



PRESBYTERY OF  
NEW COVENANT

**HANDBOOK  
FOR  
CLERKS OF SESSION**



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PRESBYTERY OF  
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## Introduction

# W

elcome to the office of Clerk of Session! You have joined a unique and important group of people in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The *Book of Order* mandates that each governing body of the PC(U.S.A.) have a moderator and a clerk<sup>1</sup>. Clerks of Presbyteries, Synods, and the General Assembly are called Stated Clerks. Those serving Sessions are called Clerks of Session or Clerks to Session. This depends on whether you are currently serving on Session or not.

As clerk, you will record a good deal of the history of your church as you write the session minutes. Future generations will learn what your church did to further Christ's mission in the world by reading the minutes you write. It follows then, that it is important that you keep accurate records of all the proceedings in session meetings and in congregational meetings.

This handbook has been prepared to provide Clerks of Session with information and examples to assist them in their work and to insure that they have easily accessible information about what must be included in the session record books.

This handbook has been prepared by drawing on information in the *Book of Order* and in various manuals for clerks of session throughout our denomination. Special appreciation is noted for the work of Elder John Bolt, former Stated Clerk for the Presbytery of West Virginia, and Teaching Elder Ken Hockenberry, Stated Clerk of Chicago Presbytery.

If you have any questions, or need assistance, please contact me at the presbytery office ([lhargrove@pbyofnewcovenant.org](mailto:lhargrove@pbyofnewcovenant.org)).

**Lynn R. Hargrove**

General Presbyter + Stated Clerk for Administrative Process



<sup>1</sup> G-3.0104 (*Book of Order*, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Part II, 2011/2013)

## The Office of the Clerk of/to Session

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he Clerk of Session shall be an elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine<sup>2</sup>. The clerk may be a member of the session, or may be an elder not currently serving. If the clerk is not a member of session, general privilege of voice **may** be given by session but s/he may not make motions or vote. Session may ask the clerk to be its parliamentarian and in all cases **shall** give the clerk voice in matters pertaining to the minutes and the clerk's report.

The person chosen to be clerk of session needs to be knowledgeable about session responsibilities, to have an understanding of Presbyterian polity, and be willing to learn basic parliamentary procedure. S/he must be able to write a clear record of the proceedings at session and congregational meetings and make those minutes available promptly following the meeting.

When the pastor or elders need a strong lay leader, the clerk of session is the “first among equals.” This responsibility flows to the clerk not because of any explicit statement in the *Book of Order*, but because the officer who receives the correspondence, keeps the records, and routinely discusses the work of the session with the pastor and all of the committee chairpersons to form the agenda and refer business, is the officer to whom they would take a problem. Presbyterian polity does not provide for any other lay officer to carry out these responsibilities.

In spite of the fact that the core functions of the clerk are secretarial, the session, in electing a clerk should seriously consider the qualifications needed to carry out the very significant “silent” functions of being the primary administrative officer of the congregation.

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<sup>2</sup> G-3.0104



## Responsibilities at a Glance

### Annually

1. Complete the annual statistical report (see Pages 24-26) requested by the General Assembly accurately and report to the PC(U.S.A.) by the deadline noted. Also, return other paperwork requested by the presbytery's stated clerk by the deadline noted (Supplemental Report, Members of Session form, Necrology Report).
2. Have your Session Records Reviewed with your fellow clerks, choosing a date and time from those set by the stated clerk of the presbytery. Bring your minutes since your last review. Include a copy of your Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation and your congregation's required policies (see G-3.0106).
3. Communicate dates and other information on Presbytery meetings to the Session so that ruling elder commissioners can be elected. Typically, the presbytery meetings are held on the third Saturday of March, July and November.

### Monthly

1. Send meeting notices by mail or email.
2. Contact committee chairpersons about unfinished and referred business.
3. Ask for recommendations to be in writing.
4. Develop the docket or agenda for the meeting with the moderator.
5. Record the minutes of each meeting. It is helpful to use a template with room to take notes and minutes. This should be a full and accurate record of the proceedings of the session (G-3.0204).
6. Keep the roll of session membership and attendance (G-3.0104). The session shall "provide by rule" the number present for a quorum. (G-3.0203)
7. Bring all official correspondence to the attention of session, and respond as directed by the session.

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8. Keep a list of unfinished business, including all matters referred to a committee or a staff member for later report to session, and remind the appropriate persons(s) if not reported expeditiously.
9. In consultation with the moderator, prepare a statement of highlights of session actions and reports following the meeting for information for the congregation (may be included in the next issue of the congregation's newsletter). Note: confidential matters should not be included.

Ongoing

1. Arrange for the careful preservation of session records (G-3.0104), making recommendation to the session for the permanent safe-keeping of its records (G-3.0107).
2. Furnish extracts from the minutes when required by another governing body of the church (G-3.0104).
3. Maintain and preserve rolls and registers required of session (G-3.0204a&b). (See Rolls and Registers, page 11.)
4. Be responsible for the preservation of the records of the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees (G-3.0107).
5. Be familiar with the responsibilities of the session as described in the *Book of Order* (G-3.0201).
6. Be prepared to respond to questions of parliamentary procedure in meetings if requested to be parliamentarian. (Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*, except in those cases where the *Book of Order* provides otherwise (G-3.0105). Copies of *Robert's Rules of Order* and the latest *Book of Order* should be available at meetings.)

