

A
SHORT DIRECTORY
FOR
RELIGIOUS
SOCIETIES,
DRAWN UP BY APPOINTMENT OF THE
REFORMED
PRESBYTERY,
FOR THE PARTICULAR USE
OF THE SEVERAL SOCIETIES OF
CHRISTIAN PEOPLE
UNDER THEIR INSPECTION,
AT THE DESIRE OF THE SAID SOCIETIES,
AND ADDRESSED TO THEM.

PREFACE.

Authentic history informs us that for hundreds of years a peculiar people have existed in the British Isles called “Society People.” In the seventeenth century their faith and patience were tried by persecution: and for the twofold purpose of preserving their own unity and protecting themselves from spies, they adopted rules to secure a select fellowship.

John Howie, author of the Scots Worthies, mentions a certain Walter Smith, who was contemporary with Donald Cargil, as among the first to frame such rules. The Reformed Presbytery probably built upon this foundation cemented by martyrs’ blood.

Although more than one edition of this document have been published in the United States, the present demand cannot be supplied; and this is the special reason why the Reformed Presbytery in May last appointed a committee “to revise and publish another edition of the Rules of Society.” Other reasons, however, may readily occur to the intelligent reader why this faithful and authoritative document should be brought out of its comparative obscurity.

The R.P. Synod of Scotland in the earlier of this century, while professing to re-exhibit the Testimony of the church, did in fact materially change all her subordinate standards. “A Guide to Social Worship” was framed, from which every distinctive feature of the witnessing church was eliminated. There followed from the same source some crude but very piously expressed regulations for what have been since known as “Union Prayer-meetings.” To this project the COVENANTER (Belfast) offered some feeble resistance at the time: but fellowship in the Evangelical Alliance followed, leading to identifying with the Presbyterian Alliance, and ultimately into the Free Church of Scotland. Thus did the Guide to Social Worship effectually supplant the Rules of Society. Against this dangerous counterfeit when republished in America. the Reformed Presbytery gave solemn warning in the year 1840.

REVISION is a comprehensive term, and hitherto not very accurately defined: and although the Committee under Presbytery’s instructions might have both remodeled and abridged this ancient and faithful document, they have judged it better for the edification of those for whom it was designed, to let it reappear in its original dress, although it now appears to modern eyes somewhat antiquated.

Apart from anything local or temporary, the intelligent and faithful witness will easily discern in this treatise some of the footsteps of the flock of slaughter—some of the waymarks set up by those heroic patriots who “loved not their lives unto the death,” while in adhering to their solemn vows, they nobly contended against the dragon and his angels for the covenant rights of God and man. There is not now upon earth a man in the possession and exercise of these rights, nor shall there be until Antichrist be destroyed. Rev. 13:17; 2 Thes. 2:8

That the Lord God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our covenant fathers, may give their successors the same spirit of faith to contend earnestly and strive lawfully for these precious rights, is the earnest prayer of the Presbytery’s Committee.

Rochester, N.Y.

August 10th 1881.

David Steele

Robert Clyde

James Campbell

Committee.

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[originally published in 1772; this edition from which this was taken includes all the original material;
additionally, one may read the Preface of the Committee from 1881.]

CONTENTS.

- Preface by Reformed Presbytery (Covenanted), Rochester, N.Y., 1881.
- Epistle to Reader
- Section I. *Of the divine scriptural institution of social or fellowship meetings.*
- Section II. *The Special Ends and Designs of Social Meetings.*
- Section III. *Some general rules with respect to the formation of such Societies*
- *the necessary character of the constituent Members*
- *the terms of admission and union*
- *the social religious duties they are called to be engaged in, in Society.*
- Section IV. *Particular directions for the internal regulation of Social Meetings*

A
SHORT DIRECTORY
FOR
RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES.

Beloved Friends and Brethren in the Lord,

WE now at length, in compliance with your repeated applications to us, in our judicative capacity, present you with a brief directory, in order to your walking dutifully and comfortably in private Christian fellowship one with another, in this cloudy and dark day of sin and error. You have now for more than 100 years past subsisted in select societies, even ever since the hand of prelati- cian tyranny and violence having prevailed to overturn the glorious Reformation and covenanted uniformity, which once obtained in these lands, by bloody rage and persecution scattered the Lord's flock, robbed them of their faithful pastors, and forced them to fly for concealment to the mountains, dens and caves of the earth. These religious Christian associations were not only found specially and necessary, and useful then, for the comfort encouragement of the faithful under persecution, distress, and tribulation—but even since open violence and persecution were restrained, times became more peaceful, yet under a continued national overthrow and burial of Christ's taunted cause and testimony, increasing apostacy, idolatry, blasphemous heresies, errors, delusions, ungodliness, atheism, and all manner of wickedness, this sort of Christian fellowship has been experienced to be greatly necessary useful for maintaining the truth, and word of Christ's patience, and preserving the life and practice of religion, &c. For such purpose we call daily upon you to attend to these Christian exercises; and because you have not been hitherto provided with one uniform system of rules and instructions for the proper management of the duty, we therefore offer you the following, which we hope, if attended to, under the divine blessing, may be useful to the whole body, and in which they may all accord with becoming Christian unanimity: But prior to our laying before you the particular method we intend to follow in this short treatise, allow us to premise a few introductory strictures concerning the general nature of the subject of duty of which we are afterwards to write more particularly.

The moral obligation to society, and the duties and virtues of it, arises from man's being made by God of a social nature, a creature particularly formed for society. The society for which man was originally designed was twofold, 1. Divine society, or communion with God. 2. Human society, or communion and intercourse with his fellow-creatures.

1. Divine society or communion with God, consists in a grateful receiving and acknowledging the bounty and goodness of God, and pledges of his favour and friendship, yielding a willing obedience to the divine commands, and paying that actual homage and worship to God which is due to his name, and which he has commanded. For this divine society man was peculiarly formed in his creation, being made not only a creature of a rational nature, whence he becomes a subject of moral government, capable of knowing and enjoying God as his chief happiness, but also had this his rational and intelligent nature beautified with the moral or gracious image of God, in righteousness and true holiness superadded thereunto; hereby he is completely fitted for yielding that perfect love and obedience which is due from such a creature to the adorable Creator.

2. Human society, or, communion and, intercourse with his fellow-creatures, in the way subordination to the other. All human society, unions and friendship, must ever be considered as subordinated to divine society, otherwise they cannot deserve the name of *society* but of *conspiracy*. This human society consists in the reciprocal performance of all the offices and duties of that mutual benevolence, love and helpfulness which the divine law requires between man and man. All these arise and flow from the moral relation naturally subsisting among all the individuals of mankind, as being originally by creation the offspring of the same father, Mal 2:10; Acts 17:28. And partakers of the same common nature, Acts 17:26.

This human society may again be considered in two-fold view, *viz.* civil and spiritual. These kinds of society among men differ not with respect to their foundation and rule, which is the revealed will or law of God; nor with reference to the ultimate and subordinate end of both, which is the glory of God and good of men. But they differ with respect to the immediate object of each. The first of these is immediately conversant about, and designed for the preservation of things of a temporal or secular quality; that is to say, the persons and lives of men, and all the external goods and privileges belonging to them, as animal, rational, and even religious beings, in this present life and state. The second *viz.* spiritual or religious society, is conversant about things of a different nature, the things of God, his government and kingdom of grace and glory; things eternal, divine, and spiritual, which concern the spiritual and eternal good, peace and happiness of men's souls. Again,

Religious or spiritual society, may be also considered in a double view; either,

1. As it is the state and privilege of the visible church of Christ in general, with relation to all the common immunities, rights and blessings belonging to her, and also to the common work and duty incumbent upon her, and every one of her members, openly to acknowledge and worship God their Saviour in all the public ordinances of his appointment, in a conjunct social way. Thus they are to "strive together for the faith of the gospel." Or else,
2. As it is the duty and privilege of such particular members of the visible church of Christ, as from the providential vicinity of residences have *access* to accompany together, and to form themselves in particular societies of a private nature, not for the celebration of the public ordinances of Christ, but for the practice of private personal duties, in an united social way. These kinds of societies are commonly known by the name of *social* or *fellowship* meetings.

"The visible church of Christ, which is also catholic or universal, not being now, under the gospel, confined to one nation, as before under the law, consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion of Jesus Christ, *and support their profession with a suitable practice*, together with their children:"¹ Or as the apostle expresses it. 1 Cor. 1:2. *All that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*²

That the state of this catholic visible church of Christ, and the several members of it as a state of spiritual society and fellowship into which they are called by the gospel, is sufficiently evident from the figures and emblems by which she is described in scripture. There the church of Christ is called a kingdom, Matt. 3:2, 5, 19—a city, Cant. 3:2. Heb. 12:22—an house, 1 Tim. 3:15. Heb. 3:6—a

¹ Westminster Confession, chap. xxv.2.

² This text and article of our Confession has been very perversely applied by modern Libertines, as if it contained a direction and injunction to join in church fellowship and sealing ordinances with all that pretend to call on the name of Christ, whether of the Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Independent, or other Sectarian associations. But by the *name of Christ* we are here to certainly understand the true doctrine of his divine person and offices, as prophet, priest and king of his church. His laws, ordinances, government, and every thing wherein and whereby he is made known to us—And by *calling on His name*, is meant the faith, worship, subjection and obedience, which, on the footing of his divine person and office, is due to him as the only Mediator between God and man.

family, Eph. 3:15. And with reference to the great Shepherd, a flock, Luke. 12:32—Pet. 5:2. All these allusions declare that the state of Christ's church is a state of society or social communion.

The bonds and cement of this religious society are those enumerated by the apostle Paul, Eph. 4:5, 6. "One body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all." And these engaging unities are not only the bonds and motives, but the very foundation, causes, and source of this holy fellowship and communion, in which all the members of Christ's visible church are joined.

It is of the second of these kinds of religious society last mentioned, that we propose particularly to treat, and to offer some directions for the successful management of it. That is to say, such private associations or societies of Christian friends and brethren in the cause and truth of Christ, as have voluntarily agreed to meet together at certain stated times and places, for the exercises of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, spiritual conference, and all the duties of Christian love and friendship, for the mutual benefiting, comforting and encouraging one another, in a steady attendance upon all the ditties and ordinances of godliness, and adherence to the cause of Christ, his truth, and true religion in the world. This may be considered as a description of the specific nature and distinct properties of such societies. They are not public meetings, to which all who choose may have access, but private. They are meetings of select Christian friends and brethren in the cause and testimony of Jesus, agreeing on this as the foundation of their society, and not promiscuous meetings of various jarring professors of the Christian name; for, *how can two walk together except they be agreed?* They are not disputing societies, as some are called, but praying societies and for mutual communication and conference on divine subjects. They differ from the occasional meetings of Christians, being fixed at certain stated times and places, and so not optional, or left to every one's convenience, &c. But we shall not insist further now on these things, as they will fall in and be touched more fully afterwards in our discussion of the following particulars, which will be necessary to be handled with relation to fellowship meetings. And they are these:

- I. To ascertain the divine institution of such societies from scripture.
- II. To point out the distinct particular design and end of them.
- III. To lay down some general and particular rules with respect to the formation of such societies. The necessary character of the constituent members. The terms of admission and union: And the different special religious duties they are called to be engaged in when in society. And finally,
- IV. To offer some directions how the members of such societies may walk dutifully and comfortably in this way of Christian fellowship. And all these particularly accommodated to the circumstances of the societies of Christian people under our presbyterial inspection.

These several articles belonging to the subject under consideration shall be explained in the following sections.

SECTION I.

Of The Divine Scriptural Institution Of Social Or Fellowship Meetings.

THAT the divine institution of this kind of society in the first place be ascertained, is necessary, in regard that many not only question but deny the warrantableness of such societies; others falsely reckon them only necessary in evil and troublous times of the church, but not at all times. And others who have no open objections against this exercise, yet are as careless and practically indifferent about it, as if it were not a divine institution, but an invention of human prudence only, and therefore their engagement in it left to their own option and conveniency.

That the above designed social meetings of the Lord's people are of divine warrant and that therefore it is the duty of all Christians, members of the visible church of Christ, who would approve themselves faithful, either to him their Head and Lord, or to themselves, and their brethren, members of the same body, to maintain, at all times, such religious fellowship as the Lord gives them access in his providence, will appear sufficiently evident from many considerations; such as,

1. The mutual and intimate spiritual relations which Christians stand in one to another, as these are represented in scripture, particularly in the New Testament. There they are spoken of under the characters and relations of *soldiers*—1 Tim. 4:3; *fellow-soldiers*, having the same captain, warfare and. enemies—Phil. 2:25. As *fellow-citizens*, Eph. 2:19. As *fellow-servants*, all employed in the work of the same Master and Lord,—Rev. 6:11. As *brethren*, children of the same Father and family, even the *household of faith*—Eph. 3:15; Gal. 2:10. As *members of the same body*, and not only so, but every one *members one of another*—Rom. 12:5. Now, this being the case, it plainly discovers what inviolable obligations Christians are under to maintain the most intimate friendship and correspondence with each other; to associate together as fellow-servants and brethren, in order to consult, advise, and be mutually helpful to one another, in doing the work, and supporting the honour and interests of their common Father and Lord.

And moreover, as there is nothing more common, natural, or necessary, than that such as are of the same country, manners, and language, when among strangers, in a foreign land, join in society together, and maintain the most friendly intercourse and friendship with one another; so it ought to be, and so it will be, with all the saints, who are not only all of them, fellow citizens and countrymen in a strange or foreign land, all of them being *strangers*, and *pilgrims on earth*—Heb. 11:13; but also standing in the most intimate and dear relations among themselves, as children of the same family, even of *the household of God*—Eph. 2:16.

