

## INTRODUCTION

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The committee, in compiling this volume, does not propose to present a recommended or standard service of worship, which is to be followed by each of our congregations. Our denomination has always advocated a position of free worship. Each congregation prepares its own order of service to meet the needs of its worshipers. So there has been variety within our churches. For example, some utilize liturgical elements, singing traditional hymns accompanied by an organ. Others worship with a simple order of service using gospel songs sung with the accompaniment of a piano. Each church develops its own pattern of worship with which it feels most comfortable and therefore seldom varies that worship pattern week by week. Increasingly our churches are changing what they perceived to be their own traditional form and now include elements that appeal to a younger generation. The music is becoming more upbeat and the preaching revolves around a theme, which is discussed in the light of the teaching of Scripture.

Diversity in worship forms is encouraged; however, healthy Evangelical Congregational churches must always worship as Christ instructs, in “spirit and truth.” Such worship is characterized by openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. There will be times when under the Spirit’s direction the pastor will depart from the “traditional” form in order to speak to a special need. Since we believe that the Bible is God’s Word of Truth, our worship will be biblically based and provide opportunities for the reading and proclamation of that truth.

Although this volume does not present an order of worship for each individual church it does provide a compilation of rituals that will aid pastors in the performance of their pastoral duties. Some of these ceremonies had been incorporated in the *Discipline* of our church from earliest times. The rites themselves use elements found in the historic rituals of the Church, thus linking our congregations to the Church universal.

These services also provide a way of sharing with the participants and the congregation what we believe concerning various areas of the Christian life. The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are important means of grace for the Christian. By the use of the rituals contained in this book we are able convey the meaning and significance of the sacraments to the worshipers. Contained here also are rituals of ordination, consecration and commissioning, which clearly acknowledge that the Holy Spirit has called and prepared His servants for ministry within the Church as pastors, bishops, and missionaries. Local pastors will find ceremonies in Part II that present the biblical view of birth, marriage, sickness, and death. Infant Presentation, a service approved by the Administrative Council in 1980, is printed here for the first time as an alternative to Infant Baptism. The final section of this book includes ceremonies relating to the life of the local congregation that help to convey the significance of church membership and enables the church to receive a newly appointed pastor with an appropriate service of prayer. Other ceremonies relate to special occasions within the life of the church and its members.

It is the desire of the committee to make available to our pastors a book of rituals in language and form that is easy of use and yet maintains a biblical foundation and a link to the historic faith of the Church. Prior to the publication of this book pastors had to refer to the *Discipline*, *Pastor’s Manual*, or search through other published sources to find appropriate services. This book meets a longstanding need in our Church and will be a welcome addition to the libraries of Evangelical Congregational pastors.

On behalf of the Bishops,

Rev. Dr. John E. Moyer