

Guidelines for Profession of Faith Procedure

Ebenezer CRC Council June 14, 2016

Profession of faith is a major highlight of our church's life! It's a celebration of God's good work in a person, with prayerful hope that he will carry it on to completion until the day Christ returns (Philippians 1:6). The following guidelines will help to ensure the process and worship service are as spiritually enriching as possible.

The Profession Class

In early February the pastor will initiate personal conversations with prospective students (youth and/or adults), as well as print bulletin announcements and make verbal announcements in worship services to let prospective students and their families know that a 4-week profession of faith class will be offered in March / April. As per a council's decision in 2015, ordinarily students in grade 11 and beyond will be considered for profession. Younger people may certainly be inclined to, for which we are thankful, and we encourage them to continue walking closely with our Lord, including through the programs offered in our church.

The timing of the classes will need to allow for Council interviews to happen in April, approximately 3-4 weeks prior to Pentecost Sunday, when the students will profess their faith. The council interviews can be on a regularly scheduled evening for council or otherwise, depending on how full the council agenda is.

The pastor will teach the class according to the schedule below, with an eye to covering the four major questions of profession of faith, and as many of the large-group questions as possible (below). In the first class the pastor will note the need and value of writing a profession of faith letter, showing them (anonymously) some prime examples from previous years. He will also encourage them to have a profession of faith verse, personally chosen, to include in that letter, which will be due by the fourth class (to allow timely completion of the certificates and gift books). The pastor will give printed instructions in the last profession class to each participant about how the council interviews and the Sunday morning of profession will progress, including verbally noting the need to be in the council room 20 minutes before the service.

Council Interviews

Upon completion of the four classes the students will have a two-part interview with council:

1. a personal interview with two elders (or an elder and deacon), and
2. all the students as a class interviewed by full council.

The 20-minute personal interviews will be in the classrooms of the education hall at the church (beginning at 7pm if a regular council meeting is happening afterward. One of the council members will begin with a prayer of thanks for the student and blessing on their conversation. At least one week prior to the interviews the two council members will have received from the pastor the profession of faith letter of the student they are interviewing, along with a copy of the explanatory letter to council members (below). Questions can be asked of the student based in part on that letter. After the interviews all students and council members will join together in the youth room, where a sampling of the large-group questions will be asked of the students. Students should answer a minimum of three questions each. Some of the questions will be directed to anyone who wishes to answer, while other questions will be asked of specific students. The pastor (or other questioner) should make the questions as personal as possible (ie. asking them about something that reflects well from their profession letter).

Following the question period, the students will be excused to go upstairs. The council members will reflect on the answers together and, following prayer, arrive at a motion to accept the students as professing members. The motion may be made for the whole group or for each student individually. The students will be called in, either as a group or individually, to hear how the Lord has led council.

Devotional and Certificates

Devotional books will be chosen by the pastor (in consultation with elders) and purchased ahead of time with enough time to have something written in them to commemorate the occasion. They will be sent to Debbie Eggink several weeks in advance to allow her to write the names, profession date, and the individual's profession verse on the inside cover.

Profession certificates for each person will likewise be prepared a month in advance by the secretary and Debbie Eggink and signed well in advance by the pastor and clerk. Upon completion they will be kept in the council room for the morning of the profession. If rolled up should have an identification sleeve.

The Sunday Service

Students will come to the council room 20 minutes before the service (9:40) to sit with council for prep and preservice prayer. The pastor and council should be there to welcome them and allow time to give a briefing on how the profession will happen, (ie. when participants will be asked to come up, where they will stand, what will happen while they are up there, explain who will be saying and doing what). This is all said in the council room so that if anything is missed or if anyone has a question, these things can be caught. It is also a good reminder for the pastor, so that nothing gets missed or forgotten. It further reassures the participants in knowing what to expect, reduce worry and help them focus on the event rather than wondering about the process.

After prayer in the council room the students will follow the serving elder and pastor up to the front of the church and sit in the order as requested by the pastor, typically alphabetically. This is done to help give the books and certificates out correctly.