2. The necessity of this will also appear from the consideration of the many general and comprehensive duties incumbent upon Christians toward one another, *e.g.* They are required to *love one another*—John 15:7, 11; Rom. 13:8; 1 John 3:11; and to be *kindly, affectionate one towards another*—Rom, 12:10; to *consider and provoke one another unto love and good works*, and to *exhort* one another—Heb. 10:24, 25. They are commanded to *comfort*, to *edify*, to *teach* and *admonish* one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs—1 Thess. 4:11, and 5:11; Col. 3:16; and to *receive* one another—Rom. 5:7. But how can these relative and social duties be performed without social meetings and fellowship? How can they *love, consider, exhort, admonish, or edify* one another? How can they *comfort themselves together*—1 Tim. 5:11, and at the same time live strangers to society one with another? Further, they are recommended to be of

one mind and mouth—Rom. 15:5, 6; 1 Cor. 1:10, and must they not then confer together, and communicate their minds one to another! They are called to be *subject one to another*—Eph. 6:21; *i.e.*, every one showing all readiness both to give and to accept of instruction, counsel, or reproof from each other. They are expressly required to *confess their faults one to another*; and *pray one for another*—James 5:17, to *strive together* in their prayers for the ministers of Christ, and for the faith of the gospel, *i.e.*, in behalf of the kingdom, cause, and interests of Christ in the world—Phil. 1:17. Now can these duties possibly be done, without a regular assembling and conversing in a social way? By no means. So that to deny the duty and necessity of such social meetings and intercourse were to forbid all these relative social duties which God has commanded.

3. The divine institution of this exercise may be shown from the express testimonies of God's approbation and acceptance of such services as particularly pleasing to him. A first instance of this kind we shall adduce, shall be that remarkable text of scripture—Mal. 3:16, 17. where we have the express example of the fearers, *i.e.*, the worshippers of JEHOVAH assembling together in the very way we are speaking of, at a time of great prevailing impiety and corruption, although otherwise an externally peaceable time in the church. And this, as it is accompanied with an explicit declaration of God's special approbation. is equivalent to a divine command enjoining it: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." The adverb of time *then*, with which the text begins is particularly to be observed, because it has a special reference to the characters given in the context, of that age or time when the fearers of JEHOVAH were thus employed in religious meeting and converse, &c. *Then*, when the saddest corruption abounded both among priests and people: *Then*, when the covenant of Levi was corrupted, and many were made to stumble at the law: *Then*, when Judah dealt treacherously with God, slighted his ordinances and offered the blind and lame for a sacrifice: *Then*, when Atheism and blasphemy abounded—the *proud called happy*—they that wrought wickedness exalted—religion openly reproached and condemned, and judgments awful and alarming threatened and impending: *Then* it was that they that feared and worshipped JEHOVAH spoke often one to another; met, conferred and prayed together, in order to strengthen one another in supporting the truth, honour, and service of God; for arming themselves against the dreadful contagion of sin and apostacy, and securing themselves from the wrath and judgment threatened against the whole land, by flying into the chambers of safety. And now the like being evidently the sad character of the present times, points out how much this exercise is our present duty.

A like testimony of the divine presence accompanying, and divine acceptance of such services we have—Matt. 18:19, 20, "Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in Heaven. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." In this one text we have both a clear proof of the divine institution of such religious private meetings, from an open testimony of Christ's approbation of them, and presence with them, and also a great and very engaging motive of attention to this duty on the same account. For although the *meeting or gathering together in his name*, does by no means exclude the meeting of church officers, the servant's of Christ, in a judicial capacity, and the more public assemblies of his people for divine worship, yet it seems more particularly to point to religious private meetings or societies for prayer, &c., and such are these we now speak of.

4. The divine warrant of this kind of society may be evinced from the constant practice and example of the people of God both under the Old Testament dispensation and the New. Thus God's faithful people during their captive state in Babylon—Psal. 137, resorted together in companies

and sitting down by the rivers of Babylon; *they wept and remembered Zion*. And thus Ezra and his companions who returned with him, assembled together for fasting and prayer to seek of God a right way, and who accordingly was entreated of them—Ezra 8:21. In like manner, Daniel and his fellows joined together in fervent supplications to *ask mercies of the God of heaven, &c.* Again,

The New Testament affords us a noble cloud of witnesses in recommendation of this exercise. Here we have the example of our Lord the King of saints, in the above social communion he maintained with his disciples as recorded by all the evangelists. And as he had taught them this duty by his example and practice, all the time of his abode with them in the flesh; so we find them attentively imitating it afterwards—Luke 24:43. During the interval between Christ's resurrection and public ascension and until the disciples were *endued with power from on high*, and thereby furnished for public service, it was their stated practice to meet in a private social way for prayer, praise, spiritual conference, &c. on *the first day of the week*—John 20:26. And accordingly, when occupied in this exercise, on the Lord's day, they were, we find, repeatedly favoured with the most signal manifestations of their arisen Lord and Saviour. This clearly indicates to us that such social Christian meetings are a very proper and suitable way of spending the Sabbath, when the disciples of Christ are providentially deprived of access to the more public ordinances of gospel worship; a way of exercise of divine appointment, and therefore in which they may expect Christ's presence and blessing. So Acts 1:13, 14, "And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where they were assembled. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplications, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." And was it not when they were thus engaged in this duty, that the Spirit was poured out upon them from on high, in the most abundant measure—Acts 2.

This religious fellowship was accordingly maintained, we are told, and steadfastly continued in, by all the primitive Christians all along; see Acts 2:42, and chap 4:23, it is said of the apostles Peter and John that *being dismissed* from the council, *they went to their own company, and rehearsed all that the chief priests had said unto them*. As also, we find such a religious meeting in the *house of Mary the mother of John—gathered together, praying*—Acts 12:12—with many other instances of a similar kind that might be mentioned—see Acts 10:27, and 15:19, where we read of a number of persons that used to meet together for prayer by a river near the city of Phillippi. Nay, so common were such Christian meetings in those times, that the apostle to the Gentiles, when he writes, desires the joint prayers of such societies on his own behalf, and that of his ministry—Phil 1:27—"I beseech you, brethren, that ye strive together in your prayers to God for me"—Rom. 15:30. Yes, of such importance did they reckon this kind of Christian society and fellowship, that they made it a term of communion—an article of their creed, as we see in that which is called *the Apostles'*, insomuch that those were not looked upon as Christians that were not careful to maintain this fellowship and communion of saints. Moreover, this is known to be a first and genuine fruit of true conversion. Grace, as we see in the instance of Saul, afterwards called Paul, made him immediately join himself to the company and society of the disciples, for no sooner was he converted than it is said of him—Acts 9:16: "Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus."

Thus the divine institution of this duty and exercise stands clear from the above scripture testimonies; the examples of the saints recorded therein; the intimate spiritual relations in which they mutually stand to one another, and the duties they owe one to another; nay, the very dictates of common sense and reason, and the common practice of mankind with respect to things of lower concern, bear witness to the necessity and expediency of such Christian associations.

The moral law, which is the law of nature and creation, obliges man to society. It obliges men to advise and converse with one another, and thereby to be mutually helpful to each other, even in civil or worldly affairs. And if we are obliged to be social and assistant to each other in these respects, certainly Christians are obliged by the same law, as a law of grace, love and liberty in the hand of Christ, to converse with one another about divine things, in order to being helpful to each other therein, and explicitly to discover their united concurrence in and concern for the faith, worship, and all the things which relate to God's kingdom and glory. Has it not even been reckoned a wise method, and found necessary and useful for people of the same civil profession, engaged in the same way of worldly trade or business, to form themselves into societies for consulting and advising together what may be for their joint and mutual benefit and advantage and shall not Christians who are partakers of the same heavenly calling, trade and business, joined together by such intimate relations, and whose interests, temptations and difficulties are so much the same, join thus together in social meetings, in order to instruct, advise, comfort and encourage one another, as to these things that are of infinite moment and importance? But this now leads to the next thing that comes to be considered.

SECTION II.

The Special Ends and Designs of Social Meetings.

BECAUSE some may make it a question of what the valuable purposes are which social fellowship among Christians does serve and answer, we shall therefore touch a little in this section at some of these. A right impression and proper view of these, is of great importance both as an engaging incentive to a Christian and conscientious attendance to the exercise, and for the profitable management of the duty. The special ends and purposes of this kind of society, and the advantages which arise from a dutiful attendance to it, are many and great, we can only give a very general account of them.

This social fellowship of the saints on earth, is intended for, and contributes in a singular manner to the increase of the knowledge of God and Christ, as he reveals himself in his word, ordinance and works of creation, providence and redemption. In all these God discovers and manifests his glory; and the people of God having eyes given them to see, and ears to hear, do in their attendance on the dispensation of his public ordinance of word and sacraments, or in the private reading of the Word, see his glory as the God of grace and salvation, and obtain some comforting and enlightening knowledge of him. The like may be said of his works, all which are *wonderful, and sought out of all them that leave pleasure in them*—Psal. 111:2. It is the Christian's work and duty to *observe the work of the Lord*, whether respecting himself particularly or in general, and to *consider the operation of his hands*. But while attending to these instances of personal, internal duty, in an observant waiting upon God in his ordinance and doings, he has not access to the performance of those duties and exercises that are the special design of this intimate social communion of saints. Christians while attending public gospel ordinances, have not access to instruct, admonish, counsel and comfort one another; and by a communication of their knowledge, observations and experiences, mutually to establish and *build up themselves in their most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost*—Jude ver. 20—as is their business in social fellowship meetings; so that here we may see the difference of the ends of the other ordinances and works of God, and this particular institution. These are all designed for conveying the knowledge of God, and giving experience of his goodness; Isa. 2:5—”And many people shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways.” This for the diffusing and communication of such a knowledge of God, and taste of his goodness unto others, as has been found in ordinances and providence. In the public sanctuary ordinances, believers by faith *see the power and glory of God*—Psal. 63:2. But in these little sanctuaries, in these temples of God, every one *speaks of his glory*—Psal. 29:9—*talks of his power and righteousness*, and all his *wondrous works*—Psal. 71. and 119:97. Thus these social meetings of Christians contribute, as they are intended, for the propagation and increase of an experimental knowledge of God and taste of his goodness among his people, in the holy exercises of praise, prayer and spiritual conference. And this is just what the apostle enjoins and recommends. Col. 2:16—”Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord.” Again,

Another valuable purpose for which the religious social meetings of God's people serve, and for which they are intended, is a mutual and reciprocal helpfulness and encouragement in the ways of God and godliness. Society among mankind in general is designed for the comfort and help of

individuals against the common wants, weaknesses and difficulties they are exposed to. The royal preacher Solomon gives us an excellent encomium on utility of even common natural society and friendship, for these purposes. Eccl. 4:9; 10, 11, 12—"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up. And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not easily broken." These various advantages of the social life, as they hold true in things natural and civil, so in things spiritual and religious. So manifold and various are the weaknesses and dangers of the Christian; his temptations inward and outward, and enemies, such as Satan, persecutors, false teachers. &c. that it is absolutely needful for the children of Zion to travel in companies, and, like soldiers that go on a warlike expedition, to keep close together in Christian communion. And thus they also become helpful and encouraging to each other in the time of need and discouragement, by their counsels and comforts, and mutual aids. And by their mutual instructions, advices, reproofs and prayers, they sharpen each other's countenances, quicken and comfort each other's souls. In this way they find the truth of the divine sentence.—Prov. 27:17—"As iron sharpeneth iron so doth a man's countenance his friend." They establish one another in divine truth, and strengthen each other's hands and hearts. Yes, often hath this Christian fellowship been found a happy means of reviving the drooping Christian, ready to sink under discouragement; and of quickening and restoring to vigour that grace which was ready to die in them, when grown backward and indifferent to spiritual exercises. *But woe to him that is alone; for when he falleth, he hath not another to help him up: No Christian friend to visit, comfort, relieve or counsel him under his necessities; or recover him from error, or immoralities, when fallen into them.* But when saints stand fast in one spirit, and in an united way strive together for the faith of the gospel, they then stand their ground, withstand the enemy, maintain the truth, and establish each other therein. This leads us to observe farther on this article, that there is not any social Christian exercise a better or more effectual means for preventing, opposing or overcoming errors, or delusions of any kind than this. Christians thus joined together, are far better able to withstand and vanquish the enemy, appearing in this form, being fortified by their united forces, mutual instructions, cautions and counsels than singly by themselves, the church standing thus united, is said to be *terrible as an army with banners*—Cant. 6:4. But stragglers, such as go alone, are often *snares and taken*. They fall an easy prey to seduction and error who neglect or despise the benefit of the advice, counsel and prayers of their Christian friends and brethren. Again,

These Christian meetings are specially designed for the performance of all the social duties and relative offices of Christian friendship, brotherly love, and sympathy among the members of the church of Christ. Such are all those duties formerly mentioned, and which are required and recommended in the following texts of Scripture. Heb. 10:24, 25—"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love, and to good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another." 1 Thess. 5:14—"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them which are unruly, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak." Heb. 3:13—"Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any be burdened through the deceitfulness of sin." Rom. 12:10—"Be kindly affectioned one to another; with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another." Col. 3:16—"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs." Gal. 5:13—"By love serve one another." Gal. 6:2—"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Eph. 5:21—"Submit yourselves one to another." 1 Pet. 5:5—"Yea. all of you be subject one to another," James 5:16—"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another." These two last quoted texts signify, that these Christian societies are, in a loving and friendly way, to oversee and observe the conduct and behavior of their fellow-members, both as men and Christians; and every one is to watch over another, and be *his brother's keeper*. This is what the apostle Jude enjoins, recommends with much earnestness; ver. 21—"Keep ye one another (*marg.*) in the love of God." And who that know their own weakness and infirmity, and consider their dangerous situation in this present evil world,

and the liability to be led astray with the errors of it, will think that it is good for them to be alone? Nay, every such person will esteem it a peculiar privilege to be connected in Christian society with such prudent and faithful companions and brethren, as will correct his errors, reprove his faults, and by wise counsel point out the line of duty, and way of comfort to him. Psal. 112:5—"Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil."

