**Introduction**

*The Book of Common Worship*, 1991, is offered for use in The Presbyterian Church in Canada with the humble recognition that it is but one step in the slow and continuing process of giving shape to liturgies which aid the people of God in the worship of their creator and redeemer. As with its predecessors, texts are drawn from the ancient church, the Scriptures, the liturgies of the Reformation era as well as the texts that are emerging in the liturgical renewal of the latter part of the twentieth century.

*The Book of Common Worship* is the fourth publication of its kind produced by The Presbyterian Church in Canada. In 1895, the General Assembly appointed a Committee on Uniformity of Worship with a mandate to provide "direction to the Church to secure the reverent and edifying observance of public worship, with due regard to Christian liberty, on the one hand, and general uniformity on the other." After an unsuccessful attempt to produce a new Directory for Public Worship, the committee was directed to prepare "a book, for voluntary use, to assist in the administration of the sacraments and other ordinances of the church."

In 1922, the first *Book of Common Order* was published for use in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It drew on the Reformed tradition, especially as represented in *Euchologion: A Book of Common Order* (1874) published by the Church Service Society of Scotland, *The Book of Common Prayer*, and *The Book of Common Worship* (1906), published for use in The Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.

The second *Book of Common Order* was published in 1938; the third was approved in 1964. In 1974 the General Assembly directed a revision of the Book of Common Order and in 1977 assigned the task to the Board of Congregational Life and its Worship Committee.

*The Book of Common Worship*, 1991, contains a few new features but is in continuity with several important principles set forth by its predecessors. These include:

The norm for worship on the Lord's Day is the Service of Word and Holy Communion.

Liturgy is rooted in the Scriptures and the texts of the ancient church.

The liturgy in prayers and hymns of praise must be in the vernacular of the people, reflecting the contemporary idioms that have meaning for them while at the same time, faithfully interpreting the theological positions of the Reformed tradition.

It is desirable to find a common order of worship by which Presbyterians may praise God with unity of mind and spirit, while at the same time allowing for the diversity which encourages freedom in Christ.

These goals we hold in common with our predecessors. How they have been interpreted for our time will become more apparent as the book is used but a few principles which guided the compilers are outlined below.

**One Order, Many Alternatives**

The Service of Word and Holy Communion is the norm for worship on each Lord's Day. In other service books, variety has been offered by providing texts for two or more complete services. In this book, the decision was made to provide only one Order of Service which is consistent with tradition but offering several variations. The Order is printed in outline with options, followed by the full text for one complete service. These serve as one model. The next section of the book provides a selection of texts for each part of the service, providing convenient resources for worship on Sunday and on other occasions.

**The Use of Scripture**

Liturgical texts have always been rooted in the Scripture and reflective of the biblical imagery. Most of the texts are not exact quotations as they have been adapted for use in prayer and praise within the community. Unlike its predecessors, this book provides the Scriptural reference in the margin. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is the basic source but once again, the texts have been adapted for use in public worship.

**The Language**

The language is contemporary and inclusive. In keeping with decisions made by the General Assembly in 1980, 1983, and 1988, those writing and revising texts have made every attempt to use language that is rich in biblical imagery, is contemporary in style and idiom, and is inclusive of all people in terms of sex, race, age and ethnic culture.

The language about God and address to God is more difficult. Masculine pronouns referring to God have been reduced while at the same time an effort has been made to find a variety of forms of address to God which are appropriate and biblical. This is in keeping with the decisions and guidelines provided by the General Assembly in 1988. In general, when a choice was required concerning a given text, the committee was inclined to take a conservative position. The Trinitarian formula in its traditional words is clearly preferred over more contemporary expressions when the text has to do with a central act of worship such as the Sacrament of Baptism or when we use other texts which we hold in common with the holy catholic church such as the translation of ancient prayers, creeds and canticles. On the other hand, where common agreement exists among churches of the English speaking world, we have chosen to introduce the new translations such as the Lord's Prayer, Apostles' Creed and other texts translated by the English Language Liturgical Consultation.