As needed

1. Notify the session or congregation of special meetings, describing accurately the business that will be transacted. Congregations shall provide by their own rule for minimum notification requirements and give notice are regular services of worship prior to the meeting (G-1.0501 and G-1.0502).
2. Serve as secretary for meetings of the congregation (G-1.0505), seeing that the minutes are received by session and are inscribed in the permanent session minute book. It is helpful to have the congregation delegate to session the authority to approve minutes of the congregational meetings, but these minutes should be posted for the congregation to see.
3. Receive and submit communications from/to other governing bodies.
4. Notify the stated clerk of the presbytery of changes in the membership of session.
5. Assist the moderator in preparing the agenda for session meetings, as requested.
6. Assist in church officer training when requested.

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7. May moderate the congregational meeting, if requested by the moderator, during the pastor's salary review. If this occurs, a temporary clerk should be appointed.
8. Perform such other duties as may be assigned by the session or moderator.

**HELPFUL HINTS**

Written reports facilitate the meeting flow.

Meeting may be informal, but all actions must be approved.

Each member of session should receive a copy of the minutes soon after the meeting.



## Sample Session Docket/Agenda

Your Presbyterian Church  
Stated Session Meeting  
Month Date, Year

Call to Order, Declaration of Quorum and Opening Prayer

Approval of the Docket and the Minutes of the previous stated meeting

Communications

Clerk's Report

Session class of (year) was ordained and installed at the 11:00 am worship service on (Date): list their names

Lord's Supper was celebrated at the 11:00 am worship service on (dates)

Membership report – transfers, deaths, marriages, baptisms

Session Committee Reports

Action Items

Old and New Business

Spiritual and Pastoral Concerns

Motion for Adjournment and Closing Prayer

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The docket or agenda for a session meeting can be the responsibility of either the clerk or the moderator working together. In some instances, it is compiled by the church secretary. Input from the moderator and other members of session is invaluable. In the case of a pastoral vacancy, the moderator named by the presbytery often will rely on the clerk of session to formulate the docket.

Session dockets should be made available to session members prior to meetings so that the elders may be prepared to do the business of the church. Included in this information are the date, time, location, agenda or order of business, financial data, and other pertinent information as needed and available.

The value of a printed docket or agenda is three fold:

It provides for an orderly process in the handling of session business.

It informs the members of issues to be discussed.

It serves as a reminder of the necessary preparation for a meeting.

The clerk of session can take this opportunity to assist the moderator in handling administrative details and sharing in the ministry of the church.



## Guidelines for Session Minutes

Minutes of each session meeting shall (i.e., must include:

1. Whether the meeting is a regular or special meeting.
2. The name of the church, the place, date and time of the meeting.
3. The name of the moderator of the meeting.
4. The opening and closing of each meeting with prayer.
5. The roll, listing elders present, elders absent and any who are excused; the clerk, moderator and other staff present or excused; others present and their identity. (Please use first and last names.)
6. The affirmation of a quorum (G-3.0203). NEW: Sessions shall provide by rule for a quorum for meetings; such a quorum shall include the moderator and either a specific number of ruling elders or a specific percentage of those ruling elders in current service on the session.
7. The approval of the agenda. (In case of a special meeting, the call to the meeting stating the purpose becomes the agenda.)
8. The approval of the minutes of the previous meeting. (Any corrections of previous meeting minutes shall be listed, and then corrected in the prior meeting's minutes.)
9. Clerk's report: may include correspondence, announcements, and report of the serving of the Lord's Supper, in addition to listing of baptisms, marriages, changes in membership rolls.
10. Reports of pastor, other staff, the treasurer and committee chairpersons should be summarized in the minutes.
11. All motions and amendments, if any, and whether they passed or failed. (Details of discussion should not be recorded, except when needed to give a sense of the action.)
12. When a previous action of the session is referred to, the page on which it is recorded, or the date of the meeting at which it occurred, should be designated.



### Minutes shall include the following, when applicable:

13. Requests for marriage, baptism or funerals to occur in the church.
14. The administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper must be reported at the next succeeding regular meeting. When the sacrament has been administered to those unable to attend public worship, the name of the minister officiating and

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- the name of the elder or elders assisting should be noted. (This may be part of the clerk's report, the pastor's report or that of the worship committee.)
15. The administration of the Sacrament of Baptism must be reported at the next succeeding regular meeting, giving the full name of adults baptized including the maiden name of married women; the record of infants baptized, noting the name of the child, date of birth, and the names of the parents or the one rightly exercising parental responsibility (W-2.3014), and including the mother's maiden name. (This may be part of the clerk's report, the pastor's report or that of the appropriate committee.)
  16. The full name of applicants for church membership (in the case of married women, include maiden name) and the manner of their reception:
    1. by profession of faith, previously baptized
    2. by profession of faith and baptism
    3. by re-affirmation of faith
    4. by letter of transfer, giving the name of the church from which received
  17. The name of the church to which a certificate of transfer is granted and the full name of the person transferred with the date of transfer, together with names of baptized children, if applicable.
  18. Record (attach to minutes) the job descriptions for employed personnel, both clergy and non-clergy, as they are approved.
  19. Name of elders elected to be commissioners to meetings of the presbytery, and the exact period for which elected (G-3.0202(a.)).
  20. Record that commissioner(s) to the presbytery reported to session. The report may be summarized.
  21. When the session finds it necessary to exercise discipline, the "Form of Government" and the "Rules of Discipline" should be carefully studied by a committee of the session and if discipline be administered, the minutes of the session must contain such a record of the proceedings which will enable the Presbytery to know who was disciplined, why and how. It is most often advisable for session to ask the presbytery to take jurisdiction of any matter of church discipline.
  22. In case of a sale, mortgage, gift or lease of property, the session records must show:
    1. Name, address and legal description of the property
    2. Name of buyer/lessee
    3. Sale price
    4. Loan amount purpose and terms, including the name of the lender
    5. Lease terms and liability insurance
    6. Concurrence of Presbytery