We shall only mention another text of Scripture here, where a very peculiar design of social Christian fellowship is pointed out. The text is that of 1 Pet. 4:10—"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Some may think the *gift* here spoken of is to be understood of gifts and talents for public office and work in the church; but it does not at all appear, that these are the gifts only, or even principally intended in the text. It is true, all these are the gifts of an exalted Saviour, and are to be improved and employed faithfully by such as receive them, for his honour and glory; nevertheless, it is certain that to all the members of the mystical body of Christ—to every one (of them) is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ—Eph. 4:7. "To one is given by the spirit, the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same spirit; to another faith by the same spirit; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits"—1 Cor. 12:8, 9. One Christian is endued with quickness of apprehension, or understanding in the fear of the Lord, a retentive memory, and prompt expression, which the apostle calls the *gift of utterance*; another with a solid and sound judgment, wisdom and prudence. One Christian is strong in gifts and grace, another weak. There are also various tempers among Christians—one is zealous and forward, another circumspect and cautious—one liable to discouragement and dejection, another is cheerful, &c. Now the divine wisdom is specially manifested in this distribution; for why hath God dispensed such a diversity of gifts, but for mutual benefit and usefulness; so that those who are intelligent and judicious, prudent and cautious, may impart of their knowledge, wisdom, and caution to such as are, it may be, lively, active and zealous, but not to intelligent, or properly wise and cautious; and on the contrary, those who are warm and zealous, may thus communicate something of their vivacity and warmth to such as are knowing, but perhaps slow and inactive. Thus the strong may bear with and help the infirmities of the weak, each member being dependent on another; and hence it comes to pass, that as the apostle says. 1 Cor. 12:21—"The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the head to the feet. I have no need of you." By this society, the church of Christ becomes like a *city compactly built together*; as if of Jerusalem—Psal. 122.—the several buildings of which depend upon and support one another, and therefore has greatly the advantage against winds and storms of such houses as stand single in the open fields.

There are some of the great and valuable ends which Christian social meetings are intended to serve. The advancement and increase of the practical knowledge of God—instruction of the ignorant—supporting the weak—comforting the feeble minded—preventing and withstanding error and seduction—and the discharge of all the other duties of Christian brotherly love and good works—and that all the members may have fellowship one with another in the divine virtues, gifts and graces, whether common or saving, with which they are blessed. And hence this kind of religious society may be considered as indeed the strictest, closest and most intimate of any on earth. Believers in their attendance upon the dispensation of word and sacrament, have communion with Christ and one another in the common relations, blessings, and privileges which belong to them all. But they have not (neither can they have) communion one with another in their several personal gifts and graces, as here.

SECTION III.

*Some General Rules with Respect to the Formation of Such Societies—
The Necessary Character of the Constituent Members—
The Terms of Admission and Union—
And the Social Religious Duties They Are Called To Be Engaged In,
In Society.*

FROM what has been said in the preceding sections we hope, Christian friends and brethren, you will be convinced of the duty, and of the special design and usefulness of social meetings. We therefore now proceed to lay down some general rules or directions relative to them, on the several articles mentioned in the contents of this section. We shall suppose, in what we say, all you whom we address, and for whose use the Directory is designed, to be members of such private Christian societies, or called and obliged to be such from your public profession and principles. This, as we have already hinted, is the form and manner in which you, and your predecessors, as a Christian people adhering to the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the original reformation on which the church of Scotland have long stood. Many, from Christian experience, have all along hitherto borne their testimony to the great utility and comfortable fruits of these spiritual exercises. And certainly in the day of temptation and continued backsliding both in principle and practice; in this day of spiritual deadness and deep security, into which all denominations of professors are fallen; in this *day of perplexity, and treading down—in this day of rebuke and of blasphemy*—Isa. 22:5, and 37:3, you are loudly called to join your united force in *lifting up your prayers for the remnant that is left, and for strengthening the things that remain, and are ready to die*—Rev. 3:2. And in relation to this duty and exercise we therefore recommend.

1. Always remember and bear in mind that you are *under the law of Christ*, and obliged by the authority of his command to *love one another*, and to *receive one another* in this way of Christian fellowship and communion of saints, for your mutual profits and spiritual advantage, and *to the glory of God*. This will be an open testimony of your being truly the disciples of Christ. John 13:34, 35—”A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”
2. The members of such societies behave voluntarily and explicitly to agree and consent to meet together, weekly, at such a certain stated time and place as shall be found most convenient for the whole, for the performance of such private religious duties and exercises as are competent for them in a social way. And this being the case, none of the members of such societies have any right to absent themselves at their pleasure, or on account of a slight inconvenience from worldly business, or otherwise. This would be a following after lying vanities, at the expense of *forsaking your own mercies*. Or, if any of the members shall absent themselves frequently, or for two days of meeting successively, they behave to satisfy the society as to the reasons of their absence, upon their return. And if they shall continue to absent themselves, then one or two members of the meeting should be appointed to go and enquire after them.
3. The time, in the general, of such social meetings ought not only to be on such Lord’s days as the members, or most of them, have not access to the public ordinances, in agreeableness to the will of God, and their duty; but also, on certain stated times on week days. On Sabbath days it is decent that such societies convene about the ordinary time that public worship begins, and that

they spend that time in these private social exercises, which they have not access to spend in public worship, and which is the next most agreeable way of using sacred time. But the chief part of the constitutional agreement of such societies, as to this article is, that they shall meet, and spend a certain proportion of time in social Christian exercises on a week day; either every week, if the members live convenient for meeting, or every fortnight, if they live distant and remote from each other.

4. The special Christian duties and exercises which the members of social meetings are to be jointly engaged in, in society, are these—singing God’s praise, reading his word, prayer, and Christian conference on divine and spiritual subjects; such as God, Christ, the truths, grace, will, and good-will of God revealed in the word; and the works of God, both of providence and grace, &c., &c. They may also, when God in his holy providence calls them, agree to meet for solemn prayer, joined with fasting and humiliation, either on account of any particular instance of sin, dishonouring to God, and wounding to religion, fallen into by any of their members—1 Cor. 5:2—or of any singularly afflicting dispensation under which any of them, or their families, may be laid, and in which case they desire the sympathy and prayers of their brethren, for mercy and help from God. Or else, in the case of awfully abounding sin in general, and threatened impending, or inflicted public calamities. In such cases the Lord expects that the godly should show themselves concerned, “by standing in the gap, to make up the hedge, standing up before him for the land,” that his anger may be turned away—Ezek. 21:30. Also, another particular duty whereby the Sabbath is to be sanctified, by social meetings convened on that day from their not having access to attend public ordinance, is collection for the poor—1 Cor. 16:2. This they ought to attend to, according as the Lord hath prospered them, before they dismiss.
5. Social or fellowship meetings, as to their constituent parts, or members, are, or may be, composed of both sexes, men and women. We have formerly mentioned sundry scripture instances of such meeting of the saints made up of both sexes—Acts 1:14, and 12:5, 12, 17, and 16:13. In this, as well as in other cases, *the woman is not without the man*, as the apostle speaks, *nor the man without the woman in the Lord. In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female.* They are all one in him—Col. 3:28. The weaker sex particularly need instruction, direction, counsel, comfort, and encouragement in the ways of the Lord. And some of them have also been found particularly serviceable in a social way, as succouring even the strongest believers of the other sex—Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:1, 9, 3. We therefore cannot approve of the way which some take, of making a separation of the men from the women in societies. It evidently appears to be contrary to God’s ordinance. The woman is, and has always been, safest in society with the man, both from the dangerous prevalence of Satan’s temptations, the power of error, and influence of seducing spirits, who have frequently made their most successful attacks on the weaker sex separated from the other—and *led captive silly women.* 2 Tim. 3:6.

But although we allow that female members of social meetings may be called to, and employed in all the duties competent to such Christian assemblies, yet we think a decent and becoming distinction between these two sorts of members ought always to be maintained in such societies. As to these duties in which the person employed is the mouth of the whole society Godward, the female members ought not to be placed on a par, or equal footing with the other, so as to have these duties devolved upon them in the course of rotation equally with the men. Though we do not think it agreeable that the women should be locally separated from the other sex, yet there should be some distinction. These names should be entered in a roll distinct from that wherein the others are. And when there are plenty of members in the other sex, it would be proper for every one of these to be more frequently employed in their duties than those of the female. And no woman ought to be called to any of these duties at any time in society, but in consequence of a motion from some of the other members, agreed to by the rest. Nor should any woman, where

there are members of the other *sex*, be employed either to begin or conclude the meeting. And no woman ought, at any time, to be urged or importuned contrary to her free consent and choice. Matters ought to be conducted in the same way as to this particular, in social meetings, as in domestic society. In this, these duties belong first and primarily to the man, and only in a secondary way to the woman; and then only at the man's desire, devolvement and call. This order observed, we are of opinion, will properly support that distinction which ought to be maintained between the man and the woman *in the Lord*.

6. As the foundation of a lasting union, and comfortable fellowship in these social meetings, all the members ought to consent and agree in the faith and professions of the truths, cause and testimony of Jesus; for, *can two walk together, except they be agreed?* Amos 3:5. No; they cannot. Rom. 15:5, 6—"With one mind and one mouth glory God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 1:10—"Now I beseech you, brethren, that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment." 2 Cor. 13:11—"Be perfect, be of one mind—and the God of love and peace shall be with you." This was the glory of the first Christian church, that they were all of *one heart and mind*—Acts 4:32, and this Christ requires his people to pursue and study as a first object, without which they cannot perform the social Christian duties they owe to one another. See 1 Pet. 2:3—"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous." Let it therefore, Christian friends, be a fixed point and rule with you to be thus compactly joined together in the same mind and judgment, as to the whole faith, the worship, discipline and government which Christ has delivered unto his church, and which she has received; otherwise you will not agree in your prayers, praises, or practice. These truths and doctrines. &c. drawn from God's word, on the belief and profession of which you are called to agree, are summed up in our Confession of Faith, Catechisms Larger and Shorter, Directory for worship, and Form of Presbyterial Church Government and Discipline, composed by the reverend assembly of divines at Westminster. The maintenance and preservation of these in their purity, together with the civil reformation, or purgation of the throne (as well as the sanctuary) from idolatry and wickedness, was that which was solemnly sworn unto in our sacred vows, the National Covenant of Scotland, and Solemn League and Covenant of the three lands. This is the Covenanted testimony of the reformed Church of Scotland. which, under the acknowledged moral and perpetually binding obligation of these Covenants, you are to unite in loving, supporting, and maintaining, in faithfulness, even unto the death, following the footsteps of the faith and faithfulness of the Lord's witnessing remnant in these lands, which he has been still pleased mercifully to preserve among us, from the time of the still overthrow of our reformation constitutions, civil and ecclesiastic. To all these behoves to be added, as a summary of the whole of them, an acquaintance with, and unanimous acknowledgment and approbation of The Act, Declaration, and Testimony for the whole of our Covenanted Reformation in Britain and Ireland. And against all the steps of defection therefrom, since the overthrow of that glorious work down to the present day—Published by the Reformed Presbytery. Here the Covenanted reformation cause is stated and vindicated. Every communicant, therefore, and member of societies, ought not only to provide himself with one of these, but diligently to peruse it, esteeming it a singular advantage that he can from this declaration come distinctly to know and judge the principles of those with whom he joins, and consequently may act from knowledge and faith in uniting with them. An acknowledgment and approbation of this, you know, was judicially appointed to be summarily the terms of ministerial and Christian communion with the presbytery under whose inspection you are. But farther,
7. In forming social meetings or admitting new members to those already erected, it is not only necessary that the constituent members, or those admitted give satisfaction as to their orthodoxy and soundness in the faith, and profession of it in the manner as above: but the temper, spirit, and moral character of those admitted, or desiring to be so, ought to be attended unto and enquired

after. Religious societies ought to be cautious and wary whom they take into their communion in this way. Every one is not fit for it. The very natural temper of some Christians, that perhaps cannot be excluded from communion otherwise, unfits for this kind of society. The churlish and contentious proud, Diotrephes-like tempers, loving to have the lead and preeminence, in place of yielding that dutiful subjection which is required of Christians one towards another, will be found troublesome and dangerous members. There are also those whom the apostle calls *evil surmises*—1 Tim. 6:4—who being taken into social meetings, never fail to give them trouble. These are persons of weak, jealous or suspicious minds, always ready to imagine and construe the worst of the words and actions of their brethren. Their fellow-members cannot perhaps pitch on a portion of a psalm to be sung, or read a place of Scripture, but they will conclude it is intended against them. The moral character and general Christian deportment of those who apply for admission into social meetings ought also to be regarded. It is necessary they should be known, either to a competent number of the members of the society to be persons of an outwardly blameless moral conversation or attested by other unexceptionable persons. They behave to be such as attend to the duties of personal and family religion, are careful and tender as to Sabbath-sanctification, waiting on God therein in all his ordinances public or private they have access to, in the way of truth and duty. In time they ought to be such, as discover that they are acted, not merely from a principle of concern for their own edification and salvation, but also from that of zeal for God's honour and declarative glory in the world. And such ought first to be proved, by being only admitted as auditors, or to accompany with the society for some time, before they are called in a formal and explicit way, to declare their union and coalescence with them, and to take part with them actually in their common social duties and religious concerns. And for more particular satisfaction, with a view to this, the following short queries may be proposed by the Preses of the society for the time being, unto such as having thus attended upon the meeting or a time, desire to be received into the number of their full members.