At the appropriate time those doing profession will be asked to stand and face the congregation in the correct order while the explanation and profession questions are being read. The chairman of council is asked to come forward and assist the pastor with the certificates and devotionals at the same time. The pastor will call each participant by name. That person steps forward, then the pastor asks, "_(name)_, how do you respond? They then give their response into the microphone: "I do, God helping me."

The pastor gives a short blessing (example: we praise God for the Holy Spirit's work in your life. We would like to share with the congregation the verse that you have picked to remind you of your good profession..., etc.). Then the pastor or council chair reads their verse. The participant will then hand the mic to the next participant and walk over to the pastor to be congratulated and receive the certificate (which has been checked to be sure it is the right one). The participant will move on to the chairman to receive congratulations and the devotional books (again checked) as a gift from the congregation and then return to their place in the line. The process repeats itself until all participants have finished. The profession student(s) will be encouraged to share a word of thanks to the congregation and how God has been at work in their lives.

The pastor then makes a few closing remarks of praise to God for the work of the Holy Spirit, a blessing on the group, an encouragement to hold to the good confession just made, an explanation about the devotional that each participant has received, and a reminder to us all of how daily prayer and Bible reading are so important to growing as a Christian. He then directs the participants to their seats again. During this time the pastor can give instructions on how the congratulation line will work after the service. If one or more of the participant's chooses to say a few words or bring praise through song or music this can be done at this time. This will be followed by a song of praise from the congregation or a prayer of thanksgiving.

The rest of the service will progress as planned, perhaps with reference to profession in the sermon as well.

Resources

Appendix 1: Sample bulletin announcement for three Sundays in February

Appendix 2: Welcome letter to students, timeline and syllabus

Appendix 3: Letter to students explaining process of profession service

Appendix 4: Letter for elders and deacons (to accompany the student's profession letter)

Appendix 5: Large group interview questions (to be given to students on first day as well)

Appendix 1: Sample bulletin announcement for three Sundays in February

Profession of Faith Class: If God's grace in Christ is a reality for you, then professing your faith in him is a natural step and a valuable milestone! All members in grade 11 and older are invited to consider profession of faith, set for Pentecost Sunday, May 15. The profession class will be offered on four successive Wednesday evenings through mid-March and early April. Speak with your Elder or Pastor Daryl to confirm your place in the class.

Appendix 2: Welcome letter to students, timeline and syllabus

2016 Profession of Faith Class @ Ebenezer CRC

Welcome to the profession of faith class! Our heart over the next month is to give you a safe space to share question of faith in God and trust in Jesus Christ. The goal is to discover answers from God's word and be enriched by our stories of God at work in our lives. If God's grace is irresistible to you, then professing your faith in him is a natural step. It's a valuable milestone, but hopefully just one of many in your life-long walk with God!

Warmly, Pastor Daryl and the Council of Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church

Timeline and Syllabus

Our time together this Spring will follow the timetable below, with some flexibility for discussions that come up.

Date	Topics of Discussion	Homework
March 23 (7:30 – 9:15 pm)	Personal introductions: names, hobbies, why you're here, question(s) of faith, and what you pray/hope for God to do through our time together. Question 1: Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God sent to redeem the world, do you love him and trust him as the one who saves you from your sin, and do you with repentance and joy embrace him as Lord of your life? (from the Psalter hymnal form on p.964)	Begin your survey of the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed and Athanasian Creed
March 30 (7:30 – 9:15 pm)	Update on our week. Question 2: Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God revealing Christ and his redemption, and that the confessions of this church faithfully reflect this revelation?	Survey the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort (the "Three Forms of Unity"!)

