
268 God lives and acts in mutual, self-giving love.

269  
270 It would be presumptuous to speculate about the inner life of God on the strength of our own reason or  
271 imagination. Lurking in such speculation is the danger of making God after our own image or according  
272 to our own wishes and desires. Yet if we keep to the witness of scripture, we can be confident that  
273 confessing faith in the triune God is not fueled by idle speculation. It is shaped by the outpouring of  
274 God’s abundant love for us in Jesus Christ and in us by the Holy Spirit. We trust that the way God acts in  
275 relation to us corresponds to who God is in all eternity. Before the world was created, and after it shall  
276 have come to its end, God is none other than the one who is for us once for all in Jesus Christ and with us  
277 here and now by the Holy Spirit.

### 278 279 280 **Three in One, One in Three**

281  
282 In the history of the church’s thinking and speaking about the Trinity, two analogies have been especially  
283 prominent. One likens the Trinity to the capacities of an individual human mind. Just as a human being  
284 is one and the same in each of the three distinct acts of remembering, knowing, and willing, so God exists  
285 as one-in-three and three-in-one. Often called the psychological analogy, this way of thinking places the  
286 emphasis on the one-in-threeness of God. The other analogy likens the Trinity to a loving communion of  
287 persons. As human beings find their deepest identity in relationships of mutual love, so God exists as  
288 three-in-one and one-in-three in the ineffable exchange of love among the three persons of the Trinity.  
289 Often called the social analogy or analogy of human life in relationship, this way of thinking places the  
290 emphasis on the three-in-oneness of God.

291  
292 Neither of these analogies should be pressed too far. On the one hand, pressing the analogy of the  
293 different capacities of a single human mind may reduce God to a solitary individual, neglecting the reality  
294 of personal relationship within God’s being. On the other hand, pressing the social or relational analogy  
295 runs the risk of portraying God as three separate individuals who decide to work in concert with each  
296 other. This would be tantamount to tritheism or belief in three gods. Fortunately, we do not have to  
297 choose between these analogies of single personhood and personal life in community. The church has  
298 never declared one of these analogies right and the other wrong. Instead, it has rejected the dangers to  
299 which each of these analogies may lead if pushed too far.

300  
301 The mystery of the Trinity is reverently expressed by Gregory of Nazianzus: “No sooner do I conceive of  
302 the one than I am illumined by the splendor of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried  
303 back to the one” (*On Baptism*, Oration 40.41).

304

305  
306  
307  
308  
309  
310  
311  
312  
313  
314  
315  
316  
317  
318  
319  
320  
321  
322  
323  
324  
325  
326  
327  
328  
329  
330  
331  
332  
333  
334  
335  
336  
337  
338  
339  
340  
341  
342  
343  
344  
345  
346  
347  
348  
349  
350  
351  
352  
353  
354  
355

## Speaking of the Triune God

In recent years new ways of speaking of the Trinity in the prayer and theology of the church have been proposed. Some of these proposals are helpful; some are unsatisfactory. What must be clear is that we cannot distinguish the persons of the Trinity simply by assigning different attributes or acts to each of the persons. The divine attributes are held in common by all three persons: all are holy, all are loving, all are wise and powerful. Similarly, an action of God cannot be restricted to one of the three persons. All of the acts of the triune God are indivisible. The persons of the Trinity do not work independently. Each of God's acts is always the one work of the whole Trinity.

For example, while the first person of the Trinity is often referred to as the "Creator," this must not be understood to exclude the involvement of the second and the third persons in the work of creation. Thus while the triad "Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier" appropriately describes distinct aspects of God's relationship to the world, it does not designate the relationships of the triune persons to each other. In the life of the triune God the three persons are uniquely distinguished and uniquely united by their mutual relationships. Each person gives and receives love from the others in a distinctive way.

In what ways may we speak faithfully of the mystery of the Trinity today? With the witness of scripture, the ecumenical creeds, and the Reformed confessions and liturgies, we speak of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Presbyterian Church (USA) affirms and values this way of speaking of the triune God, resisting any tendency to discard or diminish it.

Faced with the alternatives of *never* speaking of the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and *only* speaking of the Trinity as Father, Son and, Holy Spirit, we see a way that is more consistent with the scriptures and theological and liturgical tradition. The language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rooted in scripture and creed, remains an indispensable anchor for our efforts to speak faithfully of God. When secured, an anchor provides both necessary stability and adequate freedom of movement. If our lifeline to the anchor is frayed or severed, the historic faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic church risks being set adrift. With this anchor in place, however, we are liberated to interpret, amplify, and expand upon the ways of speaking of the triune God familiar to most church members. We are freed to speak faithfully and amply of the mystery of the Trinity. We may cultivate a responsible trinitarian imagination and vocabulary that bears witness in different ways to the one triune God known to us from scripture and creed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Faithfulness to the gospel frees us to honor and continue to use this faithful way of speaking of the triune God even as it frees us to adopt other faithful images. Rather than simply repeating the word "God" in prayer and liturgy, we are free to broaden our vocabulary for speaking of the triune God, emboldened by the rich reservoir of biblical and traditional terms, images, and metaphors.

The language of Father, Son, and Spirit has too often been misunderstood to sanction hierarchies that some human beings arbitrarily impose on others. However, a trinitarian understanding of God is indispensable in empowering faithful resistance to oppressive uses of human power that are rooted in hierarchy and subordination. Similarly, trinitarian language has been used to support the idea that God is male and that men are superior to women. For this and other distortions of trinitarian doctrine we repent. God is not male (The Westminster Confession, *BC*, 6.011). Question 51 in "Belonging to God: A First Catechism" asks: "When we pray to God as our Father, do we mean that God is male?" and answers: "No. Only creatures who have bodies can be male or female. But God is Spirit and has no body." A trinitarian understanding of God makes it clear that the Creator of gender is not subject to it.

As we explore diverse possibilities for trinitarian images, we are mindful of the temptation to bring the mystery of God under our control. Therefore, we must always be guided by the words of scripture and

356 creed that speak of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

357

358 At the same time, we should not insist on the exclusive use of the traditional trinitarian names, lest we  
359 quench the Spirit and even foster idolatry. Such a view would insufficiently acknowledge the divine  
360 mystery, would neglect the freedom of God’s children to glorify God imaginatively with all our hearts  
361 and minds, and would diminish the joy of knowing God ever more fully.

362 Female imagery of the triune God has yet to be adequately explored. The overflowing love of God finds  
363 expression in the biblical depiction of God as compassionate mother (Isa 49:15; 66:13), beloved child (Mt  
364 3:17), and life-giving womb (Isa 46:3). The divine wisdom (*hochmah* in Hebrew, *sophia* in Greek) is  
365 portrayed in the Bible as a woman who preaches in the streets, gives instruction, advocates justice, builds  
366 houses, and acts as a gracious hostess (Prov 1,8,9).

367 Responding to objections that the title “Father” is “more appropriate” to God, John Calvin reminds us  
368 “that no figures of speech can describe God’s extraordinary affection towards us; for it is infinite and  
369 various.” He further explains that God “has manifested himself to be both...Father and Mother” so that  
370 we might be more aware of God’s constant presence and willingness to assist us (*Commentary on Isaiah*  
371 46:3). God “did not satisfy himself with proposing the example of a father,” writes Calvin, “but in order  
372 to express his very strong affection, he chose to liken himself to a mother, and calls [the people of Israel]  
373 not merely ‘children,’ but *the fruit of the womb*, towards which there is usually a warmer affection”  
374 (*Commentary on Isaiah* 49:15).

375 Maternal imagery reminds us that God is a mother who expends herself for us, sheltering us like an eagle  
376 hovering over her young and bearing us on her wings (Ex 19:4; Deut 32:11). Carried by and born of the  
377 Virgin Mary, the child of God shares life with us, working to establish justice, righteousness, and peace  
378 (Isa 9:7; Lk 1:46-55). As we are born of flesh and blood, so we are also born again by the Spirit of God  
379 (Jn 3:3-6). The Lord lifts us up and carries us throughout life (Isa 46:1-4).

380

381

382

### A Plenitude of Images of the Trinity

383 Recognizing that all language about the triune God refers beyond itself by way of analogy, we draw on  
384 scripture and our confessions to speak of the triune God in historically faithful yet freshly imaginative  
385 ways. The analogies employed in the following list have not been chosen at random. They are guided by  
386 God’s self-revelation as attested in scripture. Some triads have a narrative quality; others are drawn from  
387 creation. Three guidelines have been followed: 1) in each case the three terms must have an inner  
388 relationship; 2) the terms must either be personal or functional—the two should not be mixed; and 3)  
389 functional Trinitarian language should be understood to amplify and enrich our understanding of God—it  
390 cannot replace personal language.

391 While classical trinitarian theology speaks of the “first, second, and third” persons of the Trinity, scripture  
392 also refers to the three in other patterns, as in the apostolic benediction which invokes “the grace of the  
393 Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:13).

394 As we worship, the triune God is the One From Whom, the One through Whom, and the One in  
395 Whom we offer our praise (Rom 11:36).