Query 1. Were you prior to this, in actual communion with any church?

Query 2. What moved you to resolve upon separating from those with whom you were formerly in communion? Was it for any private or personal quarrel with the minister, church-courts, or officers?

Query 3. What were the positive and real grounds and motives of your resolution to separate?

Query 4. What are the determining reasons that induce you to desire to join in communion with the Reformed Presbytery, and the Societies of Christian people under their inspection? Is it merely from convenience, because you have easiest outward access to them? Or, is it because, upon serious enquiry, you find them to be the nearest of all to the truth and way of God?

Query 5. Are you acquainted with the different principles and footing upon which the various parties of professing Christians, now on the field, do stand? And have you considered and weighed these in the balance of the sanctuary, desiring to know, choose and cleave to the perfect way of God's commandments?

Query 6. Have you also some degree of acquaintance with the history of the reformation in Britain and Ireland, and particularly in Scotland; the church's attainments therein, through the good hand of her God upon her; and the contendings and sufferings of the faithful witnesses of Christ for our covenants, and covenanted reformation, both under Popery and Prelacy? Have you read Knox's history, and those that follow, of the first and second periods of our reformation; and sufferings of the church of Scotland, Naphtali, the Hind Let Loose, and Cloud of Witnesses, &c.

Query 7. Have you diligently read our Confession of Faith, Catechisms Larger and Shorter, Directory for Worship, and Form of Presbyterial Church-Government drawn up by the Westminster assembly of divines? And do you approve of the doctrine, worship and government contained and set forth therein, as being, so far as you can find, agreeable to the word of God in the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?

Query 8. Do you own the morality of the duty of covenanting personally and nationally, under the New Testament? And do you acknowledge the perpetual moral obligation of our solemn National Covenants on all ranks of men in these lands, to the latest posterity, viz: the National Covenant of Scotland, and the Solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms, adjuring both popery and prelacy?

Query 9. Do you believe and acknowledge that the work of reformation both in church and state in these lands; the extirpation of both popery and prelacy, and the uniformity in religion, *i.e.*, in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, sworn unto in these covenants, was, and is, the work of God and cause of Christ?

Query 10. Are you sensible of the sinfulness of the present constitution of the civil government and magistracy in these lands, as to the fundamental conditions and terms of government? Do you not perceive it to be built not only on the ruin and overthrow of the work of God, and cause of Christ, sworn to in our national and baptismal covenants; but also as founded on, and devoted as a sacrifice for the perpetual maintenance of antichristian hierarchy, and idolatrous worship of the *heretical*³ church of England, solemnly abjured in these covenants, as an essential condition of holding the civil power? Are you not therefore convinced that we cannot voluntarily and actively, support it, nor have communion with it, without being involved in the guilt of *perjury*, and of *communion with idolators*, in *eating things sacrificed to idols*, and *committing* (spiritual) *fornication*, which our Lord Christ declares are sins singularly detestable to him?—Rev. 2:14, 20.

Query 11. Are you sensible of the sinfulness of the spiritual supremacy which essentially belongs to the British crown and present constitution: that it is a most injurious usurpation of the royal power and prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole king and head of the church? And are you convinced of the groundlessness and iniquity of the distinction which some pretend to make between the civil and spiritual supremacy in the united constitution, since there is no such thing at present as a king in Britain, in civil things only, or clothed with the civil supremacy without, the other?

Query 12. Are you not also sensible of the evil and sinfulness of the complex religious settlement in Britain and Ireland, at and since the revolution, as containing the establishment of abjured prelacy in England and Ireland, and a sort of Presbytery in Scotland? Do you not see it to be a creature of human policy, framed by the *wisdom of the princes of this world which cometh to naught*? Founded on the lusts and inclinations of men, not on the will of God; and reared on the ruins of our covenanted reformation?

Query 13. Are you not convinced that it is your duty, and resolved in the way of bearing testimony for Christ. and his covenanted cause and work of reformation in these lands, in opposition both to popery and prelacy, to avoid every real acknowledgment, in word and

³ The church of England is here called *heretical*, not because she holds or maintains in her doctrinal articles or holiness, damnable errors or heresies; but because the church is a great faction, sect, or schism (in the New Testament called *Heresies*, or heresy—Acts 26:5; 1 Cor. 11:19, *et abili*,) gathered and united under such ecclesiastic officers and governors, and practicing such superstitious modes of worship, as have, none of them, any institution in God's word, but are all of them of human invention. In respect of all these, she stands as a *schismatical or heretical* church, separated from and in opposition to Christ's true church, and the worship, officers, and government of his appointment.

deed, of the lawfulness of the constitution and authority of the present civil rulers, supreme or subordinate, as the minister or servant of God for the good of mankind, or of religion, by praying, or fighting for their support, swearing oaths of allegiance to them, or making oath before them in their courts, as now fenced and constituted, or by any other way that contains such an acknowledgment? And do you not judge it a grievous instance of treachery in God's cause and covenant, to require an acknowledgment of the present government and rulers for conscience sake, as the ordinance and servants of God. as an indispensable term of Christian communion? Is not this to *teach and seduce the servants of Christ to commit fornication, and to eat things offered in sacrifice to idols*, Rev. 2:20.⁴

Query 14. Do you not also hold it unlawful to own or countenance the ministers of any of the religious establishments in these nations, not only on account of their personal corruption, error, profaneness or unfaithfulness; but because both church and state are joined hand in hand, and reciprocally sworn to support each other in the same malignant cause of opposition to God and his true religion, and in the defence of false religion and idolatry?

Query 15. Have you read and considered the Act, Declaration and Testimony, published by the Reformed Presbytery, for the whole of our covenanted reformation, and against all the steps of our national defection therefrom; in which all the particulars included in the foregoing queries are explained, and the truth of them proven? Have you provided yourself with a copy of said Testimony, to which you may have recourse for information, as occasion requires? And do you acknowledge the principles and testimony contained in said Act, to be agreeable, so far as you are able to judge, to the word of God, our national Covenants (National and Solemn League), Confession of Faith, and the testimonies of the true covenanters, and faithful martyrs of the last age, from 1639 to 1689? And do you design and resolve through grace, to maintain and cleave to the said principles and testimony, as the truth and cause of Christ?

Query 16. Have you also read and considered the several Rules, both general and particular, laid down in this Directory? And do you in compliance with and submission to these, willingly join as a member of this fellowship meeting, under the inspection of the Reformed Presbytery? Do you promise and design to attend dutifully, to maintain communion with your brethren in this way. and to give all the assistance in your power, by your best counsels, and worldly substance, according to your ability, for the support of the common cause and testimony, the faith and ordinances which God hath appointed in his word. and delivered unto his saints? And, finally, Do you promise fidelity as a member of this society, That you will divulge nothing of the matters internally reasoned and concluded in the society, but by their allowance or consent?

But besides the above Queries, all of which are more of a disciplinary than doctrinal nature, it may be proper that some few substantial articles of the doctrinal kind should also be put in the form of

⁴ It is well known, that those who call themselves Seceders require an acknowledgment for *conscience sake*, of the present government and rules, as *God's ordinance and servants* doing his work, as an indispensable term of Ministerial and Christian communion. And moreover, they have formally and judicially excommunicated, and do constantly in a doctrinal way excommunicate all those who even from conscience towards God refuse this. Now, as it is undeniable, that the present government (and rulers from the highest to the lowest, on the footing of the present British constitution) is a sacrifice given, dedicated and consecrated by oath to the support and defence of the idol of Prelacy (for this is the fundamental condition of their having and holding civil power) the sinfulness therefore of the requisition of such terms of communion, and inculcating such doctrine on the people, cannot be better or more properly defined than in the words of the sacred text above quoted; for it is indeed nothing less than to teach the servants of Christ—to *eat things offered in sacrifice to idols*.

queries, to such as offer to join societies, for their satisfaction as to the soundness of the judgments of those they admit into their communion, and they may be such as these following:

Q. 1. Do you believe the doctrine of our confession of Faith and Catechisms concerning the holy Trinity, *i.e.*, of three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in one and the same common divine nature, essence or Godhead, to be Scripture doctrine?

Q. 2. Do you believe these personal characters and internal divine relations of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the unity of the divine nature or Godhead, to be natural and eternal?

Q. 3. In what respects do you think and judge Christ to be called in Scripture the *Son of God*—the son of *the Father—of the living God*? Is it on the footing of eternal generation, or on other accounts?⁵

Q. 4. Do you believe that God made man at first upright, after his own gracious image, in knowledge righteousness, and true holiness?

Q. 5. Do you believe, according to Scripture, that God graciously condescended to enter into a covenant with our first parents, commonly called the *covenant of works*?

Q. 6. Is man now in the same estate in which he was created; or fallen into a sinful, dead, and condemned state?

Q. 7. Hath God left all mankind to perish in that sinful and miserable estate? And what hath he done for the salvation of lost sinners?

Q. 8. Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

Q. 9. Do you believe God's eternal decree of election?

Q. 10. What is your judgment concerning Christ's death? Do you believe it was a proper expiatory sacrifice? For whom did Christ lay down his life, and give himself a ransom? Did he in any sense *satisfy* for the sins of all mankind?

Q. 11. Do you believe the doctrine of the perseverance of saints unto everlasting life? That none of them shall be lost, or fall into *final* apostacy? And on what grounds and foundations do you think the infallible perseverance of saints or believers is built? *&c.*, *&c.*

On satisfying answers to these and such others of the same kind as may be thought necessary, and to the queries preceding, we think persons may be admitted as members into social meetings. At the same time such meetings ought to beware of excluding or refusing admittance to persons making application to them, merely on account of ignorance as to some of the things above mentioned. or weakness otherwise, provided such persons appear to design honestly, to love the truth, and are willing to learn and be informed. But where such application is made by those who have been

⁵ This is a question of great importance, and concerning which Christians have need to believe aright. The eternal sonship and generation of Christ, is a matter of pure revelation and faith, not of human opinion, investigation, or explication; for, *Who can by searching find out God?* Some, by their opinion and doctrine, make Christ to be the *Son of God*, his *only begotten Son*, his *eternal Son*—either because of his miraculous and extraordinary manner of conception as to his human nature, or on account of his being *set up from everlasting*, in the eternal decree and Covenant, to be Mediator, Redeemer and Head of the elect. And this is the same as to say, that he is *only the Son of God* as man or Mediator. But, according to this doctrine, Christ is not the *Son of the Father*, or first person, as the Scripture calls him, but the son of the *essence* or Godhead. He is the son of himself and of the Holy Ghost, as much as the Son of the Father; and thus he has no other kind of sonship than believers, *viz:* by grace, adoption and new creation or sanctification. Others have maintained that he is the *Son of God*, both by eternal generation, and by office as Mediator or Head of the church and elect. But as the character and relations of *Son is a personal* relation and character, so if he had a twofold sonship, this would infer that there were two persons also in Christ, than which nothing can be more contrary to Scripture, or subversive of salvation through his personal merits.

formerly in communion with the church of Rome, or church of England, it is necessary that they should, before admission to church privileges, or into societies, be called, by a minister of the gospel, publicly to abjure or renounce the whole superstition and idolatry of Popery and Prelacy. We now proceed to another class of Directions.

SECTION IV.

Particular directions for the internal regulation of Social Meetings, erected on the principles aforesaid, in order to a dutiful and comfortable walking together in this way of Christian communion.

1. It would be best and most agreeable that there should be ordinarily one place of meeting fixed upon by consent, as central and equally distant from all the members as possible. Changing from place to place will not be so decent, unless that it may fall to be necessary sometimes, where no central place can be had, or out of sympathy with sick or weakly members, and at their desire. Such place of meeting should also be preferred, if otherwise answerable, where the head of the family and members of it, or most of them, do join in, or attend upon the society. This circumstance, in such divided times as the present, will contribute to make the duty appear with greater beauty, and the performance of it will be attended with far less inconvenience.
2. Each distinct society should meet every Sabbath day, when without reach of public ordinances. And though some members living more adjacent may attend sermons, the rest should keep the meeting, this being the next way of social worship they have access unto. But the more particular design of such Christian associations, is, that even when they have access to public ordinances on Lord's day, they should, for their mutual benefit and establishment, allot and take some time for social duties on week days; and for this purpose, the day of the week and convenient for the members in general, should be chosen; perhaps, for preventing journeying and fatigue immediately before or after the Sabbath, in places where the members live distant from one another, the middle of the week may be best. But this circumstance must be left to option and conveniency. The time of the day which has usually been found most answerable for such social meetings, is the evening from five or six o' clock. In cities, towns, villages, and all places where the members of such societies reside near each other, and convenient for meeting, they ought to resolve to meet once every week, and in places more wide and remote, once a fort night at farthest. Let the hour of meeting be precisely fixed, and punctually observed, every one endeavoring rather to be before than behind.
3. With respect to the work or duties which private Christian societies are to be engaged in, we have already said something in general; but now in particular. Let the member who is called to open or constitute the meeting, begin with a short prayer or thanksgiving, "acknowledging God's mercy and goodness in granting another opportunity for meeting and joining in worship, and beseeching his gracious presence, assistance and *acceptance* in Christ," &c. Next, let him proceed to sing a few verses of a psalm, and after reading a portion of holy scripture, conclude with prayer. It is, however, to be observed that there is no necessity for the number or members who shall succeed him who opens the meeting, to begin with any introductory prayer or thanksgiving, the whole course of social duty, after it is begun, being to be considered as one continued act; and during the intervals of duty, it may be proper that one of the most grave and distinct readers, may read a part of some sound approved author on practical divinity, for the entertainment and edification of the whole, continuing for the space of half an hour or three-quarters, or else confer on some practical question or case. And then let another member be called to proceed to duty.