**Be sure the following is included each year:**

1. Approve of the annual budget.
2. Approve of the distribution of the church's benevolences.
3. Record the annual review with each pastor of the adequacy of compensation.
4. Record the recommendation to be made to the congregation for changes in the terms of call for each pastor.
5. Note the annual review by the personnel committee (or other responsible body appointed by the session) of the adequacy of compensation of all paid staff.
6. Note whether new officers have received training and been examined (G-2.0402).
7. Report the ordination and/or installation of elders and deacons at the next succeeding meeting.
8. Report the recognition of trustees (if any) at the next succeeding meeting.
9. Report that property and liability insurance has been obtained (G-3.0112). (Insert photocopy of the church's certificate of insurance.
10. Record report of annual financial review or audit.
11. Record marriages, births, deaths.
12. Record election of clerk and treasurer.
13. Record annual review of church rolls and if anyone is moved to inactive or removed.
14. Report reception of new members; dismissal/transfer of members to other churches.
15. Record approval of curricula, teachers for the educational program.
16. Attach copy of Annual Statistical Report (to OGA) to minutes.



## Clerk's Annual Report

At the last meeting of each calendar year, please include the following in the Clerk's Report:

1. Record that job descriptions have been approved for all employed personnel, both clergy and non-clergy, and indicate by page number where the latest job description for each staff person is located in the minute book.
2. Record changes during the year in the Session, the Board of Deacons and the Trustees through death, resignation, or removal.
3. State the composition of the session with regard to racial ethnic members, women, men and age groups, and how this corresponds to the composition of the congregation. (This requirement may be fulfilled by photocopying the annual statistical report required by the General Assembly into the session records.)
4. If congregation has a Board of Deacons and/or Trustees, report in the minutes where their records are kept, and that they have been reviewed by session.
5. Include an Annual Narrative Report. (Moderator's annual report, or periodic reports to the session of ongoing church life will satisfy this request.)



## Nuts & Bolts of Session Minutes

The method of recording session minutes is somewhat dependent on local circumstances. The following is the suggested procedure used by the majority of churches:

1. Clerk takes notes for the minutes at meeting.
2. Clerk writes the minutes and types or arranges for them to be typed.
3. Clerk makes copies and distributes before the next meeting;
4. At the next meeting, the minutes are either approved as distributed or corrections are made and the corrections are noted in that meeting's minutes (as well as originals);
5. Clerk types or arranges for someone to type approved minutes in the session permanent minute book (these may be photocopied as long as archival quality paper is used);
6. If using a computer for minutes in the permanent minute book, a laser printer and archival quality paper must be used;
7. If you wish, 200-250 pages may be professionally bound into volumes. This can be done by the Presbyterian Department of History at a reasonable cost (215) 627-1852.
8. Do not use erasures, whiteout, strikethroughs or footnotes; or insert in the records separate sheets of paper with written or printed matter on them.
9. The records of each session meeting are to be duly attested (signed in ink) by the clerk. The records of congregational meetings are to be attested by the clerk AND the moderator.
10. The minutes of congregational meetings, the annual report of the church treasurer or treasurers, and the annual statistical report required by General Assembly are to be included with session minutes. These are to be typed or photocopied into the permanent record book.
11. Minutes should be interesting, with enough information so that future generations will know what happened in the church years before. The minutes play a role in recounting the history of the congregation, often retrievable in no other way.
12. The minutes of a meeting should never reflect the clerk's opinion, favorable or otherwise, on anything said or done.
13. Session minutes should be available to any member who asks.
14. It is recommended that a "church office copy" of session and congregational meeting minutes be kept in a notebook for handy reference. Typically this is not the set of minutes to be reviewed by presbytery.

**SESSION MEETING MINUTES MUST BE ATTESTED (SIGNED IN INK) BY THE CLERK.**

**Sample Minutes of Stated Session Meeting**  
**Your Presbyterian Church**  
**Month Day, Year**

The Session of Your Presbyterian Church held its Stated Meeting in the church library on (Month Day, Year) at (Time). The meeting was called to order by Moderator (Name), who declared a quorum was present and opened the meeting with prayer.

Attendance: Ruling Elders (name), Visitors (name), Moderator (name), Excused (name)

Docket: It was moved and seconded that the docket be approved. The motion was approved.

Minutes: It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the Stated Meeting of (date) be approved as written (corrected); motion approved.