396

397 As we seek God’s grace and wholeness, acknowledging the sin and brokenness in us, our human  
398 communities, and the whole creation, the triune God is our Rainbow of Promise, our Ark of  
399 Salvation, and our Dove of Peace (From Gail Ramshaw, *Koinonia: Services and Prayers*)



400 (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2004).  
 401  
 402 As we read, proclaim, hear, and live out the message of scripture, the triune God is known to us  
 403 as Speaker, Word, and Breath (Heb 1:1; Jn 1:1; Jn 20:22; Ps 104:30).  
 404  
 405 In baptism, the triune God is for us Overflowing Font, Living Water, Flowing River (*Book of*  
 406 *Common Worship*, p.412; Jn 4:10, 13-14; Jn 7:37).  
 407  
 408 As we are born anew by water and the Spirit, the triune God is Compassionate Mother, Beloved  
 409 Child, and Life-giving Womb (Isa 49:15; Mt. 3:17; Isa 46:3).  
 410  
 411 As we grow in grace, the triune God is our Sun, Light, and Burning Ray (John of Damascus, *First*  
 412 *Apology*).  
 413  
 414 As we offer ourselves, our resources, and our gratitude in stewardship and Eucharist, the triune  
 415 God is Giver, Gift, and Giving (Jas 1:17; Jn 3:16; 2 Cor 9:15; 1 Jn 3:24).  
 416  
 417 In celebrating the communion of our life together in Christ, the triune God is Lover, Beloved, and  
 418 the Love and binds together Lover and Beloved (Augustine, *The Trinity*).  
 419  
 420 As members of the believing community, we acknowledge the triune God as our Rock,  
 421 Cornerstone, and Temple (Ps 28:1; Eph 2:20-21).  
 422  
 423 When we speak of God's wrath in the face of evil, the triune God is for us Fire that Consumes,  
 424 Sword that Divides, and Storm that Melts Mountains (Deut 5:25; Mt 10:34-35; Ps 97:5).  
 425  
 426 As we seek to live in faith, love, and hope, the triune God is for us the One Who Was, the One  
 427 Who Is, and the One Who Is To Come (Rev 4:8).  
 428

429 In these and other ways we stammer to confess that the triune God is an inexhaustible mystery of  
 430 purifying and transforming love. God abides in eternal communion. Divine life is giving and receiving,  
 431 sharing and delighting in reciprocal love. Abundant, overflowing love is the glory, majesty, and beauty of  
 432 the triune God. By the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we are  
 433 invited to participate in the eternal life of the triune God who is love (1 Jn 4: 8).  
 434

435 We must always bear in mind that Scripture affirms Jesus Christ is the very image of God. This means the  
 436 Triune God has chosen to reveal the Divine identity in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Christ is the  
 437 mystery of our salvation and the revelation of God to the world.  
 438

**The Doctrine of the Trinity and Christian Practice**

440  
 441 The church's faith and life will be enriched as we learn and live into the triune reality of God. Faithfully  
 442 articulated, the doctrine of the Trinity teaches that Jesus Christ our Savior and the Holy Spirit our  
 443 Sanctifier are truly one with God who made the heavens and the earth and who called Israel to be a light  
 444 to all nations. God is not a solitary and self-enclosed being (as we often imagine God to be and as we  
 445 often aspire to be). The eternal triune God wills to communicate with creatures and to share the divine  
 446 life and love with them. God's being is in mutual love and shared life. God is the gift-giving God. This  
 447 is the way God has related to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the pouring out  
 448 of the Holy Spirit, and it reveals who God is and how God acts in all eternity.  
 449

450 God is love. In the life of God and in God's relation to us, there is no withholding of life and love, no

451 reservation, no qualification, no half-heartedness in giving. God's triune life is described by ancient  
452 church tradition as a *perichoresis*: a mutual indwelling, mutual interaction, and mutual interpenetration  
453 of the persons of the Trinity in eternal life and communion. In this everlasting and interactive divine  
454 communion, each lives with, in and for the others. All is held in common except the distinctiveness of  
455 the persons in their reciprocal relationships of love. Confessing God as triune, we affirm that this eternal  
456 life-in-communion of the triune God is freely and gladly extended to us and to the world.

457  
458 This trinitarian way of thinking and speaking of God transforms our understanding of the power of God  
459 and of fruitful human power. True power, the creative and life-giving power that originates with the  
460 triune God, is not dominating and coercive power. It is not power that manipulates and overwhelms.  
461 True power is life-giving, life-enabling, life-empowering power. True power is the power strong enough  
462 to live for and with another. It is the power strong enough to be vulnerable for another, to suffer with and  
463 for another, to rejoice with and for another, to give one's all for another. The power of the triune God is  
464 the power of omnipotent, shared love.

465  
466 The overflowing love of God given to us in Jesus Christ and shared with us by the Holy Spirit draws us  
467 out of ourselves and into life in right relationship with God and others. Human beings are created in and  
468 for relationship. We bear witness to the triune God by our life in relationship. Knowledge of the triune  
469 God and knowledge of ourselves are inseparable (Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.i.1). This does not mean that we  
470 can use the doctrine of the Trinity as a kind of blueprint for human life or as a program for the renovation  
471 of human society. But this much we can surely say: If God's life is in communion, then human life, too,  
472 created in the image of God, is intended by God to be life in communion. From this perspective, sin often  
473 takes the form of rejecting life in relationship, of wanting to live only for oneself, of actively and  
474 intentionally disobeying the laws of God, of wanting to live apart from God, or of living as though our  
475 sisters and brothers did not exist or were there only for our benefit. But sin may also take the form of  
476 self-devaluation and self-hatred, of wanting to disappear into another, of neglecting God's purpose  
477 because we do not feel worthy of it, or of trying to hide one's personhood and unique talents. In whatever  
478 form, living in bondage to sin is living against the grain of reality as constituted by the triune God, in  
479 whom depth of communion and personal differentiation are inseparable. God wills all creation to  
480 participate in this triune life of communion.

481  
482 The doctrine of the Trinity is not an abstract theory but a practical doctrine. The truth of the doctrine of  
483 the Trinity must be claimed with our whole heart, mind, and strength. It must be put into practice in our  
484 everyday life. It has its roots in the proclamation of the gospel and in the church's life of prayer. By  
485 practicing our faith in worship and service, we take part in the life and love of the triune God. We enter  
486 into the realm of God's community-forming love, which is able to reconcile sinners and make enemies  
487 into friends. As we worship and praise the God made known in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy  
488 Spirit, as we attend to the preaching of the Word of God and the celebration of the sacraments of baptism  
489 and Lord's Supper, as we assist our neighbor, forgive our enemy, and live in friendship with all people,  
490 we take part in the life-giving and peace-making love of the triune God. In Christian faith, hope, and  
491 love, we are united with God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. In our common worship,  
492 common prayer, and common service of our neighbor, we are being formed and nurtured in the  
493 overflowing love of the triune God.

494

495

### 496 **The Doctrine of the Trinity and Christian Mission**

497

498 Christian service and mission, too, are shaped and guided by the missions of the triune God. God has sent  
499 Jesus Christ to accomplish our reconciliation with God and sends the Holy Spirit to bring us to new life in  
500 Christ and to renew the whole creation.

501

502 The mission of the church is a participation in the mission of the triune God. The church's mission is not  
503 determined by our own special interests and favorite agendas. In Jesus Christ "God was reconciling the  
504 world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19; Confession of 1967, BC 9.07). The Holy Spirit is the Bond of Peace (Eph  
505 4:3) who brings together in new unity people of many languages, nations, cultures, and races. The Spirit  
506 works toward the full realization of God's reign of justice and peace. The mission of the church is  
507 established and directed by the reconciling and community-building activity of the triune God.  
508

509 Participating in this mission, we extend the reconciling and peace-making love of God to others. We  
510 share the good news. We show compassion to the needy. We work with others for justice, freedom, and  
511 peace. We practice forgiveness. We welcome strangers and the outcast. We use our gifts to build up the  
512 church, which is Christ's body. We encourage friendship and community among all people. We take  
513 part, always imperfectly and provisionally, in the overflowing, self-giving, community-forming love of  
514 God that is the mystery of the Trinity. The triune God who is and calls us to take part in life in  
515 communion is the object of our faith, the basis of our love, and the goal of our hope.  
516

517 The church looks with eager longing to the consummation of life in the triune God who is overflowing  
518 love. With the *Brief Statement of Faith* of the Presbyterian Church (USA), we declare:  
519

520 In life and in death we belong to God.  
521 Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
522 The love of God,  
523 And the communion of the Holy Spirit,  
524 We trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,  
525 whom alone we worship and serve.  
526 (*Brief Statement of Faith*, BC 10:1).  
527

## 528 **II. PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S OVERFLOWING LOVE**

530  
531 All of Christian life is a participation in the abundant love of the triune God. In our worship of God, we  
532 bring participation to awareness and speech. Each act of worship – praising, confessing, forgiving,  
533 proclaiming, professing, baptizing, thanksgiving, offering, sharing, praying, blessing, sending – nurtures  
534 our faith in this Trinity of love.  
535

536 Our need and desire to worship confront us with the inadequacy of our language for God. With all the  
537 saints, "we are forced to raise our lowly words to subjects which cannot be described" (Hilary of Poitiers,  
538 *The Trinity* 2.2). We worship the triune God who transcends even our best efforts to sing or speak, to  
539 preach or praise. John Calvin declared, "If all that can be said or imagined about love were brought  
540 together into one, yet it would be surpassed by the greatness of the love of God. By no metaphor,  
541 therefore, can God's incomparable goodness be described" (*Commentary on Isaiah* 46:3).  
542