April 6 (7:30 – 9:15 pm)	Update on our week. Question 3: Do you accept the gracious promises of God sealed to you in your baptism and do you affirm your union with Christ and his church which your baptism signifies?	Choose a ‘theme verse’ for your profession. Draft of your ‘Profession of faith letter’, a ½ to 1-page explanation of who God is to you and why he’s led you to accept his grace in Christ.
April 13 (7:30 – 9:15 pm)	Update on our week. Do you promise to do all you can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen your love and commitment to Christ by sharing faithfully in the life of the church, honouring and submitting to its authority; and do you join with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord everywhere?	Finalize your Profession of faith letter and print or e-mail it to Pastor Daryl: ddeklerk@JarvisEbenezer.ca
?April 20? (7:30 – 9pm)	Extra class if needed	

On Tuesday, April 26 (7:00 – 8:30pm) we’ll anticipate Profession of Faith by each of meeting with two elders from our church. We’ll each have individual conversations with two elders for 20 minutes. This is a great time for them to hear about your trust in the Lord. The conversations will happen in the classrooms downstairs (one classroom for each student with their two elders). These are also “getting to know each other” chats that include learning about *their* walk with God and *yours*, plus your knowledge of Reformed highlights. Then at 7:30 all of us will convene together in Youth Room for a large-group chat. This time is for about 45 minutes and includes questions for you to shine in about big themes in the Bible and your understanding of the Christian faith.

Finally, on Sunday, May 15 in the 10am worship service you’ll profess your faith! This is a highlight for many in our church, and hopefully you too! Feel free to invite friends or family to celebrate this milestone in your walk with the Lord. To God be the glory

Sincerely,

Pastor Daryl DeKlerk

Appendix 3: Letter to students explaining process of profession service

Dear (names of students),

Sunday, May 15 is Pentecost Sunday and your profession of faith (and/or baptism)!

Before the service please come to the Council room to cover any last-minute details and join us in the prayer for the service. Please be there by about 9:35. When we come into the service, you can sit together in the front pew. Please sit in the order above (alphabetical by last name) so that people who don't know you can learn your names.

After the service begins and we sing our opening song of praise, I will call ___ up first for baptism. I've written a separate explanation to her.

After her baptism I will call the rest of you to stand up on the platform. Just walk forward up the step and turn around so that you're in the same order. I'll read through the four profession questions (see below) and I'll have a cordless microphone for you to use as you each (individually) reply with. Please step forward and say, "I do, God helping me." After you say so, come over to the side where the chair of council and I will have a certificate and gift book for each of you from our church. We will read your theme verse and/or share a few kind words about you to make the occasion personal for you.

As we've talked about in class, each of you can also prepare a little something to say. You can use a music stand for this. I highly recommend writing it out to help guide your thoughts! You might know it well enough by Sunday morning that you don't need to read it, but at least writing it out will help you say what's most meaningful to you. It can be nerve-racking to speak in public, but our congregation LOVES you and they'll treasure anything you say! You might consider starting with a Bible verse ie. one that means a lot to you and why. It's also very special for people to hear in what ways you've been blessed by your family and/or our church family, or at least a thank-you!

Here are a few other ideas to get you thinking/talking about what profession of faith means to you:

- accepting God's unconditional love
- the joy of forgiveness of sin and being set free by Jesus.
- ways you've seen God's hand guiding your life
- sharing a challenge you came through by God's grace (keeping it brief)
- you name it!

After your profession please stay standing in the line. When the last person is done and the congregation has responded and we've said the Apostle's Creed, you may all sit together again in the front pew for the rest of the service (in the order you were), for singing... (a song of their choice).

Finally, after the service people will want to congratulate and encourage you, so stay at the front of the church and I'll let people know they can come by and give you their blessing!

God bless you,

Pastor Daryl and the Council of Ebenezer CRC

Profession of Faith Questions (from Psalter Hymnal, p.964)

Will you stand now, and in the presence of God and his people respond to the following questions:

- Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God sent to redeem the world, do you love and trust him as the one who saves you from your sin, and do you with repentance and joy embrace him as Lord of your life?
- Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God revealing Christ and his redemption, and that the confessions of this church faithfully reflect this revelation?
- Do you accept the gracious promises of God sealed to you in your baptism and do you affirm your union with Christ and his church which your baptism signifies?
- Do you promise to do all you can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen your love and commitment to Christ by sharing faithfully in the life of the church, honoring and submitting to its authority; and do you join with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord everywhere?

Answer: I do.

When everyone is finished and standing, I'll ask the congregation:

Pastor: How do we respond to their profession of faith?

Congregation: Thanks be to God! We promise you our love, encouragement, and prayers.

We'll also say the Apostle's Creed together.

Followed by congregation singing...