When the society has continued a competent time in the course of these duties, on Lord's days, (which in the summer season may perhaps be five hours, and in the winter four) let the member last employed in duty conclude the meeting by singing a few lines of a psalm.

4. The above is designed to apply only to the case of social Christian meetings on Lord's days; but, on the occasion of meetings on week nights, as the time is shorter, and chiefly to be occupied in the main duties of prayers, praise and spiritual conference, it may be better to omit reading any portion of scripture, proceeding immediately to prayer after singing. Then, also, there should be one interval of duty, which should be spent in spiritual conference on some divine subject. Such practical question or case should be proposed by the person last occupied in duty, and put round by him. that all the members may speak their minds upon it; or, if such person find nothing occurring that may be answerable, if any thing suitable occurs to any other of the members, they may be desired to propose it.

But for the better regulation of this particular, it might be better that the question designed for the subject of Christian conference at next meeting, be proposed at the present, by the person who concludes the meeting or by any of the rest at his desire. And for the better remembrance of it, it may be taken from any text of holy scripture, or the words of the psalm last or lately sung; and such question being proposed and agreed to every member ought carefully to endeavor to commit it to memory, take it along with him, and, during the intermediate space betwixt the next meeting, make it the frequent subject of his thoughts and consideration; so that, upon his return, he may be able to give his judgment upon it, in a sensible and solid manner, to the edification and benefit of his fellow-members, as well as his own.

5. Such private Christian societies ought to be very cautious what subjects or questions they fix upon at the matter of their conference in meeting. They ought to beware of meddling with deep or controverted points of divinity, or the secret purposes and decrees of God. They likewise should be very sparing in proposing questions about the sense and interpretation of scripture, or taking upon them to expound or explain it; unless in the way of mentioning such explication or sense given of texts of scripture as they remember to have found in some orthodox writer or commentator, or in hearing sermons, &c. And though, as we have said, such questions may be, and are best from scripture texts, yet no question that has the appearance of a too curious prying into, or an attempt to investigate and explain the mysteries of divine revelation, should be admitted, such as the mysteries of the Trinity—the internal relations of the Deity—generation of the Son—procession of the Spirit—hypostatical union of the two natures in Christ, &c.⁶

The most proper subjects for such spiritual conference in Christian meetings are those which concern the substantial and vitals of religion: such as the fall of man—corruption of human nature—sinfulness and evil of sin, marks and evidence of faith—regeneration by the Spirit—of uprightness, love to God, Christ, the word and people of God; as also, of the love of God—redemption wrought by Christ—his priesthood, sacrifice, intercession; and all God's great works of grace and providence, all which are *sought out of them that have pleasure in them*.

As a particular specimen of such questions, taken from scripture texts, particularly from the book of Psalms, as may be most useful and edifying subjects of conversation in social meetings. we shall note down the following, to which many more may be added, if thought necessary.

Psalm 1:1. *That man hath perfect blessedness who walketh not astray, &c.*

Q. 1. Wherein consisteth the blessedness of the truly upright and faithful walker?

Q. 2. What are the characters and parts of that faithful and godly conversation which is attended with blessedness?

⁶ [These words fail to convey the mind of the Scottish Presbytery. Those divines well knew that a "union of the two natures" is simply impossible. They did mean that the *human nature is united to the Person of the Son only*—not to the *divine nature*.—*Committee*.]

Psalm 2:19. *Kiss ye the Son, lest in his ire ye perish from the way.*

Q. How are we to kiss the Son of God?

Psalm 3:8. *Salvation doth appertain unto the Lord alone, &c.*

Q. 1. What salvation is that which alone appertain unto the Lord?

Q. 2. How is the blessing of the Lord always and forevermore upon his people?

Psalm 4:1. *Give ear unto me when I call, God of my righteousness.*

Q. How is God the God of his people's righteousness?

Verse 4—*Talk with your heart—*

Q. What are some of the proper subjects of spiritual meditation?

Ver. 6 *But of thy countenance the light, Lord lift on us alway.*

Q. What are the qualifications and characters of those who esteem the light of God's countenance above all earthly enjoyments?

Ver. 7. *Upon my heart, bestowed by thee, more gladness I have found.*

Q. What are the singular excellencies of that joy and gladness which arises from the light of God's countenance, above all other earthly joys, or joys of earthly men?

Psalm 5:8. *Lord, in thy righteousness, Do thou me lead; do thou thy way make straight before my face.*

Q. By what means and by what way does God lead his people?

Psalm 6:1. *In thy great indignation, O Lord, rebuke me not.*

Q. How may it be known that divine afflictive dispensations are in love, and not in wrath?

Psalm 7:11.—*God is wroth, with ill men every day.*

Q. How does God every day reveal his wrath against ungodly and wicked men?

Psalm 9:18. *For they that needy are shall not forgotten be alway.*

Q. Who are the poor and needy ones whom God will regard and remember?

Psalm 16:8. *Before me still the Lord I set.*

Q. How should we set the Lord always before us?

Psalm 18:23. *And watchfully I kept myself from mine iniquity.*

Q. How shall we best discover and subdue a predominant or beloved sin?

Psalm 19:7. *God's law is perfect, and converts the soul in sin that lies.*

Q. What are the distinguishing excellencies of God's law testimonies, *i.e.*, his word of divine revelation and preached gospel?

Psalm 22:26. *The meek shall eat, and shall be filled.*

Q. Who are those meek that shall eat and be satisfied with the provisions of God's house?

Psalm 25:12. *What man fears God ? him shall he teach.*

Q. 1. What are the true characters of one that fears the Lord aright.

Q. 2. What is the peculiar happiness and blessedness of such!

Psalm 27:4. *That I the beauty of the Lord behold may and admire.*

Q. What is the beauty of the Lord (or Jehovah) which his saints may behold and admire in his holy place?

Ver. 5. *For he in his pavilion shall, me hide in evil days.*

Q. What are the privileges of those that live in communion with God?

Psalm 30:6. *In my prosperity I said, I shall not moved be.*

Q. By what means shall we avoid falling into sinful security, after singular experiences of God's goodness, whether common or special?

Psalm 63:2. *That I thy power may behold, and brightness of thy face.*

Q. When may persons be said to see the power or glory of God in his sanctuary or ordinances?

Psalm 84:4. *Blessed are they in thy house that dwell.*

Q. 1. What special blessings are received in ordinances?

Q. 2. How may we know if we are blessed therein?

Ver. 10. *For in thy courts one day excels a thousand—*

Q. Why do believers esteem God's house and courts so highly?

Psalm 85:8. *To his folk he'll speak peace.*

Q. 1. What are the characters of God's people to whom he speaks peace?

Q. 2. How shall we distinguish that peace which God speaks from that which we may speak to ourselves?

Psalm 119:19. *I am a stranger on this earth.*

Q. 1. How are the children of God strangers in the earth?

Q. 2. And what is it to live as a stranger on earth? &c.

Such questions as these, which any judicious Christian mind may deduce from almost any verse of the book of Psalms, we judge the most suitable subjects of Christian *conference* in society or fellowship meetings. The like edifying questions, for the same purpose, may be formed from any other text of Scripture that occurs to any one or other of the members. As for example,

Gen. 3:9. *And the Lord God called—Adam, where are thou?*

Q. What is implied in this divine call, both in respect of Adam, and of God who calls after him?

Lev. 19:17. *Thou shall in any ways rebuke thy neighbor.*

Q. What is the right and dutiful way of brotherly reproof?

Job 11:13. *If thou prepare thy heart, and stretch out thine hand towards him.*

Q. What is the preparation of heart which is necessary in order to our approaching unto God?

Job 23:4. *I would fill my mouth with arguments.*

Q. What are the most suitable arguments in prayer to God?

Isa. 56:6.—*And taketh hold of my covenant.*

Q. 1. What is God's covenant we are to take hold of?

Q. 2. And what is it to take hold of God's covenant?

Jer. 2:19. *Know therefore and see, what it is an evil and a bitter thing that thou hast forsaken the Lord.*

Q. Wherein lies the evil and bitterness of the sin of apostacy, or forsaking the Lord?

Ezek. 36:26. *I wilt take away the stony heart; out of your flesh, and I wilt give you an heart of flesh.*

Q. 1. In what respects is the natural unrenewed heart called a *stony heart*, or heart of stone?

Q. 2. Why is the renewed heart called an *heart of flesh*?

Dan. 5:23.—*The God in whose hand the breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified.*

Q. 1. How and in what way are we called to glorify God?

Q. 2. Wherein lies the greatness of the sin of neglecting to glorify God? &c.

Matt. 6:33. *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.*

Q. What is that kingdom of God, and his righteousness, which we are to seek first and above all things?

Mark 1:15. *Repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

Q. 1. What is the Gospel which we are called to believe?

Q. 2. What is that repentance which prepares for, and leads to the particular faith and reception of the Gospel?

Luke 1:53. *He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.*

Q. 1, Who are those hungry whom God fills with good things?

Q. 2. What are the good things or goodness wherewith he fills them?

Q. 3, Who are the rich whom he sends empty away?

John 2:15. *And we beheld his glory.*

Q. What is that glory which faith discovers in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Thus we might go through all the books, chapters and verses contained in the sacred volume: but the above may sufficiently serve as a specimen.

6. The members of the society having pointedly convened, at the time and place agreed upon these things following should be attended unto during the time of their engagement in social duties.
 - 6.1. That they do not give way to trifling, idle, or carnal conversation about common or worldly matters or public news, unless when some extraordinary occurrence or appearance of providence has happened, the mention of which may contribute to stir up to the duties of prayer or thanksgiving; but with composure, gravity, and seriousness, apply themselves to the exercises for which they are met.
 - 6.2. In the duty of prayer, let every one guard against formality, in practically using little or no variation in the matter of their petitions, pharisaical boasting, vain repetitions, or legal expressions. Let special care be had to use the form of sound words agreeable to holy scripture. Let none address themselves to God in the duty of prayer, as if they were speaking to one another; or, as if they were explaining scripture, or preaching, rather than praying; or, in the way of using the third person, as some do, after this manner of expression, O that HE would do or give this or that, when they should use the second person, saying, O, that THOU wouldst do or give such thing; and so of any other phrases of a similar nature. But,
 - 6.3. If it shall happen that any one of the members of the society shall, at any time, be found weak and faulty in these respects, that is to say, in using expressions not intelligible, or favouring of error, such as any of the members of the meeting scruple to join in, let care be

taken that Christian, mild, and cautious methods be used with him. Let an elder, or other judicious member of the society, at his desire, caution him privately, requesting him to explain himself, if that may be sufficient, or forbear such expressions for the future, at the same time endeavoring to make him sensible of the evil of them, as well as letting him know that they are offensive to his brethren.

- 6.4. Let Christian conference on any divine subject be conducted with decency and order. Let every member-speak only in due course, as called by the preses for the time: and let all beware of falling into debate, strife, disputation, or contention, in opposition to and contradiction of one another. All these proceed from carnality of temper—1 Cor. 3:3— from foolishness, imprudence and sinful weakness, and issue in vain janglings—1 Tim. 1:6, 7—which subvert the very ends of social fellowship, and grieve the Holy Spirit, who is a spirit of peace and love.

If, therefore, any thing like debate or contention appear to arise on any subject of conversation, from the indiscreet zeal, or too fervid temper of any member; in this case, it will be most advisable that they at the time drop the conference, and call the next whose turn it falls to be to go about duty; and, after this, the controversy should by no means be allowed to be resumed.

During the time of such mutual conference on religious subjects, it is proper for the sake of a regular conducting of it, that the person who was last employed in duty (not being a female member) should act as president for the time, in putting the question around, calling to order when necessary, or moving, after sufficient time spent in conversation, to proceed to the other duties belonging to them.

- 6.5. Let all the members of social meetings ever remember not to be tedious, either in prayer or conference. In secret prayer persons may continue as long as they please, without offence; but long prayers in society, or company with others, are not agreeable but frequently burdensome, and have the appearance of pharisaism and hypocrisy, and therefore ought to be avoided—Matt. 22. ver. 14.
- 6.6. In conference, also, let brevity, judiciousness, and distinctness be studied. Let none find fault with the weakness or imperfection of the answers made by any fellow members, if there is nothing in them unsound, or disagreeable to truth; nor ought any in the course of conference to repeat what has been said or observed already. If they have nothing further to add, let them signify their agreement with what has been formerly offered on the subject.
- 6.7. During the time of social meeting, let every member carefully avoid giving way to sleep or drowsiness, and, for the prevention of it, each one should endeavor a particular watchfulness against their own, and the seeming disposition thereunto in others. Let every one, without offence, allow of their being called upon by another to guard against it, accounting it a particular favour done them at such a social season of duty.
- 6.8. As Christian parents ought to be careful to bring their children to attend the dispensation of public ordinances, as soon as they are capable of being taught to behave with outward reverence in divine worship, or of receiving the smallest benefit; so, in like manner, ought they to bring them along with themselves duly to the society, on Lord's day, and otherwise, during their minority; and if they appear to have, or show any aversion to the duty, they should cause them to attend the more closely. The early initiation of children in these exercises, will natively tend to attach their minds to the duty. This is the method that the word of God directs unto—Prov. 22:6—”Train up a child in the way that he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” And it is the business of the societies of

Christian people we now write for, not only to enquire after the children of parents that are members of their meetings, desiring their attendance, but to find them blameworthy, if they are careless in this respect. It is also their duty with respect to such young people as have been brought up in outward communion with them, when they arrive at maturity of years, and some competent degree of knowledge and capacity of judgment, to put the directory and rules for societies into their hand, desiring them to read and consider the same, in order that in the way of agreement with them, and submission to them, they may be formally received as members. They ought, moreover, at certain times, to enquire after their diligence in reading and considering these, and such other books, for their information, as are therein recommended. And if they have any difficulties, or scruples, to endeavor to remove them; and to explain such things to them, as they may not so easily understand.