543 Yet our faith will not let us keep silent. In a favorite hymn we pray, "O for a thousand tongues to sing my  
544 dear redeemer's praise" (Charles Wesley, *PH #466*). Our praying, praising, worshiping language is a  
545 reflection of the overflowing love of God's triune beauty. We come to see the classic trinitarian  
546 language, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, as a root out of which grows a rich vocabulary of praise. We draw  
547 from the deep well of scripture and from the prayers of the church, past and present, to expand and enrich  
548 the ways we speak of God and to God. Thus we hope to deepen our participation in the abundant love of  
549 God – the one in three, the three in one.  
550

551 The sixteenth century Reformation was characterized by a "return to the sources," especially scripture and  
552 the theology of the early church. Yet the reformation of the church did not mean the rejection of all that

553 had gone before. Calvin himself encouraged “an assiduous reading of the ancient writers” (*Institutes*,  
554 IV.xviii.9). Contemporary conversations with other Christian churches have helped Presbyterians to  
555 rediscover and reformulate our liturgical roots.  
556

557 The Service for the Lord’s Day in the *Book of Common Worship* is ordered around four basic movements:  
558 “Gathering,” “The Word,” “Thanksgiving,” and “Sending.” These basic movements, described in the  
559 *Directory for Worship*, provide a helpful outline for our reflection on worship of the triune God.  
560

561 *Gathering*

562 Call to Worship  
563 Prayer  
564 Praise  
565 Confession and Pardon  
566 Peace

567 **The Word**

568 Prayer for Illumination  
569 Scripture Readings and Psalm  
570 Proclamation  
571 Affirmation of Faith  
572 Baptism  
573 Prayers of the People

574 **Thanksgiving**

575 Offering  
576 Eucharist

577 **Sending**

578 Charge and Blessing  
579 Dismissal  
580

581

582

**GATHERING**

583

584

585

586

587

588

589

*Gather us in and hold us forever,  
Gather us in and make us your own;  
Gather us in, all peoples together,  
Fire of love in our flesh and our bone (Marty Haugen, STF #2236).*

590

**Call to Worship**

591

592

593

594

595

596

597

598

599

God brings all things into being by the Word.  
God offers the Word of grace,  
and people respond to that divine initiative  
through the language of worship (*Directory for Worship, W-1.2001*).  
The Spirit moves them to respond by naming and calling upon God,  
by remembering and proclaiming God’s acts of self-revelation in word and deed,  
and by committing their lives to God’s reign in the world  
(*Directory for Worship, W-1.1002*).

600

601

602

603

*We are called to worship by the triune God whose gracious love invites our grateful response. It is God who calls us to worship, not we ourselves, and so we are beckoned by words of scripture that voice the fullness of Promise, Salvation, and Peace.*

604 *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;*  
605 *The whole earth is full of God's glory.*  
606 *I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God,*  
607 *Who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*

### Prayer and Praise

611  
612 *Joyful, joyful we adore Thee,*  
613 *God of Glory, Lord of Love...(Henry Van Dyke, PH #464).*

614  
615 *Christian worship joyfully ascribes all praise and honor,*  
616 *glory and power to the triune God*  
617 *(Directory for Worship, W-1.001).*  
618 *In prayer,*  
619 *through the Holy Spirit,*  
620 *people seek after and are found by the one true God*  
621 *who has been revealed through Jesus Christ*  
622 *(Directory for Worship, W-2.1001).*

623  
624 In worship we seek to embody our calling to glorify and enjoy God forever (The Shorter Catechism, BC  
625 7.001, 7.111). Our worship begins with praise. "Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!" (Ps  
626 150:6). We come to worship as creatures in the presence of the Creator, as beloved in the presence of the  
627 Lover, as humanity in the presence of the Holy One. We strain to give voice to the holiness, majesty, and  
628 mercy of God. And so the vocabulary of praise is expansive, rich, all-embracing.

629  
630 In praising the triune God we use biblical language, both classic –  
631 Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
632 and surprising –  
633 Mother, Child, and Womb.  
634 We may use words that speaks of the inner relations of the Godhead –  
635 Lover, Beloved, Love,  
636 and those that speak of the loving activity of the Three among us –  
637 Creator, Savior, Sanctifier,  
638 Rock, Redeemer, Friend,  
639 King of Glory, Prince of Peace, Spirit of Love.

640  
641 Heartfelt praise of the triune God marks the beginning of all our worship:

642  
643 God of all glory,  
644 on this first day you began creation,  
645 bringing light out of darkness.  
646 On this first day you began your new creation,  
647 raising Jesus Christ out of the darkness of death.  
648 On this Lord's Day, grant that we,  
649 the people you create by water and the Spirit,  
650 may be joined with all your works  
651 in praising you for your great glory.  
652 Through Jesus Christ,  
653 in union with the Holy Spirit,  
654 we praise you now and forever. Amen (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 45).

655  
656  
657  
658  
659  
660  
661  
662  
663  
664  
665  
666  
667  
668  
669  
670  
671  
672  
673  
674  
675  
676  
677  
678  
679  
680  
681  
682  
683  
684  
685  
686  
687  
688  
689  
690  
691  
692  
693  
694  
695  
696  
697  
698  
699  
700  
701  
702  
703  
704

**Confession and Pardon**

*Lord, let your love, love with no end, come over us,  
That we may be saved; that we may have light  
To find our way in the darkest night,  
Let your love come over us  
("Shine On Us," Michael W. Smith and Deborah D. Smith).*

*The believing community announces the good news of God  
whose love gives people grace to confess their sin and complicity in brokenness,  
to repent, expressing sorrow and intention to change,  
to accept God's forgiveness and extend that forgiveness to another,  
to forgive the other and accept the other's forgiveness,  
to work toward reconciliation in brokenness,  
to trust the power of God to bring healing and peace  
(Directory for Worship, W-6.3009).*

As we offer our praise to the Holy One, we see more clearly our relationship to God, to ourselves, and to one another. In the presence of the Trinity, who is overflowing love, grace, and communion, we are confronted by our own loveless, ungracious, and self-absorbed ways. This overflowing triune love also has the power to overcome our sins of self-devaluation and our feelings of worthlessness. The God who forgives is at once powerful, wise, and tender:

Power of the eternal Father, help me!  
Wisdom of the Son, enlighten the eye of my understanding!  
Tender clemency of the Holy Spirit,  
enflame my heart and unite it to yourself! (Catherine of Siena, *Prayer 5*).

Through the ages, believers have used the threefold *Kyrie* (Lord, have mercy) in the act of confession, seeking mercy from the triune God. This ancient form is echoed in a contemporary prayer of confession:

Holy God, Maker of us all; have mercy on us.  
Jesus Christ, Servant of the poor, have mercy on us.  
Holy Spirit, Breath of life, have mercy on us  
(*Iona Abbey Worship Book*, p. 23).

In Reformed worship, we approach the holy grace of God with boldness; an assurance of pardon accompanies an act of confession:

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.  
I declare unto you, in the name of Jesus Christ,  
You are forgiven.  
May the God of mercy,  
Who forgives you all your sins,  
Strengthen you in all goodness,  
And by the power of the Holy Spirit  
Keep you in eternal life. Amen (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 56).

705 A prayer of confession for Epiphany from the *Book of Common Worship* concludes with the light of the  
706 triune God reflected in the forgiven believer:

707  
708 God of glory. . .  
709 In your mercy, cleanse us of our sin,  
710 and baptize us once again with your Spirit,  
711 that, forgiven and renewed, we may show forth your glory  
712 shining in the face of Jesus Christ (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 193).

713  
714 Confession and Pardon are at once personal and corporate. As we have been forgiven in Christ, so we  
715 forgive one another, sharing in the peace of God who is Grace, Love, and Communion (2 Cor 13:13).

716  
717

## 718 THE WORD

719

720 *Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word;*  
721 *I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord.*  
722 *Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,*  
723 *Still be my vision, O Ruler of all* (trans. Mary E. Byrne, PH #339).

724

725 **Prayer for Illumination**  
726 **Scripture Readings and Psalm**  
727 **Proclamation**  
728 **Affirmation**

729

730 *The church confesses the scriptures to be the Word of God written,*  
731 *Witnessing to God's self-revelation.*  
732 *Where that Word of God is read and proclaimed,*  
733 *Jesus Christ the Living Word is present*  
734 *By the inward witness of the Holy Spirit*  
735 *(Directory for Worship, W-2.2001).*

736

737 The assurance of forgiveness clears our senses for the hearing of God's Word. A prayer for illumination  
738 prepares the gathered community to share in the reading and proclamation of the Word.

739

740 Meanwhile, let my mind meditate on it,  
741 let my tongue speak of it,  
742 let my heart love it,  
743 let my mouth preach it,  
744 let my soul hunger for it,  
745 my flesh thirst for it,  
746 and my whole being desire it,  
747 until I enter into the joy of my Lord,  
748 who is God one and triune, blessed forever.  
749 Amen (Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogian* 789-797).

750

751 The Holy Spirit is poured out on the gathered community, hearer and speaker alike. “. . . Through the  
752 Holy Spirit we know Christ, who is God and the Son of God, and in the Son we see the Father. The Word  
753 is the messenger who makes the divine nature perceptible to us, and the Spirit is the interpreter of the  
754 Word” (John of Damascus, *Third Apology* 18). As the scriptures are read, the people are invited to take  
755 part, and to listen attentively through prayerful responses:

756  
757 For the Word of God in scripture,  
758 For the Word of God among us,  
759 For the Word of God within us,  
760 Thanks be to God (*Iona Abbey Worship Book*, p. 18).

