

The hours and forms of worship

Session Starter #26

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Prayer

A prayer by Jean Calvin

16th Century Reformer (paraphrased)

Almighty God, shine on us through your word so we will not stumble blindly in midnight darkness nor lull ourselves to sleep in its still shadows. Rouse us daily by your word. Standing in awe of your holy name, may we present ourselves, and all our pursuits, as a living sacrifice to you. Dwell in our hearts and rule them perpetually until you gather us into your heavenly home where eternal rest and glory await. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

The session is responsible for regulating the hours and forms of public worship and for arranging special services. The session determines the appointed times and provides for the administration of the sacraments.

Book of Forms section 111.1

Scripture

On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight.

Acts 20:7 NRSV

A Brief Commentary

Some Bible commentators claim this verse provides a glimpse into an early Christian worship service. While Christians, no doubt, prayed and sang hymns on their own, they also gathered together on the first day of the week to worship God, be instructed in the faith and break bread, probably as a Eucharistic meal.

Reflection

In the 25th session starter, we considered how the minister is responsible for the conduct and content of public worship (*Book of Forms* section 111). In this starter, we mull over the session's role in determining its "hours" and "forms."

The "hours" of public worship refer to when the congregation worships. The session might decide that worship will be offered on Wednesday evening to serve those not available on Sunday...that Sunday morning worship will move from 11:00 to 10:00...that the Good Friday service will take place in the evening. While it is obvious individuals may gather any time to sing, pray and reflect on God's word, it is the session that is responsible for determining when public worship occasions for the whole community of faith will be held.

The second sentence in section 111.1 suggests the phrase "forms of public worship" primarily refers to the sacraments. For example, the session might decide that the sacrament of holy communion will be administered once a month instead of four times a year, or that the Muir request to have their children baptized on Mother's Day be approved. The words "special services" are vague but could refer to public worship that involves other areas of session oversight. For example, the session might approve the date for receiving new members.

The legislation in sections 111 and 111.1 should not divide minister and session when it comes to worship matters, but they do assign ultimate responsibility. Whether considering the "conduct and content" or the "hours and forms," it is beneficial for minister and session to pray, discern and act in harmony.

Discussion

Discuss how the session can cooperate with the minister when making decisions about the hours and forms of public worship.