- 6.9. No stranger, of what character soever, ought to be invited, or at his own desire brought into the society, by any member, without the previous information of the society, and their advice and consent; nor ought any one member to take upon him to exclude, or forbid the attendance of any, at his own hand. And as to such as may offer or propose to join in fellowship, and previous thereunto to accompany with the meeting for a time, they should be known to the society, or some of the members, to be persons, who attend to the duty of secret prayer and also of private or family worship, if they have families, and to be of an outwardly blameless conversation, free of public scandal or offence; but before they are brought in, their desire and names behove to be signified to the meeting, on which, if all agree, they may be allowed to join in company with the society, in order that both parties may be better acquainted with each other. But if any objection is made, it will be best to delay the admission of such, till the relevancy of the objection be enquired into.
- 6.10. In the case of newly erected societies, and where none of the persons were ever formerly members of any Christian fellowship meeting, it will be necessary that the society next adjacent send some of their members, for some time, to meet along with them, until they have further experience in the duty. And if a society be small when newly erected, or their number greatly diminished by any providential, removal of members, the society lying nearest to them being more numerous, may send some of their members, by turns, to meet with them, for their help and encouragement, until they see if in providence their number increases.
- 6.11. In order to answer the special ends of religious social meetings, it is necessary that they should not be crowded or too numerous; twelve or fourteen has been ever thought to be the greatest number answerable for the purpose of social edification in this way, provided the one half, or two-thirds of the number be men. When, therefore, a society increases considerably above this number, it will be proper, for the purposes of edification, and to avoid confusion, that they divide themselves into two. And the method most natural and obvious for this, is, that the society first fix upon the two different houses, or places, which are most convenient for the two meetings, and then to settle, by general agreement, that the several members, male and female, should attend at these places, as they do in providence lie nearest and most convenient.
- 6.12. All the different societies of Christians under the Presbytery's inspection, ought to look upon themselves as engaged in supporting the one common public cause and interest of Christ and his gospel. And though a society divide as above, or where there are a number of different societies in a neighborhood, district, or extended congregation, they ought still, notwithstanding, to resolve to maintain their social friendship; and, for that purpose, they ought to settle upon a regular way of particular correspondent meetings, monthly, or every six weeks, as convenience will allow, or necessity may require. This method of correspondence may be conducted, either by the delegation of a ruling elder, if there is one

in the society, together with one or two proper persons along with him, to meet with the other society; or, with the like number of delegates from all the several societies, if there are more than two of them; or else, in the way of the whole or most of the members of the several societies by agreement meeting together. Such meetings as these will serve for various valuable purposes. They will serve to regulate, or settle upon any such matters of public order or utility, as are common to such several societies as live contiguous and in correspondence together; or for composing jars or differences existing between individuals among them.

And thus also the different societies, situated as above said, will come to know the several respective conditions of each, whether individuals conduct themselves dutifully in their social capacity; and thus they will be prepared to sympathize and pray with, and for one another, according as their condition shall require; and if any thing intricate or perplexing shall fall in among any one of them, it may thus be communicated to all the rest for their counsel, prayers, or help as the case may demand. But,

- 6.13. As all things of public and common concern among the societies of any bounds, district, or congregation, united in a general correspondence, ought to be concluded and settled on by common consent, so it becomes necessary that such societies should have meetings, either stated or occasional, for ordering the public affairs. These should consist of two or more commissioners from the several societies in correspondence, whose business is to represent the mind of their constituents, as to any public and common concerns to be agitated; and also, to report to them the resolves and conclusions of the general correspondent meetings. &c. In such meetings female members of societies have no place.
- 6.14. In any society, or bounds of a correspondence, where ruling elders are wanted, the election of proper persons for that office in any one society, or for the several societies contiguous, and living in correspondence, may be best made by a general correspondent meeting of the whole, as above said. The fittest and most preferable way, however, of any for the election of ruling elders, in ordinary cases, and where there is a minister and eldership, we judge, is that which is prescribed and recommended by the Rev. Mr. JAMES RENWICK, the last Presbyterian minister, who suffered under the late Prelacy, in “The form and order of admission of elders, as done by him at *Darmeid*, and other places where he labored.”
- 6.15. If any difference shall happen to take place between any two or more members of society, some of the most judicious and prudent members of the meeting should be appointed to meet and converse with them in a private way in order to their reconciliation. But if this proves unsuccessful, let the matter then, by all parties concerned, be entirely referred to the consideration and judgment of the whole meeting. And if the person judged by the whole members to have justly given offence, will not receive conviction, and comply with what may be agreed on by the society, as the result of their considering and reasoning upon the affair, let him then be desired to forbear attending the meeting, till some other method be fallen upon, in order, if possible, to remove the subsisting difference; and, in all such procedure, it is highly requisite that even the party who has been justly offended should exercise great prudence, meekness and self-denial, and be chiefly influenced with concern for the honour of God, and the offender’s good. The above refer only to instances of difference that are immediately known in the society, or various members of it. But,
- 6.16. In the case of private personal wrongs or offences done by one member to another, not known to any but the parties concerned, the person offended must not, immediately divulge the matter to others, but should wisely and punctually attend to the golden rule prescribed by our Lord himself, in all such cases. Matt. 18:15, 16, 17—”If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear

thee, thou hast. gained thy brother: but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.” This excellent rule serves for direction, not only in the case of private trespasses against the person, character, or property of a Christian brother; but likewise in the case of sins immediately against God, known only to one Christian brother. If by private brotherly remonstrance and reproof, satisfaction can be obtained on a discovery of the repentance of the offender, by the acknowledgement of his sin, the matter ought to rest there, and be carried no farther; but if otherwise, the offender is to be related to the church. And by the church here is not meant any Christian society, nor yet the community or body of the faithful, *i.e.*, the church collective, but the church representative, in the meetings of her teaching and ruling elders; for it is such a church or society as has the power of discipline and government, of binding and losing—verse 18. Private Christian societies ought therefore to beware of taking, upon them to administer rebukes or reproofs to public offenders, (or even in cases where the offence, although originally private, becomes public.) In order to a removal of the scandal, the exercise and application of all church discipline and censures must be left to those with whom Christ had lodged that power. Finally, if a member of society falls under public scandal, or the imputation of it, such a one ought to be immediately secluded by the vote of the meeting, from performing worship, or acting in other religious duties as a formal member. At the same time in many cases, such may be allowed to attend and keep company with the society at their ordinary meetings, until the matter be cleared, and the scandal purged in a regular way. Nevertheless, in instances of more gross and heinous scandals, it will be proper that the society should exclude the offender altogether from their company, during the time of trial, or application of the censures of the church. This will be necessary in such cases, both as a mark and testimony of their detestation of the sin committed; and also, because such an indulgence may be constructed by the world as a connivance with the scandal, and making no difference in communion between the clean and the unclean.

- 6.17. Let it always be considered as the duty of Christians joined together in such an intimate way, to sympathize with and pray for one another in distress. It is not only the duty of Christian meetings to pray in a social way for any particular family or person in affliction, that stands connected with them, and of ruling elders in societies to visit and pray with such; but it is the duty of every particular member, of societies to show pity and sympathy to their Christian friends in distressed circumstances, by visiting them, speaking comfort and encouragement to them or praying with them, as they may be called, or as may be competent for them. And moreover, let those who in the course of God’s holy providence are brought to a sick or death-bed, both desire, and entertain with a ready gratitude, the sympathizing visits of their religious friends, and improve them accordingly. Persons in these circumstances ought to beware of the common licentious mode which prevails, of calling upon every one that comes near them to go to God on their behalf, of whatever religious character, profession, or principles he is, if he is of a devout or serious temper, and has a talent of utterance or oratory in prayer. If you would succeed in your suits to the *Hearer of Prayer*, employ none to go to God on your behalf, but the friends of God. The nearest and most obvious mark of such is, that they are protected by the friends of God’s cause and kingdom. Among these you must seek such as God will accept. They must outwardly in profession be the friends of God’s cause and inwardly the friends of God’s

Christ. The way here prescribed is to *glorify God in the day of visitation, the other to dishonour him.*⁷

- 6.18. It ought to be a settled point with such societies as we write for, that none of the members practice or be indulged in what is called occasional hearing other professed Presbyterian ministers in the land, or any of the different sectaries through the same. That they attend not, nor give countenance to their baptisms, or weddings, and promiscuous dancings; nothing has been found eventually more baneful to integrity, and true religion, or more debauching to the principles and consciences of professors, than a promiscuous occasional hearing and communion. Christ's church, truth, and way, and the rule of it is but one; but this way of pretended occasional hearing, is to depart from the one rule of our duty, God's will, and in place of it to walk after our own imaginations, lusts and fancies, as those—2 Tim. 4:3—who *heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears*. Our occasions, or access in the course of providence, are not the rule of our actions, but God's word. Let it therefore be the chief concern of every member of such societies first to know, and choose, and then to cleave to the perfect way of God's precepts, heedfully attending to the divine precepts. Prov. 4:25—"Let thine eye-lids look straight before thee. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left. Remove thy foot from evil." Again,

Let none embodied with these societies apply to any of the present established judicatories for relief or redress in matters civil and ecclesiastic, in any way inconsistent with their professed principles and testimony. And if any one shall in providence be involved in any such intricate and difficult cases, as may seem to lay him under a necessity of this, let him consider it as his duty, before he betakes himself to any method for relief, (next to his seeking the light of God's counsel in the case), first to advise seriously with his minister or Christian friends, or both, as he shall have access. Prov. 24:6—*By wise counsel thou shall make thy war: and in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.*

- 6.19. Let every member of reasonable nearness, ability, and freedom of time in their own power, make conscience of attending all the diets of the society. And let the time of meeting, especially on working days fixed on, be such as shall best suit the circumstances of the generality of the members. And it is hereby recommended that such as are called in providence to serve in families, or otherwise, show a proper concern and diligence, both at engaging, and during the time of their service, consistent with their duty to their masters, to procure necessary time for this and other more public duties; and to prefer such masters and service where they have most access and liberty for these religious purposes; hereby they shall bear witness that they are not ashamed of the gospel and testimony of Jesus, and that they prefer not the interests of the world, to the honour and service of God.
- 6.20. If any member be either absent from the meeting a diet or more, or come not in due time; the reason hereof being enquired into by the society, the person ought to satisfy them, as

⁷ *Glorify God in the day of visitation*—1 Pet. 2:12. By this is meant and expressed what the faithful followers of Christ, in the way of business, have often found verified. It is, as if the apostle had said, "Notwithstanding your infidel neighbors may, all the time of your health and life, revile and speak reproachfully of you and your religion, and persecute you as evil doers; yet your steady, holy and blameless conversation in every department of life shall confute these reproaches, and leave an impression on their conscience of the righteousness of your persons and profession; so that when the time of affliction or day of death comes upon them, they shall *glorify God*, by desiring your help, sympathy and prayers whom all along they formerly reviled and persecuted." And what pity is it, that any who in the time of life and health have professed to maintain a particular testimony for God's cause and truth in the way of separation not only from all its open enemies but also from all prevaricating temporizers, and deceitful dealers in the things of God, should, when distress and death overtakes them, so far throw up their profession and testimony as to join in the most intimate communion with those whom formerly they separated from and testified against. This is not to glorify God at such a juncture, but to the contrary.

far as is decent, that it may appear unto all that it is not a willful neglect, or slighting, or dislike of the duty; but if any thus absent themselves, without sufficient reasons, and be found willfully negligent, such ought first to be dealt with, in order to bring them to a sense of their sin and fault, and then called to declare their resolution and design to attend more diligently and dutifully for the future. But if after sundry such cautions, admonitions and dealing, they are found not to amend, they ought to be secluded from the society, till they shall give some encouraging evidence that they are truly sorry for the offence they have given by such careless and willful neglect. And, if they still persist, they ought to be delated, or complained of to the session, as offensive and disorderly walkers.