761  
762 With the sixteenth-century Protestant reformers we believe that “the preaching of the Word of God is the  
763 Word of God” (The Second Helvetic Confession, *BC* 5.004) and so proclamation lies at the center of our  
764 worship. Preaching is a trinitarian event, enjoining the entire worshipping community. The Word written,  
765 the Word incarnate, and the Word proclaimed are spoken, heard, and taken to heart. The very Word that  
766 called all things into being calls us into service by the power of the Spirit.

767  
768 What goes before prepares us for this proclamation; what follows is our response, an affirmation of our  
769 common faith. Just as our words, however strong and true, cannot do justice to the triune God, so no  
770 creed or confession can encompass the mystery of our triune faith. Yet we continue to preserve and  
771 reform and rediscover formulations of what we believe:

772  
773 Lord, heavenly Father, you are my heart.  
774 Lord Jesus Christ, you are my body.  
775 Lord Holy Spirit, you are my breath.  
776 Lord, Holy Trinity, you are my only refuge  
777 and my eternal rest! (Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Flowing Light* 5.6).

778  
779 In our preaching, in our hearing, in our understanding, the triune God is for us  
780 Speaker, Word, and Breath.

## 781 782 **Baptism**

783  
784  
785 *Living water, never ending,*  
786 *quench the thirst and flood the soul.*  
787 *Wellspring, source of life eternal,*  
788 *drench our dryness, make us whole. (Sylvia Dunston, STF, #2247)*

789  
790 *In Baptism, the Holy Spirit binds the church in covenant to its Creator and Lord.*  
791 *Baptism unites the people of God with each other and with the church of every time and place. Barriers*  
792 *of race, gender, status, and age are to be transcended.*  
793 *Barriers of nationality, history, and practice are to be overcome*  
794 *(Directory for Worship, W-2.3003, 2.3005).*

795  
796 Trinitarian language entered the worship and theology of the early church through the practice of baptism.  
797 Across time and space, Christians have followed Christ’s command to baptize new disciples “in the name  
798 of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). We regard this classical language of  
799 baptism not as a magic formula, but as a concrete link to our many brothers and sisters in Christ. We  
800 repeat the language of Matthew 28:19 in baptism to demonstrate our ecumenical commitment to join  
801 hands with all Christians and to show forth the unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. With  
802 the exception of the baptismal formula itself, we are also free to supplement this language with  
803 additional trinitarian images to reflect the expansive grace, love, and communion of the one God.

804  
805 In accordance with scripture, though we are many, in baptism we affirm one body and one Spirit, one  
806 hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (Eph 4:4-6). The community of the



807 baptized is bound together by the overflowing love of God which unites us to Christ in his death and  
808 resurrection, makes us alive to God, and sets us free to live according to the Spirit (Rom 6-8). The  
809 baptism of Jesus reveals the triune presence in the descent of the Spirit and the voice from heaven  
810 proclaiming, "This is my Son, the Beloved."

811  
812 Our baptismal prayer of thanksgiving expresses our joy in the fullness of the triune  
813 God's overflowing love:

814  
815 Eternal and gracious God, we give you thanks.  
816 in countless ways you have revealed yourself in ages past,  
817 and have blessed us with signs of your grace.

818  
819 We praise you that through the waters of the sea,  
820 you led your people Israel out of bondage,  
821 into freedom in the land of your promise.

822  
823 We praise you for sending Jesus your Son,  
824 who for us was baptized in the waters of the Jordan,  
825 and was anointed as the Christ by your Holy Spirit.  
826 Through the baptism of his death and resurrection,  
827 you set us free from the bondage of sin and death,  
828 and give us cleansing and rebirth.

829  
830 We praise you that in baptism  
831 you give us your Holy Spirit,  
832 who teaches us and leads us into all truth,  
833 filling us with a variety of gifts,  
834 that we might proclaim the gospel to all nations  
835 and serve you as a royal priesthood.

836  
837 Pour out your Spirit upon us  
838 and upon this water,  
839 that this font may be your womb of new birth.  
840 May all who now pass through these waters  
841 be delivered from death to life,  
842 from bondage to freedom,  
843 from sin to righteousness.  
844 Bind them to the household of faith,  
845 guard them from all evil.  
846 Strengthen them to serve you with joy  
847 until the day you make all things new.  
848 To you be all praise, honor, and glory;  
849 through Jesus Christ our Savior,  
850 who, with you and the Holy Spirit,  
851 lives and reigns forever (*Book of Common Worship*, pp. 411-412).

852  
853 In the waters of baptism we can see that God is  
854 Overflowing Font, Living Water, Flowing River  
855 (*BCW*, p. 412; Jn 4:10, 13-14; Jn 7:37).

856 When at baptism we remember the stories of salvation, we tell of the God whose faithfulness is known in  
857 Rainbow, Ark, and Dove (Gen 8-9).

858  
859  
860  
861  
862  
863  
864  
865  
866  
867  
868  
869  
870  
871  
872  
873  
874  
875  
876  
877  
878  
879  
880  
881  
882  
883  
884  
885  
886  
887  
888  
889  
890  
891  
892  
893  
894  
895  
896  
897  
898  
899  
900  
901  
902  
903  
904  
905  
906  
907  
908

## THANKSGIVING

*Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices!  
Who wondrous things hath done, in whom this world rejoices! (Martin Rinkart, PH #555)*

### Offering

*As the Holy Spirit has graced each member with particular gifts  
for strengthening the body of Christ for mission,  
so worship should provide opportunities to recognize these gifts  
and to offer them to serve Christ in the church and in the world  
(Directory for Worship, W-2.5002).*

All that we are – in our creation as in our salvation – is a gift from the triune God. With gratitude and thanksgiving, we offer ourselves for service, we offer our prayers for the life of the world, and we offer our gifts for the mission and ministry of Christ.

When we offer our whole lives for God, we commonly speak words of scripture:

Now there are varieties of gifts,  
but the same Spirit;  
and there are varieties of services,  
but the same Lord;  
and there are varieties of activities,  
but it is the same God who activates  
all of them in everyone (1 Cor 12:4-6).

These words remind us of the interplay of variety and oneness – in God’s relationships with the community of faith as well as within the church. The call to discipleship comes first in our baptism, and is renewed in the call to participate fully in the household of faith. In the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God becomes concrete in our lives and we begin to partake of the divine life and to share in the abundant love of the triune God.

As we hear the divine call, we respond in prayer. In our intercessions, we call on the triune God in language that reflects our deepest longings, desires, and concerns.

Come, Holy Spirit, and bring from heaven a ray of Thy light!  
Come, Thou father of the poor, Thou giver of gifts, Thou light of the world,  
the blessed Comforter, the dear guest of the soul, and its sweetest refreshment;  
Thou, our repose in labor, our coolness in heat, our comfort in affliction!  
(Bernard of Clairvaux, *Prayers*, pp. 62-3).

We approach the triune God who has promised to intercede on our behalf (Rom 8:26-27).

Gracious God,  
because we are not strong enough  
to pray as we should, you provide Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit  
to intercede for us in power.  
In this confidence we ask you

909 to accept our prayers (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 103).

910  
911 Prayers of intercession begin to move our hearts outward, toward others, overflowing into the world God  
912 loves.

913  
914 O God of all creation who has come to us in Jesus,  
915 lead us in your way of love and fill us with your Spirit.  
916 Choose us to bring good news to the poor,  
917 to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
918 to bring sight to the blind and set free the oppressed.  
919 So shall your new creation come and your will be done  
920 (*Iona Abbey Worship Book*, pp. 84-85).

921  
922 God is gracious toward us. Our joyful response is gratitude. And so the offering of material goods has  
923 been part of Christian worship since the beginning (Acts 2:42-47). In the act of giving, our gifts are  
924 blessed by God and set apart for ministry.

925  
926 Thou hast accepted the gifts, offerings, and fruits brought unto Thee as an odor of a sweet  
927 spiritual smell, and hast been pleased to sanctify them, and make them perfect, O good One, by  
928 the grace of Thy Christ, and by the presence of Thy all-holy Spirit (*The Divine Liturgy of St.*  
929 *James* 38).

930  
931 As we share our gifts of energy, of prayer, and of money, we are living our faith in the world.

932  
933 the world the Holy One loves,  
934 the world the Powerful Christ came to save,  
935 the world in which the Comforting Spirit breathes and blows.

936  
937 In this act of gift sharing, we recognize the Trinity as

938  
939 Giver, Gift, and Giving;  
940 Truth, Goodness, and Beauty;  
941 Sun, Light, and Burning Ray.

942  
943  
944 **Eucharist**

945  
946 ***Here, O our Lord, we see You face to face,***  
947 ***Here would we touch and handle things unseen... (Horatius Bonar, PH #520).***

948  
949 *The New Testament describes the meal as a participation in Christ and with one another*  
950 *in the expectation of the Kingdom and as a foretaste of the messianic banquet.*  
951 *In remembering, believers receive and trust the love of Christ present to them and to the world; they*  
952 *manifest the reality of the covenant of grace in reconciling and being reconciled;*  
953 *and they proclaim the power of Christ's reign*  
954 *for the renewal of the world in justice and in peace.*  
955 *Brought by the Holy Spirit into Christ's presence,*  
956 *the church eagerly expects and prays for the day*  
957 *when Christ shall come in glory and God be all in all*  
958 *(Directory for Worship, W-2.4002, 2.4004, 2.4007).*  
959

960 Having gathered around the Word, and around the Water, we are prepared to gather around the Table. At  
961 the table we give thanks, recalling all that God has done for us, we partake of the divine presence,  
962 receiving the food of Christ's very self, and we celebrate our oneness with friends and family, neighbors  
963 and strangers, through the power of the Spirit. At the table we meet the triune God who welcomes us as  
964 Table, Food, and Server (Catherine of Siena, *Prayer 12*); here we see that God for us is at once Grace,  
965 Love, and Communion.