Communication: *A letter was received from the Stated Clerk of the presbytery requesting the names of any elders or deacons who died in the past year for the presbytery's necrology report.*

Clerk's Report:

- Membership updates
- Deaths
- Weddings
- Baptisms
- Other information

Committee Reports: (indicate any actions taken)

Christian Education: *requested approval for the elementary students to use the "We Believe" curriculum in Sunday School. The motion was approved.*

Finance: *reported that pledges received exceed last year at this time.*

Worship: *requested approval for communion to be served at the church retreat at Mo-Ranch. The motion was approved.*

Property: *reported that bids for a new air conditioner are being received and be brought to the next meeting for approval.*

Old and New Business:

Report from commissioners to the presbytery meeting: *A & B attended the presbytery meeting held at First Presbyterian on (date). They recommended the keynote speaker, and were pleased to hear of the new worshipping communities in the presbytery.*

Financial Review Committee Report: *The chairperson of the Financial Review Committee reported that the 2013 financial records of the church have been reviewed by the committee. No discrepancies were found, and the following recommendations were made: \_\_\_\_\_.*

Spiritual and Pastoral Concerns:

*Requests for prayer were made for L&M and the birth of their baby; for M&E who are having marital difficulties; for P who lost his job and is seeking employment; for the teachers at the pre-school as the director just quit.*

Motion for Adjournment and Closing Prayer:

*There being no further business to come before the meeting, it was moved and seconded that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was approved. The meeting was closed at (time) with prayer led by (name).*

Respectfully submitted,

(Name)  
Clerk of Session

## Congregational Meetings

Congregational meetings may be called by the session, the presbytery, or by session by written request of one-fourth of the members of the congregation on the active roll. (G-1.0502) Your congregation's by-laws should include what constitutes a quorum. (G-1.0501) Proxy voting is not permitted in church meetings. We believe that the Holy Spirit guides us in our decision making, and one must be present in the room to be open to such guidance by the Spirit. Be prepared for a ballot vote if needed. Minutes of all congregational meetings shall be included in the session record book along with session minutes in chronological order.

Minutes of these meetings shall include:

1. Indication of whether the meeting is "regular" or "special."
2. If it is a "special meeting," the minutes shall include the call to the meeting, which will serve as the agenda.
3. Name of the church.
4. Date, time, and place of the meeting.
5. Name of the moderator or presiding officer.
6. Presence of a quorum.
7. Opening and closing of the meeting with prayer.
8. Record of all actions, whether adopted or lost.
9. When applicable, action by the congregation on any change in each pastor's compensation, with terms of call specified.
10. Minutes of the meeting of the congregation and corporation at which the annual financial reports are made should indicate, at least:
  - a. report of a full financial review of the financial records (G-10.0400d) (formerly referred to as "audit") (See Appendix)
  - b. a complete, itemized report of income and expenditures for the year
  - c. provide the complete, itemized proposed budget adopted by the session for the coming year
  - d. details of the status of loans from General Assembly, Synod, or Presbytery, if any are outstanding
11. If the congregation does not approve the minutes before adjournment, session may approve the minutes at its next scheduled meeting.

**CONGREGATIONAL MEETING MINUTES MUST BE ATTESTED (SIGNED IN INK) BY THE MODERATOR AND THE CLERK.**



**Sample Minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting****Your Presbyterian Church****Date**

The congregation of Your Presbyterian Church was called to meet on Sunday, (date), immediately following the 11:00 am worship service. The meeting was called to order by the Pastor/Moderator (name) who opened the meeting with prayer.

Clerk/Secretary: (name) was present and served as secretary. The clerk advised the moderator that a quorum was present. The moderator agreed. The clerk reminded everyone of the voting eligibility for this meeting.

Reading of the Call (for Special or Called Meeting) ... the call was found to be in order.

Approval of the Docket: The docket was found to be in order and approved by consent.

Members who join the Church Triumphant in the last year: The clerk read the names of the members who died. They are ... (names). The pastor offered a commemoration prayer.

Minutes of the Congregational Meeting(s) (for last year): The minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting of (date) and the Called Congregational Meeting of (date) were distributed. They have been reviewed and accepted by the Session as an accurate reflection of the actions taken at those meetings.

Review of the "Summary for (year)" and (year) Annual Report Supplement: The summary for (year) and the (year) Annual Report Supplement (with Minutes, Statistical and Financial reports) were distributed and discussed by the congregation. Copies of the full Annual Reports were made available in printed and/or electronic means, and upon request. Members asked questions about these reports.

Review of the Session Approved Church Budget for (year): The treasurer, (name), reviewed the (year) Church Budget which was approved by the Session on (date). Questions were asked, opportunity was offered for any member to make any budget recommendations to the Session for their consideration.

Approval of the Change in the Pastor's Terms of Call: The Session reviewed the Pastor's Terms of Call and made the following recommendation for changes:

	Past Year	Proposed Amount
Salary	\$ _____	\$ _____
Housing	\$ _____	\$ _____
Expenses	\$ _____	\$ _____
Board of Pensions	\$ _____	\$ _____

This change in the pastor's call represents a (number)% increase. The pastor spoke to these terms and left the room. The clerk assumed the chair. Discussion followed. The motion was approved. The pastor was welcomed back to the meeting with applause.