Appendix 4: Letter for elders and deacons (to accompany the student's profession letter)

2016 Profession of Faith Interviews

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” – Romans 10:9

Dear Elders and Deacons,

This time of year is wonderful for seeing God’s work in those who will profess their faith on May 15, DV. Below is a schedule of interviews to take place on Tuesday, April 26, 7:00 – 8:30pm. If that evening does not work for you, please consult a fellow elder or deacon to make a substitution and let your elder partner know (and me, Pastor Daryl). A copy of your student’s profession letter and their theme verse is attached.

The evening will begin with a 20-minute personal interview of each student by their elder, together with an elder or deacon partner. It’s best to start the interview by asking questions about their *personal faith journey* (ie. #1-5 below) and then progress to the *knowledge* questions (on the reverse)

1. Tell us about yourself: what are some of your hobbies, jobs or classes you like?
2. What were some of the first impressions you had of God? What milestones can you think of in your walk with God? What led you to see your need for God’s grace in Christ?
3. What helps grow your walk with God? (ie. devotions, prayer, worship, friends, mentors)
4. Why is your profession of faith verse special to you?
5. Other such *personal* questions... transitioning to ones about their *knowledge* (see reverse).

After the individual interviews we’ll meet as full Council with the students all together in the Youth Room (a place they’re familiar with and that we can all fit in). In that large-group context I will ask them a variety of questions on the *knowledge* side of their faith (see reverse), and you can ask anyone further questions then too. FYI, I will alternate between asking individuals and asking the whole group of them so that whoever feels comfortable can respond.

<u>Student</u>	<u>Elder (where possible)</u>	<u>Elder/Deacon Partner (where possible)</u>

Appendix 5: Large group interview questions (to be given to students on first day as well)

The following are questions we will have covered in our four classes together:

1. How do we come to know God?
2. Explain the Trinity.
3. What do you personally value about God the Father? God the Son? God the Holy Spirit?
4. What are some of the big themes of the Bible? (ie. Kingdom, covenant, God's grace)
5. What is sin and how did it begin?
6. Are you a sinner or a saint?
7. If God is so loving why couldn't he just ignore sin?
8. Who is Jesus to you?
9. What does it mean that Jesus Christ is both your Savior and your Lord?
10. What is the gospel?
11. What is faith?
12. What are some examples of covenants in the Bible?
13. What is biblical inspiration and why is it important?
14. What does it mean to say we believe in the authority of Scripture ahead of the creeds, confessions and tradition?
15. How does that answer differ from the Roman Catholic Church?
16. How can you explain differences in the Gospel events written in the first four NT books?
17. Identify the 3 Creeds and say a little bit about each one.
18. Where in the Bible would we go to find God's will for how we are to live?
19. What is prayer?
20. What are the Three Forms of Unity?
21. Can you recite Q & A 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism?
22. How is the Catechism divided and why is its order important?
23. What are the sacraments and how many do we have?
24. What does baptism remind us of and how?
25. Why infant baptism?
26. What is the difference between baptism and dedication?
27. If you moved and found a good church but they ask you to be rebaptized, what would you do?
28. How is profession of faith connected to your baptism?
29. What does the Lord's Supper teach us and how?
30. Would you be comfortable taking communion in a Roman Catholic Church?
31. What are the 'marks of the church'?
32. In your own words, describe what it means to have a Reformed identity – why is it unique?
33. What are the five 'alone's (or in Latin, 'sola's) of the Reformed tradition?

34. Can you explain the acronym 'TULIP'? (from the Canons of Dort)
35. What is the church and how do we become part of it?
36. What is the difference between the visible and the invisible church?
37. What does it mean when we say we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church?
38. What does it mean for you to be a member of the church (Lord's Day 21)?
39. Identify the offices of the church.
40. In our church order what are the assemblies of the church?
41. How many churches are there in Classis Hamilton and the Jarvis Ministerial?
42. If you want to see something change in church who should you talk to first?
43. What would you do if you began to weaken in your faith or have serious doubts?
44. What are the 'church visitors'?
45. What are ministry shares and what are they used for?
46. Name some of the ministries in the Christian Reformed Church.