966  
967 Eucharist is the great thanksgiving.

968  
969 Eternal God, holy and mighty,  
970 it is truly right and our greatest joy  
971 to give you thanks and praise,  
972 and to worship you in every place where your glory abides.

973  
974 You revealed your glory  
975 as the glory also of your Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
976 three Persons, equal in majesty, undivided in splendor,  
977 yet one Lord, one God,  
978 to be worshiped and adored in your eternal glory.  
979 We praise you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
980 great Trinity of power and love,  
981 our God, forever and ever (*Book of Common Worship*, pp.126, 136).

982  
983 The Lord's Supper is also a grateful remembering of the drama of salvation. We recall Christ's words at  
984 the Last Supper, and Jesus' saving death is brought into the present moment for us as we share the loaf  
985 and the cup.

986  
987 *Jesus, the true Savior of the world, who died for us and is seated in glory*  
988 *at the right hand of the Father, dwell in your hearts through His Holy*  
989 *Spirit, that you be wholly alive in Him, through living faith and perfect*  
990 *love (John Calvin, Form of Church Prayers 223).*

991  
992 Eucharistic Prayers – The Great Thanksgiving – give voice to the powerful grace of the triune God. The  
993 very structure of Eucharistic prayers is trinitarian, giving thanks for the work of the one God. Our  
994 *Presbyterian Hymnal* (p.13) describes the movement of this prayer. The opening of the prayer “gives  
995 thanks appropriate to the occasion, remembering God's mighty acts of salvation.” This leads to the  
996 Sanctus (*Holy, Holy, Holy*), in which the congregation joins in the praise of the Holy One. Thanksgiving  
997 continues, “recalling Christ's work of redemption and gift of the Sacrament,” concluding with an  
998 acclamation that remembers Christ's saving death and resurrection, once and for all. The third section of  
999 the prayer calls upon the power of the Spirit: “The action of the Holy Spirit is sought, and petitions are  
1000 offered that we may know the unity we have in Christ and be empowered for service. The prayer  
1001 concludes with praise to the triune God.”

1002  
1003 Partaking in this meal changes us, for it is a partaking in the life of the triune God. “The cup of blessing  
1004 that we bless, is it not a communion in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a  
1005 communion in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all  
1006 partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:16, 17).

1007  
1008 God the Creator, Thou hast made the bread.  
1009 Christ the Redeemer, Thou hast changed it.  
1010 Holy Spirit, the Binder, Thou does convey it:

1011 bread for our touching, food for our souls:  
1012 Even as our lives are bound together in Thee....  
1013 God the Creator, Thou hast changed us.  
1014 Christ, the Redeemer, Thou hast changed us.  
1015 Holy Spirit, the Binder, Thou does keep us changed:  
1016 Even as now we are bound together in Thee  
1017 (George MacLeod, in *A Book of Reformed Prayers*, p. 124).  
1018

1019 Holy Communion is a celebration here and now, a meal that nourishes our service in the world and that  
1020 whets our appetite for the heavenly banquet. Participation in Holy Communion creates in us a longing for  
1021 wholeness, for communion with all creation, for the promise of God's Shalom.  
1022

## 1023 **SENDING**

1024  
1025  
1026 *May the God of hope go with you every day,*  
1027 *Filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.*  
1028 *May the God of justice speed us on our way,*  
1029 *Bringing light and hope to every land and race (Alvin Schutmaat, PH #432).*  
1030

## 1031 **Charge and Blessing, Dismissal**

1032  
1033 *Nourished by this hope, the church rises from the Table*  
1034 *and is sent by the power of the Holy Spirit to participate in God's mission to the world,*  
1035 *to proclaim the gospel, to exercise compassion, to work for justice and peace*  
1036 *until Christ's Kingdom shall come at last.*  
1037 *God calls the church in worship to join the mission*  
1038 *of Jesus Christ in service to the world.*  
1039 *As it participates in that mission the church is called to worship God in Jesus Christ,*  
1040 *who reigns over the world*  
1041 *(Directory for Worship, W-2.4008, 7.1002).*  
1042

1043 In Christian worship, the sending is the beginning – the way we live out what we practice in worship  
1044 (Rom 12:1). We have been forgiven, we have taken the Word to heart, we have been renewed and  
1045 refreshed, we have offered what we have and are to the one God who is Giver, Gift, and Giving. The  
1046 overflowing love of the triune God fills us with spiritual power, compassionate mercy, and creative  
1047 imagination, preparing us to live in this overflowing love.  
1048

1049 Arise, O Spirit of Life,  
1050 that through Thee we may begin to live;  
1051 descend upon us and transform us  
1052 into such human beings as the heart of God longs to see,  
1053 renewed into the image of Christ,  
1054 and going on from glory to glory.  
1055 O God, Thou Supreme Good, make Thyself known to us;  
1056 through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
1057 Amen (Gerhard Tersteegen, in *A Book of Reformed Prayers*, p. 60).  
1058

1059 Just as we gather around the Word and the Font and the Table, so we are sent out to proclaim the good  
1060 news, to welcome the stranger, and to feed the hungry. The worshipping community is sent forth with a  
1061 charge.

1062  
1063 As you have been fed at this table—go to feed the hungry.  
1064 As you have been set free—go to set free the imprisoned.  
1065 As you have received—give.  
1066 As you have heard—proclaim.  
1067 And the blessing which you have received  
1068 from Father, Son and Spirit go with you  
1069 (alt. *Iona Abbey Worship Book*, p. 189).  
1070

1071 As we go from worship into the world, words of blessing and benediction are spoken;

1072  
1073 The blessing of God and the Lord be yours,  
1074 The blessing of the perfect Spirit be yours,  
1075 The blessing of the Three be pouring for you  
1076 Mildly and generously,  
1077 Mildly and generously (*Celtic Vision*, p. 248).  
1078

1079 The grace of Christ attend you,  
1080 the love of God surround you,  
1081 the Holy Spirit keep you,  
1082 that you may live in faith,  
1083 abound in hope,  
1084 and grow in love,  
1085 both now and forevermore.  
1086 Amen (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 851).  
1087

1088 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,*  
1089 *the love of God,*  
1090 *and the communion of the Holy Spirit*  
1091 *be with you all.*  
1092 *Amen!*  
1093

### 1094 **III. EMBODYING GOD'S OVERFLOWING LOVE**

1095  
1096  
1097 The life of faith is our embodiment of God's overflowing love in the world. Because God is love, the  
1098 love of God and neighbor becomes the pattern for our life as creatures made in the divine image. "If we  
1099 love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us" (1 Jn 4:7-12). The Law of Moses  
1100 insists on the inextricable connection between God's love toward us and our love of others. This whole-  
1101 hearted love is made clear in the *Shema*:

1102  
1103 Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.  
1104 You shall love the LORD your God  
1105 with all your heart,  
1106 and with all your soul,  
1107 and with all your might.  
1108 Keep these words that I am commanding you today  
1109 in your heart (Deut 6:4-6).  
1110

1111 At the center of both law and gospel is the commandment to embody God's overflowing love in  
1112 all our relationships. Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another, "By this will everyone

1113 know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” He even taught his followers to  
1114 love their enemies (Matt 5:44). When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus recalled the  
1115 *Shema*.

1116  
1117 “You shall love the Lord your God  
1118 with all your heart,  
1119 and with all your soul,  
1120 and with all your mind.”

1121 This is the greatest and first commandment.  
1122 And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”  
1123 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt 22:36-40).

1124  
1125 The abundant overflowing love of Giver, Gift, and Giving draws us out of ourselves and into life and  
1126 love-affirming acts of giving and receiving. As we delight in the glory, majesty, and beauty of holiness,  
1127 we are drawn into the communion of restored relationship. In gratitude for the grace of the Lord Jesus  
1128 Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to live in love, and  
1129 emboldened to bear witness and to serve. The pattern of our worship shapes the pattern of our lives  
1130 together. The Spirit’s presence in the life of the church creates a community which bears witness to God’s  
1131 welcoming, reconciling, sanctifying, just, sharing, celebrating and blessed love.

1132  
1133 Welcoming Love  
1134 Reconciling Love  
1135 Sanctifying Love  
1136 Loving Justly  
1137 Sharing Love  
1138 Celebrating Love  
1139 Love’s Blessing

1140 The following reflections on the embodiment of God's triune love seek to open the scriptures in the way  
1141 that sermons do. Through a variety of human voices, the Spirit challenges us to embody God's  
1142 overflowing love.

1143  
1144 **Welcoming Love**

1145  
1146 *Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you,*  
1147 *for the glory of God (Rom 15:7).*  
1148

1149 When God introduced Eve to Adam, Adam welcomed her with open arms. “You are, indeed, bone of my  
1150 bones and flesh of my flesh!” he said (Gen 2:23). Recognizing his fundamental connection to her, his  
1151 shared humanity with her, he could not help but celebrate her presence, imagining the possibilities for  
1152 what life would look like together.

