**The Constitution of a Congregation**

**A Service of Thanksgiving**

As a new congregation forms, there are many occasions when the people, with or without the presbytery, will want to hold a special service of thanksgiving, covenant making or dedication. These special occasions include the first service of worship held after a decision has been made by a group of people to form a new congregation in a new place; or it may be in thanksgiving for the fact that funds are available to permit a building program; or it may be the occasion when the presbytery has given permission to establish a membership roll and to elect a session. These are important milestones to be celebrated with joy and thanksgiving. However, a most significant event is that which marks the conclusion of the process by which the congregation is formally constituted. When, under the supervision and authority of the presbytery, the communion roll has been established, the session has been elected and a minister appointed or called, the presbytery will declare that the congregation has been duly constituted at a formal meeting of the court. It is in a sense a coming of age when the congregation is considered able to order its own affairs and to take a responsible place in the courts of the Church. That is a time for great celebration.

The people in attendance represent three distinct groups and an attempt has been made to recognize each in the service. There is the whole assembly, made up of Christians from the surrounding area and who represent in a small way the whole church catholic. There is also the smaller group of people who have pledged together to form a new congregation together with their children. There is the presbytery duly constituted to act with the authority of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in the formation of this new congregation. Although the congregation was legally constituted at a meeting of the presbytery, that fact is best realized by the people in the midst of the congregation offering praise and thanksgiving to God.

The Service of Worship shall be conducted by the presbytery with the moderator presiding. It will normally be a service of Word and Holy Communion and held at a time when the presbytery and friends from near-by congregations can attend.

The rite of constitution will normally follow the proclamation of the Word. As it includes a confession of faith, no other credal statement is required. It may be outlined as follows.

 Introduction

 The Apostles' Creed

 Recognition of Charter Members

 Affirmation of Presbytery

 Prayer

**The Constitution of a Congregation**

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An Order

*Following the sermon, the Moderator of Presbytery will address the assembly as follows:*

By the grace of God and the authority of The Presbytery of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, we are assembled to celebrate with joy and thanksgiving the constitution of a congregation of God's people within the holy catholic church.

Let us then, join together with Christians from all parts of the church both past and present as we affirm our faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed.

*The people will stand.*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,**

 **creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,**

 **who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,**

 **born of the Virgin Mary,**

 **suffered under Pontius Pilate,**

 **was crucified, died, and was buried;**

 **he descended to the dead.**

 **On the third day he rose again;**

 **he ascended into heaven,**

 **he is seated at the right hand of the Father,**

 **and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,**

 **the holy catholic Church,**

 **the communion of saints,**

 **the forgiveness of sins,**

 **the resurrection of the body,**

 **and the life everlasting. Amen.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,**

 **the holy catholic Church,**

 **the communion of saints,**

 **the forgiveness of sins,**

 **the resurrection of the body,**

 **and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*All will be seated except the charter members and their children. The Moderator addresses the charter members saying:*

As you form a new congregation of God's people, believing in Jesus Christ, depending on the power of the Holy Spirit, remember your high calling as disciples of Christ.

 You are a chosen race,

 a royal priesthood, a holy nation,

 God's own people,

 that you may proclaim the

 mighty acts of Christ who called you out of darkness

into his marvelous light.

 Once you were no people

 but now you are God's people;

 once you had not received mercy

 but now you have received mercy.  *1 Peter 2:9-10*.

The promises of God are for you and your children. As members of this congregation will you make use of God's means of grace as you

 offer the worship that belongs to God;

 grow in Christ through the Word and Sacraments;

 share your spiritual and material gifts for the good of all?

 **We will.**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and keep you faithful.

*The charter members remain standing while the members of presbytery stand. The Moderator addresses them saying:*

Members of the Presbytery of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_;

we have constituted this congregation to be known as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Church of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Let us now join with these people as we affirm the constitution of this new congregation.

To the glory of God the Father,

 who has loved and called us;

to the glory of God the Son, who has given himself for us;

to the glory of God the Holy Spirit,

 who calls the church into being,

 uniting us to Christ and to one another;

 **We constitute this congregation.**

For the worship of God in prayer and praise,

 the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ,

 the baptism of believers and their children,

 the renewal of God's people at the Lord's Table,

 **We constitute this congregation.**

For the instruction of children and adults

 in the Christian way,

 the support of those who are tempted,

 the comfort of those who mourn,

 the guidance of those who seek,

 **We constitute this congregation.**

For the blessing of Christian marriage,

 the support of family life,

 the increase of justice, peace and righteousness

 in this community and the world,

 **We constitute this congregation.**

ALL **Blessing and honour and glory and power**

 **be to our God for ever and ever!**

**Prayer Of Constitution**

*The Moderator continues saying:*

Praise be to you, O God,

 whose faithfulness endures forever.

In ancient days you guided our ancestors,

 entering into covenant with them

 and calling them to be your servant people.

In the fullness of time, you showed

 your love for the world by sending

 your Son Jesus Christ to be our redeemer.

In your great mercy, you have

 called us into a living faith

 and baptized us into the body of Christ, the church.

And now we give you thanks, O God,

 for all those,

 who have joined together to form a new congregation.

Pour out upon these people the gift of your Holy Spirit,

 that they may be united in one faith,

 one hope and one baptism,

 and that they may fulfil your purpose for them

 at this time and in this place.

May they be filled with a holy zeal

 to praise your name,

 to proclaim good news to the poor,

 to set the captives free,

 to heal the sick,

 and to rejoice in your presence

 at the breaking of bread.

May the members of this congregation grow up into Christ,

 being held together by love,

 as each person does the work you have assigned.

These prayers we offer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. Amen.

*The service of worship continues with an invitation to the Table or other form of Thanksgiving and the Dismissal.*