Changes in language are met with mixed reaction. For some, the clarity and directness of expression typical of contemporary English is welcomed. Our purpose is to help people pray together in a common language. However, liturgical language is not the same as casual conversation. It is our goal to provide a liturgical language which is marked by eloquence, rhythm and grace when it is read aloud by either the leader or the people. Contemporary English in the liturgy can achieve a fresh kind of beauty while at the same time using a vocabulary which is common to the people, including the children and youth. The language used in this book together with the actions described in the rubrics are based on the concern of Calvin and other Reformers that the words and actions of worship must be understood by the people.

**Reformed and Ecumenical**

Based as they are in the apostolic and Scriptural traditions, the Reformed liturgies have always been ecumenical. That fact is even more true today. The texts in this book are indebted to the surge of scholarship and reform which has been characteristic of the ecumenical and liturgical movement since 1965. New translations have been made of ancient texts. An attempt has been made to recover some of the traditions and understandings of the early church. Baptism and its implications for the whole of life is viewed with a new seriousness as we move into an era where the Christian church is in a situation very similar to that of the early centuries of its life. There is a growing awareness that the Sunday worship must include the eucharistic meal if the community of God's people are to be unified and nurtured for their life in the world.

Yet, while borrowing much from the work of our ecumenical partners, this book reflects the traditional attitude of the Reformers. The proclamation of the Word through the reading of Scripture and preaching remains a central and essential focus. Baptism as a sign and seal of God's covenant of grace is affirmed in both word and action. The role of the whole community of people in giving voice to the praise and prayer addressed to God is upheld and facilitated.

If a significant theological shift has occurred in some of the texts it is primarily a shift in emphasis. There is a renewed sensitivity toward the role of humanity in creation. There is more emphasis on equality and mutuality between male and female. There is a more frequent recognition of humanity as stewards of creation rather than the lords of creation. There is intentional recognition that social justice, peace and equality are signs of the reign of God in the world.

An eschatological hope is an essential element of a lively present and is given voice in several texts. These concepts are not new -- only the emphasis has been sharpened.

There is much in this book that will appear to be new and fresh. The texts presented here are not exhaustive and are but one step in the continuing task of producing aids to help the people of the church worship God with thanksgiving and joy.

The rich cultural and ethnic diversity which exists within The Presbyterian Church in Canada is not as evident as desired. This and other objectives set out by the Worship Committee at the beginning of its work in 1983 have not yet been fully realized. There is much to do.

**Development and Testing**

From the beginning, there was a deliberate attempt on the part of the Worship Committee to seek broad representation from the Church in the preparation of this book. In addition to the Committee members, Task Forces were established in all regions of the country whose members made significant contributions to the research, theological reflection and preparation of manuscripts. After much writing and revision, two books were prepared for use in the Church entitled *Word and Sacraments* and *Worship For The Way: Prayers and Services for the Life Journey.* These books contained proposed services for many occasions with commentary. The comments from those who used the services and analyzed them from the points of view of doctrine, Reformed tradition, pastoral effectiveness, liturgical integrity and general usefulness aided greatly in the revision of the early documents and the preparation of the final text. It is not possible to count or name all who participated in the process. The book is the work of many people of the Church and to them we owe our gratitude.

**Form and Title**

From the beginning of its work, ministers of the Church requested The Worship Committee to publish the book with a new title and in a new form. *The Book of Common Worship* was preferred as a title. Although breaking with a long tradition, it seemed to many to better describe the purpose and contents of the book. The loose leaf format was requested, making the book more flexible in its use and easily revised. An introductory commentary at the beginning of many sections provides information and interpretation as well as describing some acceptable variations. We hope these new features prove to be helpful.

*The Book of Common Worship* is offered to the Church as a tool to aid the people in the worship of God. May it be found useful as the Holy Spirit empowers to glorify and enjoy the God for whom we are created to worship.

The Worship Committee