1153  
1154 We continue to grieve over what happens next. For somehow, in the course of a few verses, Adam moves  
1155 from exulting in his fellowship with Eve to blaming her for his own violation of God’s law. From “bone  
1156 of bone and flesh of flesh” to “she made me do it! She gave me the fruit! It’s *her fault*” (see Gen 3:12).  
1157 The once-beloved Eve, she who shares in the very substance of Adam, is no longer welcome. Fellowship  
1158 is broken. Lines are now drawn.  
1159

1160 What would the world be like if we could get back to the welcoming words of Adam, the fundamental  
1161 recognition that we share in the same stuff of creaturely existence? What would it mean for us to know  
1162 that our lives in some sense indwell those of one another as those made in the image of the triune God,  
1163 that One who is perfectly united even in differentiation?  
1164

1165 Of course our conviction and our hope is that the church is a place where we seek to welcome one another  
1166 with the enthusiasm of Adam meeting Eve. One church gives every visitor homemade brownie mix,  
1167 wrapped up in a cutely-decorated Mason jar. And That's not a bad start, even if it's still a far cry from  
1168 looking the visitor in the eye and knowing that it is we, only together, who reflect the image of God. The  
1169 truth is that getting beyond a superficial offering of niceties to the genuine connection of deep welcoming  
1170 is difficult for us--even impossible for us--because we are divided. We are divided by our denial of sin,  
1171 by our blaming others for the predicament we find ourselves in. We size people up and evaluate them and  
1172 stereotype them, keeping them at arms' length rather than truly receiving them.  
1173

1174 So how do we get back to that joy-full cry of Adam? Our forbears in the faith--as far back as Irenaeus (d.  
1175 ca. 202)--were fond of putting Adam's words in the mouth of Jesus Christ himself. The one who entered  
1176 into the womb of Mary, who loved to share a meal with friends and with strangers, who cried out in  
1177 agony on the cross; this one looks us directly in the eye and says, "you are bone of my bones and flesh of  
1178 my flesh." We are welcomed as God's beloved because God has entered into fundamental connection  
1179 with us in the person of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.  
1180

1181 Given that God is simultaneously different from us, how all this works is a mystery. But it is a mystery  
1182 which is revealed to us, known by us, and to which we are called to bear witness. Convinced of the  
1183 reality of God's welcoming love, the Apostle Paul extended welcome to Jews and Gentiles, eager for all  
1184 to know "the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (Eph 3:10). He insisted  
1185 that through Christ, in one Spirit, all have access to the Father. We are, therefore, "no longer strangers  
1186 and aliens. . . but members of the household of God" (Eph 2:18-19). The rift has been healed; we are free  
1187 to welcome one another with open arms.  
1188

1189 One pastor does an exceptional job of conveying that the welcoming work of the church is rooted and  
1190 grounded in the overflowing love of the welcoming, triune God (Eph 3:17). Every church, of course,  
1191 wants to be welcoming. But in this church the welcome seems to be oriented in a place where it cannot  
1192 be robbed by the fragility of our pettiness, our blaming, our sin. The service begins with a processional, a  
1193 loaf of crusty bread and a beautiful chalice brought down the center aisle, followed by a pitcher of water  
1194 large enough to need two hands to carry it. The processional ends; the music stops. The pastor goes to  
1195 the table, her face full of the joy that comes when we have the opportunity to share that great mystery  
1196 which is the heart of our faith. She breaks the bread, and lifts the chalice. She pours the pitcher of water  
1197 into the font until it splashes over the sides. Lifting her hands, she looks out at those gathered and greets  
1198 them with the words, "Welcome home."  
1199

1200

1201

### Reconciling Love

1202

1203

While he was still far off, his father saw him  
and was filled with compassion... (Lk 15:20).

1204

1205

1206

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself...  
and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Cor 5:18).

1207

1208

1209

In Jesus' parable of the prodigal, a restless son cuts his ties with his family, leaves home, and squanders  
1210 his portion of the family treasure. When he loses everything, he decides to return home to ask for his



1211 father's forgiveness. But before the prodigal has a chance to make his plea, his father runs out to embrace  
1212 him, orders that he be dressed in royal garb, and arranges a feast to celebrate his return. This familiar  
1213 parable of Jesus describes the unexpected, overflowing, extravagant love of God who works for our  
1214 reconciliation long in advance of our journey home.

1215  
1216 There is, however, a second part of the story that is sometimes overlooked. The elder brother of the  
1217 prodigal is angry and resentful. He resists being reconciled to his undeserving brother. He refuses to  
1218 rejoice in the father's gracious act of reconciliation.

1219  
1220 As the second part of the parable suggests, the reconciling love of God arouses *resistance*. It challenges  
1221 our sense of moral superiority. It upsets attitudes and practices like racial prejudices and class divisions  
1222 that keep us at war with God and each other. Like the elder brother we often prefer to justify our  
1223 separation from others, to nurse our wounds, and to harbor our resentments. We resist the truth that right  
1224 relationship with God is inseparable from reconciliation with our brothers and sisters.

1225  
1226 In addition to arousing resistance, the reconciling love of God is *costly*. Just as the father of Jesus'  
1227 parable spares no expense in bringing about reconciliation with his lost son, so for the reconciliation of  
1228 the world God in Jesus Christ became obedient unto death. By his own blood Christ has created one new  
1229 humanity, breaking down all dividing walls, and giving us all "access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph  
1230 2:18). If we are to participate in the reconciling love of God, there will be a cost. We will have to empty  
1231 ourselves of the self-righteousness, the abuse of power, and the deadly desire to control others that build  
1232 walls between us and God and between us and other people. We will have to allow ourselves to be united  
1233 with our servant Lord by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

1234  
1235 The parable also teaches that the reconciling love of God is *inclusive*. It embraces the despised as well as  
1236 the respected. It includes every aspect of human life: the personal and the communal, the economic and  
1237 the political, our relationships with friends and our relationships with enemies.

1238  
1239 According to the parable of the prodigal and indeed according to the entire biblical witness, the  
1240 reconciling love of God is both a surprising *gift* and a high *calling*. We are all called to the ministry of  
1241 reconciliation by the reconciling love of God. To be reconciled to the triune God is to be forgiven, made  
1242 new, given reason to rejoice, and sent into the world as ambassadors of the love of God in Christ by the  
1243 power of the Holy Spirit.

1244  
1245 In a world addicted to violence, the biblical message of the reconciling love of God calls us to be agents  
1246 of reconciliation in our family, in our church, in our community, and in international relationships. We  
1247 are called to be peacemakers and to work at settling disputes without recourse to violence. "The church,  
1248 in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies, and to commend to the nations as practical  
1249 politics the search for cooperation and peace" (BC 9.45).

1250  
1251 The reconciling love of the triune God calls and enables us to embrace those we often exclude because we  
1252 consider them "other," "different," "unworthy," "the enemy." When under the prompting of the Holy  
1253 Spirit we dare to take part in the ministry of reconciliation in response to God's reconciling love in Jesus  
1254 Christ for us and for the world, we bear witness to and participate in the very being and activity of the  
1255 triune God.

1256  
1257

## 1258 **Sanctifying Love**

1259  
1260 ... that we may present everyone complete in Christ.

1261 For this I toil and struggle with all the energy  
1262 that he powerfully inspires within me (Col 1:28-29).

1263  
1264 The gospels are full of healing stories, accounts of Jesus healing the sick, the lame, the blind, the bent, the  
1265 broken. Luke tells the story of ten lepers who cry to Jesus for mercy; all ten are healed and cleansed (Lk  
1266 17), but only one returns thanks. In the gospels, bodily healing is most often accompanied by some kind  
1267 of spiritual healing, by forgiveness, newfound faith, the praise of God, the telling of good news. “Your  
1268 faith has made you well,” Jesus says to one leper, the only one of ten who turned around and said “thank  
1269 you” to Jesus for making him clean and whole. This man was not only unclean, a leper, an outcast, but a  
1270 foreigner, a Samaritan. He obeyed Jesus and was cleansed and he came back shouting praise to God. His  
1271 healing was complete; he was cleansed from the inside out. Spiritual wholeness and physical well-being  
1272 are connected. Salvation, sanctity, health and healing are integral to Jesus’ ministry. Holiness and  
1273 wholeness, wellness and well-being go together.

1274  
1275 We all have holiness codes. Some people are clean; others are not. To some, holiness has to do with  
1276 legalism, with outward adherence to rules and regulations. But Jesus said, “it’s not what goes into your  
1277 mouth that makes you unclean, but what comes out” (Matt 15:11, para.). What we say and what we do  
1278 come from the inside out. Here the words of Jesus and the spirit of the Law are in concert. God looks on  
1279 the heart. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. By faith we are made whole slowly but surely; by  
1280 loving God wholeheartedly—body, mind, soul, and strength--we learn to love as God loves, fully and  
1281 freely.

1282 Sanctity moves from the inside out. Sanctification is a lifelong process of growth in grace. We are  
1283 healed, restored, freed, transformed into God’s likeness by degrees.

1284 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all  
1285 of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are  
1286 being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this  
1287 comes from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor 3.17-18).

1288  
1289 God’s holy love rubs off on us and that holiness, our wholeness, rubs off on others—on neighbors  
1290 and strangers, on the weak and the strong--through whole-hearted love, love that seeks the  
1291 welfare and well-being of friend and foe, of creatures and of creation itself. It is a holy mystery:  
1292 we are bearers of divine love and holiness. Our relationship with the holy Trinity enables us to  
1293 see the world with new insight; suddenly the ordinary becomes sacred; people, time, places are  
1294 hallowed.

1295  
1296 Augustine said, “Love God and do as you please.” He knew that if God’s love dwells in us we  
1297 will become more loving; if God’s holiness cleanses us, we will become more and more whole; if  
1298 God’s grace fills us grace will grow in us. We will be changed by the gracious love of the triune  
1299 God making our lives as creatures in the world more holy. We begin to see ourselves and others  
1300 as saints. Holiness happens from the inside out.