Congregational Nominating Committee: The Nominating Committee is comprised of two members from the Session, (one from the Deacons), and (number) from the congregation. The following persons were nominated to serve in the committee: (names). A motion was made to elect (names) to the Nominating Committee. The motion was approved.

Old/New Business: (note, if any)

Adjournment: There being no further business to come before the meeting, a motion was made and seconded to adjourn. The meeting closed at (time) with prayer by (name), and the singing of "Blessed Be the Tie that Binds".

Attest:

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Moderator

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Clerk/Secretary

## The Session's Relationship to Other Organizations

All organizations of the congregation are accountable to the session. All organizations should make a financial and programmatic report to session and the congregation annually.

### *G-3.0201 The Session: Composition and Responsibilities*

*... In light of this charge, the session has responsibility and power to:*

- b. Provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.*
- c. Provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received.*
- d. Nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ ... including directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation ...*

*G-3.0106 Each council shall develop a manual of administrative operations that will specify the form and guide the work of mission in that council. All councils shall adopt and implement the following policies: a sexual misconduct policy, a harassment policy, a child and youth protection policy and an anti-racism policy. Each council's policy shall include requirements for boundary training which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse prevention for its members at least every thirty-six months.*

### Board of Trustees: G-4.0101

*...The powers and duties of the trustees shall not infringe upon the powers and duties of the session or the board of deacons.*

### Board of Deacons or Individual Deacons: G-2.0202

*...Deacons may be individually commissioned or organized as a board of deacons. In either case, their ministry is under the supervision and authority of the session. Deacons may also be given special assignments in the congregation, such as caring for members in need ...*

### Nominating Committee: G-2.0401

The church nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not the session. It does not report to the session, although the committee may wish to consult with session, and provide updates on their progress to the session.

*...Ruling elders and deacons shall be nominated by a committee elected by the congregation, drawn from and representative of its membership. Congregations may provide by their own rule for a congregational nominating committee, provided that the committee shall consist of at least three active members of the congregation, and shall include at least one ruling elder who is currently serving on the session. The pastor shall serve ex officio and without vote ...*

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Pastor Nominating Committee (When there is a Pastoral Vacancy)

It is vital that the Session and any interim pastor work closely with the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery, through the assigned transition team to the church, and the General Presbyter. This is one of the most significant ways the presbytery serves the local congregation – in the procedures and process guidance of finding a new pastor.

*G-2.0801 Pastoral Vacancy*

*When a congregation has a vacancy in a pastoral position, or after the presbytery approves the effective date of the dissolution of an existing pastoral relationship, the congregation shall, with the guidance and permission of the presbytery, proceed to fill the vacancy in the following manner.*

*G-2.0802 Election of a Pastor Nominating Committee*

*The session shall call a congregational meeting to elect a pastor nominating committee that shall be representative of the whole congregation. The committee's duty shall be to nominate a pastor for election by the congregation ...*

The pastor nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not the session. The committee has several points of contact with the session and the presbytery:

- The pastor nominating committee develops the Ministry Discernment Profile (MDP) which includes the position description.
- The session and then the presbytery (through the Committee on Ministry) approve the MDP.
- The committee negotiates the salary of the new pastor in consultation with the session/board of trustees.
- The General Presbyter does a reference check on the final candidate(s) for the position.
- The committee requests session to call a congregational meeting when it is ready to bring a candidate.

Session and Personnel Committee: G-3.0102 Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction

[Councils, like the session] ... *They have the power to establish plans and rules for the worship, mission, government, and discipline of the church and to do those things necessary to the peace, purity, unity, and progress of the church under the will of Christ. They have responsibility for the leadership, guidance, and government of that portion of the church that is under their jurisdiction.*

The session supervises all ordained and non-ordained personnel, often through a Personnel Committee. The session recommends to the congregation the “Terms of Call” (salary, including housing, benefits, etc.) of all ordained personnel; the congregation approves these terms of call or any subsequent future changes in the terms of call annually. The terms of call must meet the minimum guidelines set by presbytery unless a waiver is granted.

It is recommended that the Personnel Committee for each church consist of a majority of session members, and several congregation “at large” members.

Outside organizations

Session controls the use of all church property, including granting permission for the sanctuary to be used for weddings. The purpose of an organization using the church should not be contrary to the mission of the congregation or the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is wise to have a written contract for all organizations using the church building, stipulating any rental fee, maintenance standards, and rooms of the church to be used.

**G-4.02 Church Property (summary)**

All leases for a period of 5 years or longer must be approved by the presbytery. Any sales contract for property owned by the congregation/church must be approved by the presbytery. Any contract to purchase property must be approved by the presbytery.