- 6.21. All such societies, composed of professors, of the true presbyterian covenanted religion, ought carefully to attend to avoid all promiscuous admission of any into their social communion of different profession or persuasion anent the state of public testimony. This, as we have said above, is necessary in order that there may be an agreeing consent among them in their joint addresses unto a throne of grace respecting the public cause and concerns of God's glory, and for the preservation of a becoming harmony in all religious matters. Let no vain or regardless persons, nor such, although of a more sober deportment, as discover no hearty inclination to the reformation cause, be admitted into private social, or correspondent meetings, either as members or auditors. The admission of such persons is both inconsistent in itself, and natively tends to expose religion to the ridicule and contempt of the profane and ungodly world.
- 6.22. Let these societies when met together, remember in their united addresses to a God of grace, to make God's word, and will revealed therein, the rule of their prayers. Common temporal blessings and good things they ought to pray for conditionally, and with submission, in regard they are only conditionally promised, *viz:* so far as consistent with God's glory and our good, and are not absolutely necessary. But special spiritual blessings, the mercy and grace of God his salvation, and the things connected with it, are not to be asked of God, in behalf of ourselves or others, in a conditional way, or with submission to his will; both because they are absolutely promised, freely bestowed, and absolutely necessary; and to pray for these with submission is to say that we could be contented to want them, and happy without them. The first of these would be sinful, and the last impossible. But amongst all the particulars insisted on in social prayer the things of God's public declarative glory ought not to be omitted. The hallowing of God's name, and the coming and advancement of his kingdom, ought not to be forgotten, that God may overthrow and scatter the darkness of ignorance, atheism, profaneness and idolatry that fills the earth, and covers the people, by sending the light of his truth and gospel into the dark places of the world, whereby the earth may *be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*. It becomes all the children of Zion to mourn with her when she sits, as at present, like a cottage in the wilderness, and lies in ashes. As also, to rejoice with her when the Lord appears to establish and make her a praise in the earth. To this purpose they should pray that God may hasten the accomplishment of the promises respecting the glory of the Redeemer's kingdom in the latter day. That Jesus, the church's renowned king and head, may yet go forth riding upon the white horse of the gospel, arrayed with his bow and crown, *conquering and to conquer*, by gathering into his obedience multitudes of the travail of his soul. That it may be proclaimed, to the praise of his all-conquering power, that *the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ*; and his matchless name known and called upon from the rising of the sun unto its going down. That God may destroy the abominable delusion of Mahomet; the heresy and idolatry of anti-christ; removing every let and hindrance of the conversion of his ancient people the Jews. That the Gentile world living in Pagan darkness, without Christ and the knowledge

of his name, may be enlightened. And fervently to pray that where the written word and Gospel of God's dear son is enjoyed, many may be thereby enlightened, strengthened and edified. At the same time lamenting over the perishing state of so much of the world without the gospel, and numbers ruining themselves under the gospel, and not only cannot enter into the promised land because of unbelief, but expose themselves unto the intolerable load of gospel wrath and vengeance, even *the wrath of the Lamb*. Moreover, the case of these guilty covenant breaking lands of Britain and Ireland, where God, by the glorious reformation, built his sanctuary like an high palace, ought not to be neglected. Our great national guilt, universal corruption in principle and practice, together with the pollution and desolations of God's house and ordinances, should be bewailed, and God entreated to return to the long desolations—to revive his covenanted cause and work of reformation—purge the lands of popery and prelacy—the blasphemous heresies of arianism, socinianism, delusions of quakerism, arminian and legal, and all unsound doctrine. That the Lord of Hosts may still leave a seed to do service unto him, and preserve a remnant who shall bear faithful testimony for Christ. And, finally, that the ministers and preachers of Christ's truth may be furnished with all suitable gifts, and necessary grace; and, in the midst of all discouragements and opposition, may be *upheld by the right hand of his righteousness*, and clothed with truth, that his saints may show us for joy.

One remark more we shall mention. The most part, or many of the societies for whose use these directions are intended, lying at a distance from the residences of their pastors, they are therefore obliged in the course of discharging ministerial duties, frequently to lodge sundry days amongst them; in this case we judge it advisable that these societies should respectively make choice of the fittest and most central place in their bounds for their dispensation of public ordinances, when their pastors come amongst them; and where the minister may be most commodiously lodged. It will be most convenient and agreeable that the minister should, if possible, have one known place of resort for lodging, than to go, at different times, to different houses in the way of rotation—Luke 9:4 and 10:5, 7. And moreover, that no one person or family be burthened, and the rest eased, let the whole of the society, (or societies in that immediate bounds acting in correspondent) agree to contribute something monthly according to the ability of individuals, to be particularly applied for discharging the expense of the minister's lodgings. This, in country places, cannot be supposed less than *1s. 6d.* per day, and in towns *2s.* for man and horse, so much should be offered from the whole, by agreement, to the person who lodges and entertains their pastors; or if it should be found necessary or more agreeable to the people that the minister should lodge and preach at different houses or places; in the bounds of the same society or correspondence, still such provision should be made by the whole, for discharging the expense of entertainment; and which should be offered whenever it is due. If, in any instance, the acceptance of such an allowance be declined, from the generosity of any particular member, it can easily be applied to other public religious purposes; for the benefit of the whole. And moreover, those places where ministers' mansion houses or ordinary residences are fixed to be, and which, from this circumstance, have more benefit, and are free of the burden above said, ought to be considered by the congregational meeting as obliged to do something proportionally more for the support of the gospel and for the just case of their brethren, in this respect, that live at a distance, and have less benefit of the minister's labors, so that as far as possible, *there may be an equality*—2 Cor. 8:13, 14.

The preceding general and particular directions, Christian friends and brethren, we think, may be answerable and useful for you, if attended to. We have nothing now to add but our earnest call and exhortation, that you would heedfully attend unto them, and gather yourselves in this way of duty with respect to which we are directing you. We beseech you *forsake not the assembling of yourselves together* in the way of Christian social fellowship and friendship, and so much the rather as you see the signs and tokens of the time of God's judgments approaching. You observe the very birds and

beast flock together in the view of an approaching storm. Have you not need, considering the present aspect of the times, whether morally or civilly viewed; times of abounding sin and judgment; of error and *blasphemy* and of *treading down by the Lord God of hosts, in the valley of vision, of breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains*—Isa. 22:5, and 37:3. Have you not need, we say, to *gather yourselves together*, and to pray for yourselves and your children, for the present standing and rising generation, and on behalf of the church of God, and interests of the kingdom, and for the suppression of Satan’s kingdom and interests, which are making such rapid progress? Stand not therefore single by yourselves alone; and though there may be but a very few of you living within reach of social communion, yet remember that even two or three have the encouraging promise of Christ’s presence and blessing, meeting thus in his name. And though your beginning may be but small, yet your latter end may be greatly increased. Consider also what precious spiritual advantages arise from this exercise when conscientiously attended to, some of which have been mentioned. This exercise will contribute to enlarge and increase your Christian knowledge, both in theory, experience and practice. Hereby you will *edify one another*, build yourselves up in your most holy Christian faith, and have your hearts warmed and enlarged in the way of God’s testimonies. This you will find to be one great means of your safety and perseverance as Christians and professors. How many have we known, who contrary to all counsel, public or private, still keep themselves detached from such social engagements, the common end of the most of whom was, that they came at length to be *led away with the error of the wicked*, and so fell from their steadfastness. You know that prayer is a first and last piece of the armour of God, the armour of righteousness which Christ by his apostle calls his people to take to them, and to put on, that they may be able to stand in the evil day of terror, corruption, temptation and affliction—Eph. 6:18. Praying with all prayer. This we therefore charge you with, in his name, and request you to charge yourselves with, that they pray with all prayer; not only with secret, with closet prayer, with family prayer or worship, and public prayer, but with private social prayer also; “Striving thus together for the faith of the gospel,” this will be your safety in the time of danger. Isa. 26:20—*Come, my people*, says the great Shepherd and King of Israel, *enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee, and hide thyself—until the indignation be overpast*.

Be not of an unconcerned, low, selfish and private spirit; but show yourselves of an actively public spirit. Seek not *your own things*, in the way of neglecting *the things of Jesus Christ*. Pray for, and seek the good of Jerusalem, all the days that you shall live upon the earth. Be ever ready to serve and support the public interests of true religion. Let not your religion consist in piety only, or godliness separated from the duties of charity and righteousness towards men. Divide not the first table duties of the law of God from the second, but join the true love of God and man together, Gal. 6:10—”As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the household of faith.” Heb. 13:15, 16—”By him therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise unto God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But to do good, and to communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”⁸

Be dutifully communicative and liberal, not only of the gift and goods of the mind, according to that of the apostle, “As every man hath received the gift, so let him minister the same, as good stewards

⁸ Let us offer the sacrifice of praise. But to do good, and to communicate, forget not. Here are two evangelical sacrifices we are commanded to offer by Christ our great high priest and altar, *viz*: the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God and of charity and beneficence towards men and for the honour of God. The word *But* is commonly used in scripture in adversative sense; but its being placed here immediately betwixt these two indicates (as judicious and learned expositors observe) that special attention is required as to the last of them. Not, indeed, as if the sacrifice or duty of beneficence were of greater importance in itself, than that of praise and thanksgiving; but on the account of men’s natural backwardness and aversion to this duty. Many are seemingly forward in offering the sacrifice of praise, &c., to God, who are very backward in offering the sacrifice of charity and beneficence, in doing good by communicating to the necessities of others, or for the support of religion out of their worldly substance.

of the grace of God.” But also of your outward goods and substance, as God hath given you ability, for the help of the poor, or outward support of God’s kingdom and gospel in the world, as he shall require you. This is a chief end which Christ enjoins his people to have in view in following their lawful labours and callings with diligence; Eph. 4:28—”Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good;” not merely that he may support himself and family, or lay up earthly treasure; but “that he may have to give to him that needeth.”—Prov. 3:9. “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of a thine increase.” Think not that expense of time, labour, or outward substance lost, that is bestowed for God’s sake, or in his service. Look not on it as a burden, as too many do, but as your honour, according to your power, to support the worship of God, and interests of religion. And as you ought to be thus dutifully beneficent and charitable in your life, you may be called also to show it at your death. If the Lord had blessed you in the course of his providence with *power to get wealth*; if he hath given you any remarkable increase of worldly substance, forget not that it is your duty to *leave a blessing behind you* in disposing of some part of it, in some such way or other, for the honour of his name, as upon advisement may be thought most serviceable. When you are distributing your outward goods and possessions, which God hath given you. among your natural relations, and earthly friends, remember to acknowledge him whom if you are true Christians, you will esteem as the most precious and best friend of all others; *a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*. These things are *good and profitable unto men*. Neither these, it is true, nor any other sort of good works are meritorious, or productive of the smallest blessing or favour from the hand of God; but done from a principle of faith, they are the happy fruits and evidence of that true charity or love of God, whereby true faith ever worketh—1 Tim. 6:17. *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy. That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*. We hope beloved and Christian friends, you will consider these things attentively, and the whole that we have said: and *may the Lord give you understanding in all things*—2 Tim. 2:7—even that good understanding which all those have who do his commandments.—Psalm 111:10.

We finally conclude this our address to you, with the apostolical directions and exhortations which you have recorded, 1 Thess. 5:14, to the end. *Now we exhort you brethren, watch them that are unruly, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man: but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you: Quench not the spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things: Hold fast that which is good: Abstain from all appearance of evil, and the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: And I pray God your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. Brethren pray for us. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.*

THE END.

SESSION OF THE PURITAN REFORMED CHURCH OF EDMONTON

Addendum to the Shorter Directory for Religious Societies

In an effort to faithfully and explicitly declare all those documents which the Puritan Reformed church of Edmonton (hereafter PRCE) deems subordinate, and thus agreeable to the Word of God, we, the Session of the PRCE submit our judgment to the members of our congregations upon the document entitled, "A Short Directory For Religious Societies, Drawn Up By Appointment Of The Reformed Presbytery, For The Particular Use Of The Several Societies Of Christian People Under Their Inspection, At The Desire Of The Said Societies, And Addressed To Them." Originally published in 1772 by the faithful Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, the edition which we now possess and submit for the inspection of our members, includes all the original material, and additionally, one may read the Preface of the Committee (1881), in which the Reformed Presbytery in America indicates that they too had formally adopted this document as authoritative and subordinate.

The Session of the PRCE declares that it formally agrees with the aforementioned Reformed Presbyteries of Scotland and America, and that this Directory, being in agreement with the Word of God, is to be regarded as a faithful subordinate standard among our members, and thus contemplated within our present terms of communion. However, we must be careful when interpreting the abiding moral validity of any historical rule of societal conduct. We must distinguish between those things which are moral, and of continuing obligation according to the Word of God, and those things which are historically circumstantial, which serve to provide us with a record of faithful contendings, but which do not formally bind our practice in our present circumstance. Having carefully perused the Directory, the Session has determined that much within this document is of such a nature as to relegate it to the latter category (i.e. historically circumstantial).

In their Preface to this document, the Reformed Presbytery in America states the original reason for which these rules were introduced, and thereby clearly intimates that these rules were originally framed to accommodate faithful Covenanters amidst a troubled time of persecution.

Authentic history informs us that for hundreds of years a peculiar people have existed in the British Isles called "Society People." In the seventeenth century their faith and patience were tried by persecution: and for the twofold purpose of preserving their own unity and protecting themselves from spies, they adopted rules to secure a select fellowship (The Reformed Presbytery, A Short Directory For Religious Societies, 1772, Preface by the Reformed Presbytery in America, 1881, emphasis added).

While we as a Session believe it is necessary to continue striving toward unity, we recognize that we are not presently in need of protecting ourselves from spies. This historical circumstance is of primary importance when determining how we are to interpret and formally adopt the rules contained in this Directory. Each particular of that which is to be done in a time of grievous persecution is not necessarily to be done in a time of relative peace. Consequently, we, as a Session have sought to separate that which is of abiding moral validity from that which pertains to the specific historical circumstance of our faithful forebears--in essence, we have sought to separate that which is moral from that which is merely circumstantial. First, we intend to explain why we consider this document

as necessary to be included among our subordinate standards, and correspondingly why it ought to be included among the documents contemplated in our six terms of communion. Second, we wish to declare those principles within this document which we understand to be of abiding moral validity. Third, we desire to briefly demonstrate our reasons for not formally requiring the particular and circumstantial rules of this Directory in our present circumstances.

Finally, we intend to give our recommendation to the congregations regarding what action we consider most edifying in our present circumstance.