1301  
1302  
1303  
1304  
1305  
1306  
1307  
1308

### Loving Justly

*And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk  
humbly with your God (Mic 6:8).*

1309                    *And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin*  
1310                    *again” (John 8:11b).*

1311  
1312 To do justice...that’s a tough call. *A Brief Statement of Faith* affirms the justice mandate: “In a broken  
1313 and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage . . . to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace” (*BC*  
1314 66, 71). Yet age-old conditions are witness to the failure to live and love justly. Justice butts up against  
1315 power, privilege, and prejudice. The ancient cries for justice are manifold. Habakkuk laments the reality  
1316 that “. . .justice never prevails” (Hab 1:4b). Malevolence compels Esther to speak. Amos voices God’s  
1317 indignation: “I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Take away from me the noise of your songs.  
1318 But let justice roll down like water. . .” (Am 5:21, 23-24).

1319  
1320 Put simply, “God don’t like ugly!” This African American colloquialism reflects divine displeasure with  
1321 the ways of the world: “[The Lord] expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!”  
1322 (Isa 5: 7b). Today every part of the world is teeming with systems and attitudes that oppress, destroy and  
1323 serve as insidious weapons of mass destruction. Hymnist Brian Wren strikes a chord for loving action:

1324  
1325                    With faith newborn and passionate for justice,  
1326                    together now, we’ll travel out from home,  
1327                    to sacrifice the peace of calm uprightness,  
1328                    and struggle for the city of Shalom  
1329                    (Brian Wren, *Piece Together Praise*).

1330  
1331 “Sacrifice” and “struggle”--words that signal hard work, discomfort, and often reflect a voice in the  
1332 wilderness, radical and standing alone. Jesus rejects laws that cause suffering, laws with loopholes, laws  
1333 that steal personhood, laws that kill the spirit. When tested, he offers a radical standard of justice. The  
1334 woman accused of adultery is such a test. The law is clear; adulterers are stoned. The accusers are on  
1335 firm legal ground. But, while legally correct, are they *morally* correct? Does their law reflect God’s  
1336 justice?

1337  
1338 No! We are called to a higher standard.

1339  
1340                    Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has  
1341                    fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not  
1342                    murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet;” and any other divine commandment,  
1343                    are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a  
1344                    neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:8-10).

1345  
1346 Love overflowing is the essence of the Three in One; right relationship, complete and perfect within the  
1347 Trinity draws us to ponder all our relationships and our participation in creating a just society. Through  
1348 the lens of love, the woman’s accusers fail the test, “Is this God’s justice?”

1349  
1350 In the movie, *A Few Good Men*, two marines obey orders to punish Willie, a comrade, but perceived as a  
1351 weakling, a snitch, and an embarrassment to the squad. Their actions result in Willie’s accidental death  
1352 and they are dishonorably discharged. Crushed by the verdict, one marine cries, “We followed an order.  
1353 What did we do wrong? We didn’t do anything wrong!” The other responds, “Yeah, we did. We were  
1354 supposed to fight for those who couldn’t fight for themselves. We were supposed to fight for Willie.”

1355  
1356 God’s justice is full of compassion and reflects a fierce bias toward the weak. God calls us to fight for the  
1357 Willies of the world—women, children and men, vulnerable and invisible. They rummage through  
1358 trashcans; they stand in line for jobs and food; they are below the poverty line; they are across the border;  
1359 they are in prison; they are in debt. They are our neighbors, but through indifference we do not to see

1360 them. Indifference may become cruelty when justice is meted out to strangers or enemies. Is cruelty  
1361 ever permissible as a means to an end? Is this God's justice?

1362  
1363 Loving justly affirms Jesus' blessing and sending to go and sin no more. Loving justly is more than mere  
1364 lip service to an ideal. It means that love, even in radical forms, is the only order that we obey. It  
1365 requires sacrifice and struggle for Shalom.

1366  
1367 This is the justice of the triune God--the prospect of that peaceful kingdom where the wolf and lamb feed  
1368 together, the cow and the bear graze, and where none will hurt or destroy on God's holy mountain (Isa  
1369 65:25). God gives us the mandate; Jesus gives us the example; the Spirit gives us courage. . .to do  
1370 justice—a tough, but high calling.

1371

1372

1373

### Sharing Love

1374

1375

*And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance,  
so that by always having enough of everything,  
you may share abundantly in every good work (2 Cor 9:8).*

1376

1377

1378

1379 What might a community that faithfully reflects God's intentions for human relationships look like? The  
1380 apostle Paul suggests that it would look like a human body, constituted by its various parts and  
1381 indistinguishable from them (I Cor 12, Rom 12, Eph. 4). Christ is the head of this body, in which  
1382 Christians are literally members of one another (Rom 12:5). This unprecedented interconnectedness came  
1383 to be called *koinonia* in the New Testament, and took on very tangible characteristics (Acts 2:42-47).  
1384 The early Christians shared everything with one another: love, time, property, possessions, energy,  
1385 wisdom, compassion, assistance. In this reciprocal sharing, the body and its members received power to  
1386 display the triune God's overflowing love to the world, in fulfillment of the risen Christ's commission to  
1387 make disciples (Matt 28:18-20). "And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being  
1388 saved" (Acts 2:47).

1389

1390 *Koinonia* is sharing, participation, partaking, communion. As the early Christians reflected more deeply  
1391 on the nature of God's triune life in the light of Jesus' incarnation, life, suffering, crucifixion,  
1392 resurrection, ascension, and return, they came to see that the unparalleled depths of communion that they  
1393 experienced every day in their shared life with one another were actually the overflow of God's own love.  
1394 This overflowing love existed eternally in God as the mutual participation, self-giving, vulnerability,  
1395 interdependence, and responsibility shared among the divine persons. As the divine *koinonia*, it was the  
1396 source of all human *koinonia*. Jesus prayed that this might be so: "I ask not only on behalf of these,  
1397 but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you,  
1398 Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent  
1399 me" (Jn 17:20-21). By the Holy Spirit, this mutually self-giving divine life graciously overflowed in a  
1400 sharing of God's limitless generosity and abundance with us in Jesus Christ.

1401

1402 In our life together in the church, the body of Christ, the implications are staggering. Partaking of the  
1403 very life of God, we participate unreservedly in one another's lives. Freely sharing God's abundant  
1404 blessings with others, we reflect God's infinite self-giving in attitudes and acts of human generosity.

1405

1406 We *partake* regularly together of God's extravagant grace in worship, sharing in the very body and  
1407 blood of Christ, and miraculously being interconnected with one another as we receive the bread and  
1408 the cup (1 Cor 10:16-17).

1409

1410 We *give* generously and sacrificially of the abundant resources God places at our disposal,  
1411 recognizing that we and they belong to God, and that we hold all of God’s benefits in trust as  
1412 stewards, to be administered for the benefit of others.

1413  
1414 We *open ourselves transparently* to one another in our faults, weakness, and suffering, accepting the  
1415 vulnerability this entails in the light the cross sheds on God’s eternal vulnerability to the world’s pain.  
1416 We do this in the conviction that God’s grace is sufficient, and God’s strength is made perfect in  
1417 weakness and suffering (2 Cor 4:6-7, 12:9).

1418  
1419 We *practice interdependence* in our relationships, rejecting the pretense of self-sufficiency. We are  
1420 freed to “need” one another without co-dependence, and to give and receive from others, recognizing  
1421 that our destinies are inseparably connected and we stand or fall together.

1422  
1423 We willingly *assume responsibility* for one another, especially the weak, the marginalized, and the  
1424 needy, placing our resources as needed at the disposal of others with whom we are inseparably  
1425 connected as co-sharers of the divine generosity.

1426  
1427 The overflow of God’s trinitarian love does not stop with the Christian community. The pattern of  
1428 *koinonia* in the early church was one of ever-expanding circles of sharing, ever-broadening boundaries of  
1429 participation, giving, vulnerability, interdependence, and responsibility for one another, all humankind,  
1430 and ultimately the whole creation. As the triune God’s extravagant love continues to overflow in the  
1431 church today, we receive power to share the abundant love of God in the world, in word and deed. Thus  
1432 the Lord adds to our numbers daily, as we grow in grace and embody God’s love in tangible deeds of self-  
1433 giving before a world desperately in need of the Good News.

1434  
1435

1436  
1437

1438  
1439

### Celebrating Love

1440

1441 *The days are coming, declares the LORD, when the one who plows shall overtake the one who*  
1442 *reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip*  
1443 *sweet wine,*

1444 *and all the hills shall flow with it (Amos 9:13).*

1445

1446 The wine at the wedding had run out. And for some reason, Jesus’ mother goes to him to report this social  
1447 *faux pas*. Jesus says, “Why are you bothering me, mother? My hour has not yet come.” But there just  
1448 happened to be six huge stone water jars lying around—20 to 30 gallons each. Jesus has them filled with  
1449 water and taken to the master of ceremonies. Then the celebrating really starts. Jesus has provided the  
1450 best wine of the whole night—and an unbelievable amount of it! (Jn 2:1-10).