Whenever a congregation is formally dissolved by the presbytery, or has become extinct by reason of the dispersal of its members, the abandonment of its work, or other cause, such property as it may have shall be held, used, and applied for such uses, purposes, and trusts as the presbytery may direct, limit, and appoint, or such property may be sold or disposed of as the presbytery may direct, in conformity with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

## **Actions that must be approved by more than one council**

One of the hallmarks of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is its connectional system. There are a number of actions that require approval beyond the session. Among them are:

- Application to presbytery to take an inquirer under care of the presbytery: session, Committee of Preparation for Ministry, and presbytery.
- Loans that use the church or its property at collateral for a mortgage, and all sales of property: session and trustees, trustees of presbytery, and presbytery (ecclesiastical and corporate). These also require the initial approval of the congregation.
- All leases of church property for a period of more than five years: session, Finance Committee of presbytery, and the presbytery.
- All changes of church location or church name: session, congregation (ecclesiastical and corporate), Committee on Ministry (COM) of presbytery, and presbytery (ecclesiastical and corporate).
- All changes in the annual terms of call for the pastor: session recommendation, congregational approval, Committee on Ministry, and the presbytery.
- Dissolutions of pastoral calls and calls for new pastors: congregation, Committee on Ministry, and presbytery.
- Appointment of moderator of session, or temporary pastoral relationship: session, Committee on Ministry, and presbytery.
- Call for a special session meeting when requested by two members of the session in writing. (G-3.0203)
- Call for a special congregational meeting: session, or presbytery, or session when requested in writing by one-fourth of the active members of the congregation. (G-1.0502)
- Session meeting when a pastor is ill or out-of-town: pastor grants permission and appoints a member of presbytery as moderator pro tem. (G-3.0201)
- All waivers from the Book of Order terms of election (g-2.0404): congregation, Committee on Ministry, and presbytery.

## **Relations with Other Councils G-3.0202**

Sessions have a particular responsibility to participate in the life of the whole church through participation in other councils. It is of particular importance that sessions:

- Elect, as commissioners to presbytery, ruling elders from the congregation, preferably for at least a year, and receive their reports.
- Nominate to presbytery ruling elders from the congregation who may be considered as commissioners to synod and General Assembly, and to serve on committees or commissions of the same ...
- See that the guidance and communication of presbytery, synod, and General Assembly are considered, and that any binding actions are observed and carried out.
- Welcome representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits.
- Propose to the presbytery, or through it to the synod and General Assembly, such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church; and
- Send to presbytery and General Assembly requested statistics and other information according to the requirements of those bodies, as well s voluntary financial contributions.

# Rolls and Registers

## Rolls

**The Rolls of the church should contain information about those who are members of the local church.** It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to maintain, or to oversee the maintenance of the Rolls as required in G-3.0204a.

1. Names of members shall be placed upon, removed, or deleted from the rolls of the church only by order of the Session (G-3.0204a)
2. Session shall maintain the following membership rolls (G-1.04):

### Baptized Members (G.1.0401)

A **Baptized Member** is a person who has received the Sacrament of Baptism, whether in this congregation or elsewhere, and who has been enrolled as a baptized member by the session by who has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Such baptized members receive the pastoral care and instruction of the church, and may participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Record the name, date of baptism (if known), church where Sacrament of Baptism occurred. Names should be removed from this roll when profession of faith is made, or when the person moves from the community.

### Active Members (G-1.0402)

An **Active Member** is one who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into membership of the Church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of the particular church, and participates in the church's work and worship.

Record name, date received into membership, and method of reception. Record date of removal from the particular role and whether by death, transfer to another church, placed on inactive roll, or removed.

### Inactive Members (This category is no longer in the Book of Order)

You are not required to keep a roll of Inactive Members, but you may if you want. An **Inactive Member** is one who no longer participates in the church's work and worship.

Record name, date; indicate if inactive member is subsequently removed or reinstated with date of action. (See Appendix for additional information on roll review.)

### Affiliate Members (G-1.0403)

An **Affiliate Member** is a member of another congregation of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the congregation of active membership is situated. A certificate of good standing from the appropriate council or governing body of that congregation should be presented. The person will be received by the session as an Affiliate Member. An Affiliate



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Member is not eligible to be elected to ordered ministry or other office in the congregation, and does not have a vote in congregational meetings. An example of an affiliate member would be a college student living in your community while attending school.

Record name, date of affiliation, name of home church, date of renewal, date of return to home church.

Roll books usually provide double pages for a chronological roll by date of reception into membership with columns for name, how received, name of church from which member transferred if that is the manner of reception, date of deletion from the active roll and reason—by death, inactivity, or transfer, in which case the name of the church to which the member is transferring is listed.

Pages may be provided in the same binder for an alphabetical listing of members along with the membership number that is assigned in the chronological roll.

Pages also may be provided for Baptized, Affiliate and Inactive member rolls in the same binder.

Pages containing columns for the information requested may be obtained through Cokesbury, (800) 672-1789 or [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com)

## Registers

**Registers are historical records and need to be carefully maintained.** It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to maintain or oversee the maintenance of Registers as required in G-3.0204b. All information in the Register should be able to be cross-referenced to the minutes. Please do not erase, cross out, or use “white out”. Use the remarks section to make any changes.

According to the 2013/2015 Book of Order, there shall be registers of baptisms authorized by the session, of ruling elders and deacons, of installed pastors with dates of service, and such registers as the session may deem necessary. These are suggestions for information for the register:

### Baptisms

**Register of Infant and Adult Baptisms** shall include name, parents' names, and date of birth of those being baptized.

### Elders

**Register of Elders** shall include each elder's name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.

### Deacons

**Register of Deacons** shall include each deacon's name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.

### **Pastors**

**Register of Pastors** shall include the names of pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, assistant pastors, interim pastors, stated supplies, and parish associates serving the church, with dates of service.