1. Why should this Directory be included as a subordinate document, and as a document contemplated within our present six terms of communion?

First and foremost, the reason this Directory ought to be included as a subordinate document, and as a document contemplated within our present six terms of communion is that the Directory contains nothing doctrinal or practical which, when fairly considered, disagrees with the Word of God. To the contrary, it upholds the moral requirements of the Word of God by insisting that men responsibly attend to their social duties to both God and man. Rather than merely repeating the Scriptural argumentation contained within the Directory, which sufficiently proves the necessity of attendance upon these social duties, we simply refer the reader to the document itself, and encourage our members to carefully compare the Scriptural argumentation presented within the Directory with the Word of God. It is the responsibility of each member, in as much as they are able, to scrutinize all subordinate standards to insure that they believe that they conform, in their entirety, to the Word of God.

Secondarily and subordinately, we have explicit statements from both the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, and that of America (which we deem to have been faithful and authoritative judicatories of Christ), indicating that these documents have been judicially and historically adopted and implemented as subordinate standards.

The Reformed Presbytery of Scotland states:

We now at length, in compliance with your repeated applications to us, in our judicative capacity, present you with a brief directory, in order to your walking dutifully and comfortably in private Christian fellowship one with another, in this cloudy and dark day of sin and error (The Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, A Short Directory For Religious Societies, emphasis added).

The Reformed Presbytery in America accordingly concurs that this Directory is a subordinate standard when they explicitly refer to this document as "a faithful and authoritative document."

Although more than one edition of this document have been published in the United States, the present demand cannot be supplied; and this is the special reason why the Reformed Presbytery in May last appointed a committee "to revise and publish another edition of the Rules of Society." Other reasons, however, may readily occur to the intelligent reader why this faithful and authoritative document should be brought out of its comparative obscurity (The Reformed Presbytery in America, A Short Directory For Religious Societies, Preface, emphasis added).

Additionally, the Reformed Presbytery in America distinctly refers to this Directory as a subordinate standard when it derides the Reformed Presbyterians of Scotland, who later defected from her faithful terms of communion, for attempting to supplant this Directory with a counterfeit directory.

The R.P. Synod of Scotland in the earlier of this century, while professing to re-exhibit the Testimony of the church, did in fact materially change all her subordinate standards. "A Guide to Social Worship" was framed, from which every distinctive feature of the witnessing church was eliminated. There followed from the same source some crude but very piously expressed regulations for what have been since known as "Union Prayer-meetings." To this project the COVENANTER (Belfast) offered some feeble resistance at the time: but fellowship in the Evangelical Alliance followed, leading to identifying with the Presbyterian Alliance, and ultimately into the Free Church of Scotland. Thus did the Guide to Social Worship effectually supplant the Rules of Society. Against this dangerous counterfeit when republished in America. the Reformed Presbytery gave solemn warning in the year 1840 (The Reformed Presbytery in America, A Short Directory For Religious Societies, Preface, emphasis added).

It is also important to note that we, as a Session, in March of 1996, adopted the six terms of communion, as they were penned by the Reformed Presbytery in America. It would be dishonest to interpret these terms of communion in a different light from that which the framers (or in this case the revisers) originally intended. As Presbyterians who believe that precedential and faithful rulings of covenanted judicatories ought not to be ignored or discarded, we too must declare our adherence to this Directory if we desire to maintain a visible unity with the overall testimony manifested by these faithful judicatories. To do otherwise would imply that, in our judgment, this subordinate standard was unfaithfully adopted, and that the Presbyteries who did so ought to be rebuked and rejected for requiring an unfaithful document among their terms of communion. This we would be willing to do, if it could be demonstrated that this Directory were truly unfaithful to God's Word. However, since we agree that the principles contained therein are in agreement with the Word of God, we happily concur with the faithful Presbyteries previously cited, and accordingly agree that this Directory is, and ought to be, contemplated within our terms of communion.

In summary, the Session of the PRCE, having diligently compared the principles set forth in the "The Short Directory for Religious Societies," and finding it agreeable to the Word of God, and acknowledging that both of these aforementioned faithful Presbyteries, in their judicative capacity, included this Directory as a subordinate standard, encourage the congregation to diligently examine this document to see for themselves that it is, and ought to be honestly contemplated within our present six terms of communion.

2. Which Scriptural principles within this document are of such abiding moral validity that we must take specific action to faithfully fulfil our duty toward God and our fellow man?

The Word of God teaches that we must meet together for the exercises of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, spiritual conference, and all the duties of Christian love and friendship, for the mutual benefiting, comforting and encouraging one another, in a steady attendance upon all the duties and ordinances of godliness, and adherence to the cause of Christ, his truth, and true religion in the world. This is necessary, not only in regard to duties relative to public ordinances, but also for the practice of private and personal duties.

Among the many sound reasons provided within the Directory for the necessity of social meetings for the practice of private and personal duties, we deem the following reason as particularly weighty.

The necessity of this will also appear from the consideration of the many general and comprehensive duties incumbent upon Christians toward one another, e.g. They are required to love one another-John 15:7. 11; Rom. 13:8, 1 John 3:11; and to be kindly, affectionate one

towards another-Rom, 12:10; to consider and provoke one another unto love and good works, and to exhort one another-Heb. 10:24, 25. They are commanded to comfort, to edify, to teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs-1 Thess. 4:11, and 5:11; Col. 3:16; and to receive one another-Rom. 5:7. But how can these relative and social duties be performed without social meetings and fellowship? How can they love, consider, exhort, admonish, or edify one another? How can they comfort themselves together-1 Tim. 5:11, and at the same time live strangers to society one with another? Further, they are recommended to be of one mind and mouth-Rom. 15:5, 6; 1 Cor. 1:10, and must they not then confer together, and communicate their minds one to another! They are called to be subject one to another-Eph. 6:21: i.e., every one showing all readiness both to give and to accept of instruction, counsel, or reproof from each other. They are expressly required to confess their faults one to another:, and pray one for another-James 5:17, to strive together in their prayers for the ministers of Christ, and for the faith of the gospel, i.e., in behalf of the kingdom, cause, and interests of Christ in the world-Phil. 1:17. Now can these duties possibly be done, without a regular assembling and conversing in a social way? By no means. So that to deny the duty and necessity of such social meetings and intercourse were to forbid all these relative social duties which God has commanded (The Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, A Short Directory For Religious Societies, emphasis added).

Furthermore, the Reformed Presbytery adds:

It is the Christian's work and duty to observe the work of the Lord, whether respecting himself particularly or in general, and to consider the operation of his hands. But while attending to these instances of personal, internal duty, in an observant waiting upon God in his ordinance and doings, he has not access to the performance of those duties and exercises that are the special design of this intimate social communion of saints. Christians while attending public gospel ordinances, have not access to instruct, admonish, counsel and comfort one another; and by a communication of their knowledge, observations and experiences, mutually to establish and build up themselves in their most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost-Jude ver. 20-as is their business in social fellowship meetings; so that here we may see the difference of the ends of the other ordinances and works of God, and this particular institution. These are all designed for conveying the knowledge of God, and giving experience of his goodness; Isa. 2:5-"And many people shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways." This for the diffusing and communication of such a knowledge of God, and taste of his goodness unto others, as has been found in ordinances and providence. In the public sanctuary ordinances, believers by faith see the power and glory of God-Psal. 63:2. But in these little sanctuaries, in these temples of God, every one speaks of his glory-Psal. 29:9-talks of his power and righteousness, and all his wondrous works-Psal. 71. and 119:97. Thus these social meetings of Christians contribute, as they are intended, for the propagation and increase of an experimental knowledge of God and taste of his goodness among his people, in the holy exercises of praise, prayer and spiritual conference. And this is just what the apostle enjoins and recommends. Col. 2:16-"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord." (The Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, A Short Directory For Religious Societies, emphasis added).

From these, and the many other Scriptural reasons provided for the necessity of these private meetings, we, as a Session, believe that Scripture stipulates that we are morally bound to meet together for praise, prayer and spiritual conference, not only on the Lord's Day for the enjoyment of public ordinances, but also in a more private context, so that we might fellowship together and discuss matters of mutual importance which are otherwise inappropriate for discussion upon the

Lord's Day. Therefore, we, as a Session, believe this particular institution (that of meeting privately for praise, prayer and spiritual conference) to be of abiding moral validity, and in recognition of this duty, we are thus constrained to propose practices which would provide the members of our congregation with an opportunity to consistently comply with the requirements of Scripture in our present circumstances.

3. Next, we desire to briefly demonstrate our reasons for not formally requiring the particular and circumstantial rules of this Directory to our present circumstances.

As stated at the outset, the rules of this Directory were originally designed for a time when Christian societies were destitute of pastors, and in real danger of bodily harm due to persecution wrought by godless rulers and the infiltration of spies. Accordingly, rules were framed by which these societies wisely protected themselves from unwanted intruders. We consider these rules a wise expedient for the time in which they lived, and a godly example of faithful contending for all who may sadly experience similar circumstances in the future. However, we do not believe that the framers of this Directory intended that every society who ever existed in the past or future were formally bound to the particular rules prescribed in this document.

Our reasons are as follows:

First, nowhere does this directory state that each of these particular rules are to be formally observed in all times, places, and circumstances. Rather, the Directory gives formal instructions which accord with particular historical circumstances. As already stated above, the abiding moral reason for private meetings ought to, and does continue for all times and circumstances, however the particular rules may change to best suit the edification of those who meet together privately. This is sufficiently demonstrated in that section of the Directory which gives particular instructions.

Notice in the following citation that the Presbytery uses the word "recommend" to preface all the particular rules which they enjoin.

From what has been said in the preceding sections we hope, Christian friends and brethren, you will be convinced of the duty, and of the special design and usefulness of social meetings. We therefore now proceed to lay down some general rules or directions relative to them, on the several articles mentioned in the contents of this section. We shall suppose, in what we say, all you whom we address, and for whose use the Directory is designed, to be members of such private Christian societies, or called and obliged to be such from your public profession and principles. This, as we have already hinted, is the form and manner in which you, and your predecessors, as a Christian people adhering to the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the original reformation on which the church of Scotland have long stood. Many, from Christian experience, have all along hitherto borne their testimony to the great utility and comfortable fruits of these spiritual exercises. And certainly in the day of temptation and continued backsliding both in principle and practice; in this day of spiritual deadness and deep security, into which all denominations of professors are fallen; in this day of perplexity, and treading down-in this day of rebuke and of blasphemy-Isa. 22:5, and 37:3, you are loudly called to join your united force in lifting up your prayers for the remnant that is left, and for strengthening the things that remain, and are ready to die-Rev. 3:2. And in relation to this duty and exercise we therefore recommend (The Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, A Short Directory For Religious Societies, emphasis added).

From this point in the Directory forward, we believe the framers intended their directions as a recommendation, and not an authoritative command for all time coming. The rules that follow the word "recommendation" are to be understood as the Presbytery's best advise or opinion as to how they would order the management of society meetings under their present circumstances. This is a key point which must not be overlooked. If the Presbytery was saying that these rules were an absolute Scriptural requirement for all time past, and all time coming, then we would be forced to conclude that they formally condemned all those who in the past failed to meet privately according to these particular rules. To interpret their meaning in such a sense would be both absurd and unfair. When interpreting the meaning of others we must be exceedingly careful not to impose a meaning upon words which would involve a manifest contradiction, especially if we can reasonably conceive of a meaning that would not force the words of others into a direct contradiction. Because the Reformed Presbytery adopted terms of communion and contended for the same faith as their faithful forebearers (who did not use these exact rules), we conclude that they had no intention of condemning those faithful forefathers who had never heard of these particular rules. In our judgment, the Reformed Presbytery fully realized that they were merely "recommending" rules to suit their particular historical circumstances. Throughout the Directory, it is clear that these rules are based upon circumstance and are not to be interpreted or enacted as perpetually obligatory. The duty to meet privately for praise, prayer, and spiritual conference, was indeed perpetually obligatory, but the particular rules by which these meetings were to be ordered were not.

Therefore, we, as a Session, do not deem these particular rules as anything more than an exemplification of faithful contendings under particular historical circumstances. Accordingly, these particular recommendations do not bind us any more than we ourselves see the need to edify one another by the promotion of good order in our private meetings.

4. Our recommendation to our members regarding what action we consider most edifying in our present circumstance is as follows:

We believe that we, as professing Christians, are morally obligated to meet together for praise, prayer, and spiritual conference. Consequently, we believe that in our present circumstances fellowship societies should be set up, wherever possible.

The frequency with which we meet ought to be ordered according to the circumstances in which we live. While we deem it most edifying for brethren, if possible, to meet weekly, we recommend that initially, private societies endeavour to meet monthly, and work toward the goal of meeting weekly. These meetings are not intended to supplant our regular Lord's Day worship services, but are rather to facilitate edification and godly conference in addition to our regular worship services, and may take place on any day of the week.

The purpose of this paper was to explain the relationship of the "The Short Directory for Religious Societies" to our terms of communion, the moral necessity of private fellowship meetings, and the extent to which we are bound to adhere to the particular rules contained within the Directory. Though brief, we hope that by means of the above explanation, we have accomplished our goal. The particular order that each society may choose to adopt is not addressed herein. As these societies are set up among our members, the Session will oversee and advise our members as to what they consider to be most edifying under our present circumstances. This will be done in conjunction with, and carefully considering the needs and opinions of those members who compose each particular society.

We invite any questions or concerns that our members may have regarding the contents of this paper. May the Lord bless our endeavour to faithfully apply His Word in all areas of life.

Sincerely Submitted,

The Session of the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton
1996