1451

1452 John tells us that this was the first “sign” that Jesus is truly the Son of God (Jn 2:11). Turning water used  
1453 for washing and purification into an overabundance of wine. What a sign! We are astonished. But perhaps  
1454 a little voice in us wonders, Couldn’t Jesus have done something more useful? Was this really the most  
1455 responsible stewardship of his ministry resources? We live so seldom in a celebrating mode. We parcel  
1456 out our time and energy; we calculate and juggle; we try to figure out what other people can do for us and  
1457 in turn what they may be trying to get from us. Jesus’ extravagant gesture at the Cana wedding changes  
1458 this whole landscape. It takes us from calculating to celebrating. Jesus’ sign is proof that the messianic  
1459 age is dawning. The reign of God is near! And when this promised reign comes in fullness, it brings good  
1460 things with it. It brings an abundance like you’ve never seen. It brings joy.

1461  
1462 We celebrate the extravagance of God's love for us already now. Even before we know our own name,  
1463 our Maker claims us. Even before we knock, our Gracious Host opens the door for us. Even before we ask  
1464 for food, our Good Shepherd spreads a table before us. The creative, redemptive, sustaining love of God  
1465 takes the shape of extravagant hospitality towards all creation. We are intended to live joyfully and  
1466 generously, assured of God's gracious abundance.

1467  
1468 God's extravagance towards us frees us to be generous, even extravagant, in our dealings with others. We  
1469 can respect and celebrate the creation as God's good gift, rather than depleting it for our own selfish  
1470 purposes. We can enjoy our relationships with other people because we're not always angling for what we  
1471 can gain from them. God's generosity towards us frees us to think about our time and money differently.  
1472 We don't have to spend our days anxiously building bigger barns to protect all our treasure. We can throw  
1473 off the burden of ceaseless productivity, so we have time to keep Sabbath, time to devote to praising God  
1474 and renewing our bodies and souls. "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,"  
1475 Jesus says, "and I will give you rest." (Matt 11:28)

1476  
1477 The joy of the triune God is poured out on creation, so that all creation will rejoice. Salvation is feasting  
1478 in the kingdom of God, where people will come from north, south, east, and west to sit at table together.  
1479 Their celebration will satisfy the yearnings of body and spirit. Their fellowship will shatter boundaries of  
1480 language and culture and past enmity. In Jesus' fellowship meals, in the homes of Pharisees or of  
1481 Gentiles, surrounded by thousands or alone with his disciples, hints of this joyful communion begin to  
1482 heal the pain and brokenness of human life. His followers glimpse the glorious end that awaits them:  
1483 celebrating together in God's new realm. The picture of Jesus we get at this extraordinary wedding at  
1484 Cana tells us that God is not interested just in our failings and sorrows, but in our joys as well. Our lives,  
1485 both now and forever, are to reflect the fullness of God's perfect joy. "Everything is ready! Come to the  
1486 banquet!" (Matt 22:4)

### Love's Blessing

1487  
1488  
1489  
1490  
1491 Genesis 12:1-3; 22:1-19

1492 Luke 1:26-38; 2:25-35

1493  
1494 *"Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the*  
1495 *land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you . . . ."*

1496  
1497 *"The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will*  
1498 *conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. . . . ' Mary said to the angel, 'How*  
1499 *can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the*  
1500 *power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called*  
1501 *Son of God.'"*

1502  
1503 The blessing of God is a vocation.  
1504 It calls us, as it called Abram,  
1505 to leave all that is familiar for what is yet to be revealed.

1506 It calls us, as it called Mary,  
1507 to be a people who, by the favor of God,  
1508 bear the divine Word,  
1509 as it is conceived in us by the Holy Spirit.

1510  
1511 *"I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."*

1512  
1513 *“Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’”*  
1514  
1515 The blessing of God requires of us a choice:  
1516       to be blessing, as Abram,  
1517               not for ourselves but for others;  
1518       to ‘let it be’ with us, as with Mary,  
1519               according to God’s word.  
1520  
1521 *“I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of*  
1522 *the earth shall be blessed.”*  
1523  
1524 *“Then Simeon blessed them and said to. . . Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of*  
1525 *many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be*  
1526 *revealed.’”*  
1527  
1528 Being blessed is no private matter.  
1529       It binds us to each other in ways none of us seeks,  
1530               for beholding God’s blessing in another  
1531               compels from us a choice.  
1532       Like the neighbors of Abram  
1533               we will respond with blessing or curse.  
1534               Indifference is not an option.  
1535       Like the neighbors of Mary’s son,  
1536               in our response we disclose our hearts.  
1537       God will be the judge.  
1538               The blessed one, like Abram, must only remain true.  
1539  
1540 *“[God] said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer*  
1541 *him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.’”*  
1542  
1543 *“‘And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’”*  
1544  
1545 Blessing comes with a price.  
1546       Abram, now Abraham, must be willing to sacrifice the blessing  
1547               as burnt offering to his God.  
1548       The handmaid of the Lord, blessed among women  
1549               will herself give birth to blessing,  
1550               and it will tear apart her heart.  
1551  
1552 Being blessed is having our identity,  
1553       who we are in relation to God and each other,  
1554               formed by Love’s gifts, Love’s promises, Love’s claims.  
1555  
1556 Being blessed is being made blessing,  
1557       an embodiment of the image in which we are made:  
1558               giver, gift, giving;  
1559               lover, beloved, love.  
1560  
1561

1562  
1563  
1564 **Conclusion: Our Hope**  
1565

1566 Our theological reflection begins and ends with the love of God made known to us in Jesus Christ:

1567  
1568 For God so loved the world.... (Jn 3:16).  
1569

1570 Only divine love can give meaning to our preaching and our practice:

1571  
1572 *If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels,*  
1573 *but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.... (1 Cor 13:1).*  
1574

1575 In the end, it is that overflowing love that keeps us and holds us:

1576  
1577 *...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,*  
1578 *nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God*  
1579 *in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:39).*  
1580

1581 And so our prayers embody our hope that all may rejoice in the boundless love of the triune God:

1582  
1583 *[We] pray that, according to the riches of [God's] glory,*  
1584 *[God] may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being*  
1585 *with power through the Spirit,*  
1586 *and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,*  
1587 *as you are being rooted and grounded in love.*  
1588 *[We] pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints,*  
1589 *what is the breadth and length and height and depth,*  
1590 *and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,*  
1591 *so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:16-19).*



## SOURCES CITED

1592  
1593  
1594  
1595  
1596  
1597  
1598  
1599  
1600  
1601  
1602  
1603  
1604  
1605  
1606  
1607  
1608  
1609  
1610  
1611  
1612  
1613  
1614  
1615  
1616  
1617  
1618  
1619  
1620  
1621  
1622  
1623  
1624  
1625  
1626  
1627  
1628  
1629  
1630  
1631  
1632  
1633  
1634  
1635  
1636  
1637  
1638  
1639  
1640  
1641  
1642

### **Biblical Citations:**

Biblical quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, published by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1989.

### **Denominational Resources:**

“Belonging to God: A First Catechism,” with Biblical References [approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998)].

*Book of Common Worship*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993. Abb: BCW

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, *Book of Confessions*; Part II, *Book of Order, 2004-2005*, Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly. Numbered references to the *Book of Confessions* are noted as BC; Numbered references to the Directory for Worship in the *Book of Order* are noted as W-.

*Presbyterian Hymnal*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990. Abb: PH

*Sing the Faith*. Louisville: Geneva Press, 2003. Abb: STF

### **Historical Resources:**

Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogian*. In *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm*, translated by Benedicta Ward. New York: Penguin Books, 1973.

Augustine, *The Trinity*. In *The Works of Saint Augustine*, translated by Edmund Hill. Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991.

Bernard of Clairvaux, in *Prayers of the Middle Ages: Light from a Thousand Years*, edited by J. Manning Potts. Nashville: The Upper Room, 1954.

Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, Library of Christian Classics, 1960. References are to Book, Chapter, Section, e.g. I.i.1.

Calvin, John, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, translated by William Pringle. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948.

Calvin, John, *Form of Church Prayers*. In *Liturgies of the Western Church*, edited by Bard Thompson. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961.

Catherine of Siena, in *Catherine of Siena: Passion for the Truth, Compassion for Humanity, Selected Spiritual Writings*, edited by Mary O’Driscoll, OP. New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993.

*The Divine Liturgy of St. James*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 7.

- 1643 Gregory of Nazianzus, *On Baptism*, Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers, 2d series, vol. 7.  
 1644  
 1645 Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity*, translated by Stephen McKenna. Washington, DC: Catholic University of  
 1646 America Press, 1954.  
 1647  
 1648 John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine*  
 1649 *Images*, translated by David Anderson. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980.  
 1650  
 1651 Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, translated by Frank Tobin. New York:  
 1652 Paulist Press, 1998.  
 1653  
 1654 **Contemporary Resources:**  
 1655  
 1656 De Waal, Esther, ed., *The Celtic Vision: Selections from the Carmina Gadelica*. London: Darton,  
 1657 Longman and Todd, 1988.  
 1658  
 1659 *Iona Abbey Worship Book*. Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2001.  
 1660  
 1661 Ramshaw, Gail, "In the Name: Towards Alternative Baptismal Idioms," *The Ecumenical Review* 54  
 1662 (2002): 351.  
 1663  
 1664 Rice, Howard, and Lamar Williamson, eds., *A Book of Reformed Prayers*. Louisville: Westminster/John  
 1665 Knox Press, 1998.
- 1666 Smith, Michael W. and Deborah D. Smith, "Shine on Us." O'Ryan Music, Word, 1996.
- 1667 Wren, Brian, *Piece Together Praise: A Theological Journey - Poems and Collected Hymns Thematically*  
 1668 *Arranged*. London, England: Stainer and Bell; Carol Stream, Illinois, USA: Hope Publishing Company,  
 1669 1996.  
 1670  
 1671