Although no longer required by the Book of Order, you might want to keep a register of marriages. If so, here is suggested information:

### **Marriages**

**Register of Marriages** shall include marriages of members of the church, all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the church, and all marriages performed on church property.

**All registers may be kept in the same binder, or in the binder with the rolls. You may use the Westminster Binder, or simply use a loose-leaf notebook. Special pages for the Westminster Binder may be obtained through Cokesbury Book Stores (800) 672-1789 or [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com) .**

# Annual Statistical Report

## Introduction

The presbytery must make an annual report to the General Assembly,<sup>3</sup> which specifies the type of information it needs. Much of the information is gathered from local congregations by means of the "Session Annual Statistical Report."

The data entered need not be perfect. The information is used to keep track of trends and much is expected to be subjective. Both the total active membership and the financial data for recent years are available on the General Assembly's web site ([www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org)) for all churches that complete the Report.

Some of the information requested can be difficult to obtain accurately (such as ages of members) and some information related to the budget may be requested in different categories than your bookkeeper has used. The report form comes with a workbook, which provides explanations of each item and provides a place to do a draft before transferring the figures to an online form.

Suggestions are made here to try to make the process easier. As with most jobs, keeping up on a monthly basis rather than waiting until the end of the year makes it easier. In addition, keeping up makes the total time spent less.

The form is divided into two main parts: Membership and Finances. For this discussion, Membership will be considered in two parts: active members and other data.

In order to collect the data, it is suggested that it be done regularly (each month) rather than waiting until the end of the year.

One way is to keep a notebook with pages labeled for various categories and enter the information after each Session meeting. This could also be done using Excel or setting up a table in MSWord.

## Reporting Membership

The report gives the number of active members at the beginning of the reporting period.

Gains: Certificate gains are adults transferring their membership from another church. Youth Professions of Faith are typically those completing a confirmation class who are under the age of 17. Profession of faith (18 and older) or reaffirmation of faith are those who join the congregation who are not included in the first two categories.

Losses: Certificate would be those who transferred to another church. Death seems obvious. Deleted from the Roll for any other reason, which would include those who have been temporarily excluded or removed from active membership under a disciplinary process (D-10.0300), which is rare within a congregation.

Ending Active Membership is the total of gains and losses compared to the beginning membership.

## Congregational Life

These data includes:

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<sup>3</sup> G-3.0302e

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Baptisms – Infant/Children presented by others, at confirmation, adults

Weekly average worship attendance

Friends of the congregation – those who participate regularly but have not joined

Number of Ruling Elders on Session

Do you have Deacons?

Gender distribution – women, men, non-binary/genderqueer

Age distribution of members – 6 categories

Youth in the Congregation – 4 categories (Pre-school, Elementary, Middle and High School)

## **Disability and Racial Composition**

Number of persons with disabilities (Hearing, Mobility, Sight, and other)

Racial ethnic composition of congregation

**NOTE:** If you are using some sort of computer membership system such as PowerChurch Plus or Ease, it is possible to keep track of some of these items through the proper use of the system. Years of birth of all members may not be known so you will need to make educated guesses in order to determine age distribution.

Look at the workbook for the definition of a person with a disability. This is not the usual definition. The definition is that the disability "substantially limits participation" but the application of the definition is left to you. Just as in age distribution, use of personal knowledge is expected to be applied rather than a formal survey. Data collected with such a vague definition cannot be worth very much so don't worry about this too much; just do your best. A person in a wheel chair may not be "substantially limited". That person can't help set up tables for a church dinner but neither can the 95-year-old who lives alone and drives to church each week and serves on a church committee. Both of these describe persons in one church who would not consider themselves "substantially limited".

## **Financial Data (in whole dollars)**

The financial reporting is broken down into broad categories. The most important is the estimate of budgeted income and expenses. Note that the values to be reported are for the whole congregation. If there are several accounts in the main finances, all must be included. If groups within the church maintain their own accounts (such as Presbyterian Women, Building Fund, and so forth), all of these should be included if their finances are substantial. If these group's monies are small, they can be ignored as long as you do this consistently over the years. The financial reporting is really looking for trends.

**Per Capita Apportionment Payments:** Many presbyteries and synods have a per capita apportionment to be used for ecclesiastical expenses. Presbytery of New Covenant and Synod of the Sun do not. This does not mean that per capita is not important. This is figured based on the number of church members multiplied by a figure provided by General Assembly. In 2025, the figure is \$10.84. This can be remitted through the presbytery to the General Assembly.

## Other Information

**Annual Review of Terms of Call:** Each year the Session is required by the Book of Order (G-2.0804) to review the adequacy of the salaries of all pastoral staff. If session wishes to make any change in the terms of call as they were last approved by presbytery, the changes must be brought to the congregation for approval, contingent upon the approval of presbytery that, finally, approves terms of call and all changes in terms of call. As soon as the congregation has approved new terms of call for its pastor(s), the terms of call forms must be returned to the Committee on Ministry for recommendation to the presbytery. These forms are available on the presbytery's website [www.pbyofnewcovenant.org](http://www.pbyofnewcovenant.org) under "Our Filing Cabinet" under the "Resources" tab.

**Minimum Compensation for Pastors:** The presbytery adopts minimum terms of call for all installed pastors. These terms are reviewed and updated annually. All terms of call must meet this minimum standard for presbytery to approve the call. This information is available on the presbytery's website (see above).

## Ruling Elder Commissioners to Presbytery

Presbyterian polity is representative. It works when each church takes seriously its responsibility to elect ruling elder commissioners who attend the meetings, stay through the end of the meeting, and report to session. Presbytery of New Covenant holds three regular presbytery meetings a year. The dates and times are published annually and are available on the presbytery's website, [www.pbyofnewcovenant.org](http://www.pbyofnewcovenant.org) under the tab "Presbytery Meetings".

Each session is responsible for electing ruling elder commissioners to presbytery. The number of commissioners depends on the size of the congregation. The number of ruling elders to which a congregation is entitled also varies according to the presbytery's Parity Plan. The Book of Order (G-3.0301) states that "the presbytery shall adopt and communicate to the sessions a plan for determining how many ruling elders each session should elect as commissioners to presbytery, with a goal of numerical parity of teaching and ruling elders. This plan shall require each session to elect at least one commissioner and shall take into consideration the size of congregations as well as a method to fulfill the principles of participation and representation ..."

The docket and meeting packet are distributed prior to the meeting. This information should be given to the commissioners so that they can access the meeting materials, which can also be distributed to members of the congregation, as appropriate.

Commissioners are asked to report to session about the meeting, including significant actions taken by the presbytery; a summary of issues deliberated upon; policy decisions made; implications of presbytery actions for the congregation; concerns and opportunities open to the congregation through presbytery; and any other matter which will help with the congregation's participation in the total ministry of Jesus Christ.

“Presbyterian Postlude” is published after each meeting, and can be helpful in this report.

Session members, including presbytery commissioners, should bear in mind the opportunities and need for nominations to presbytery committees. We are committed to finding Presbyterians with skills and interests in serving on a presbytery committee, and welcome your suggestions. We strive for inclusion so that all voices are represented at the table. Please share the gifts of your congregation with the presbytery.

## Writing A Manual of Operations

One of the changes under the New Form of Government (nFOG) was the requirement for each council to develop a manual of administrative operation that specifies the form and guide the work of mission in that council (G-3.0106). Prior to the Book of Order 2011/2013, this was required of those entities above the session. It now includes the session which is considered to be a council of the church.

A manual of operation differs from the church by-laws. Since it falls under the session, it does not need congregational approval, although input from congregation members in its writing might be helpful. Its purpose is to provide guidelines for how the structures of the congregation operate, especially in light of their Mission and Vision statements.

Introductory paragraphs might include a general description of the work of the congregation through the various committees/ministry teams (which would include the session). It could include a line saying, “The contents remain flexible allowing amendments and additions to be made as recommended by the committees and approved by the session.” How the details of the committee work are defined are up to the session.

A manual that uses more “guidelines” than hard and fast “rules” often makes it easier for the work of the church to be accomplished, and to become more “permission giving.” Using the word “ordinarily” instead of the word “shall” assists in that effort.

Committee/Ministry Team (C/MT) structure could include its membership composition (how many members, terms of service), and skills and abilities that are helpful in its work. It could address how meetings are convened – how often, face to face or electronically. It could outline how committee members are assigned tasks and how reporting is done. The tasks or functions of the C/MT could be included, whether written generally or specifically. A C/MT could be able to set up task groups as needed without having to revise the manual of operations.

Use of the property might be addressed. This could include the use by outside groups, who is responsible for maintenance and clean up, any costs for using the facility. Wedding and/or funeral policies could be included.

The manual of administrative operations should be the reference that answers questions about how we do things in this congregation. Each manual will be as unique as each congregation. Writing a manual of operations will help define the policies, procedures and practices of a congregation and to discern what is working and what might need to change. A question to ask is, “What do we need to do to do the work we are called to do?”

## **Sexual Misconduct Policy**

The Book of Order 2011/2013 contained a new directive for all councils of the church which was to “adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy” (G3.0106). Many have wondered how this differs from a “Child Protection Policy.” A sexual misconduct policy is broader in order to protect the whole congregation, and those outside as we engage our communities to make disciples.

Having a sexual misconduct policy gives people language and a framework for discussing these types of issues as an abuse of power. Recognizing that power is given by individuals and communities gives us a greater responsibility to ensure that no one is being abused or mistreated. A sexual misconduct policy helps us to set up appropriate boundaries in our ministry – defining appropriate friendships, counseling limitations, and the complexities of communication technology. No one on the church staff or in a position of leadership is exempt, nor should be the members of the congregation.

The sexual misconduct policy should include the basic principles of conduct and definitions of inappropriate behavior. Sexual misconduct can include sexual abuse including that with children, as well as sexual harassment.

How the church will respond to allegations of sexual misconduct would include reporting requirements as well as the response process. Prevention and risk management should be addressed in the policy, including issues of liability and insurance as well as employment practices.

Education and training is another area to include in the policy, in order to raise awareness of this problem. This could include the requirement for ministers, volunteers, elders, deacons, and staff to be trained, as well as how often.

Another area to consider is how to meet the needs of all involved – the victim, the accused, their families, as well as the congregation. The needs of each will be different, but should be fair and compassionate.

The Presbytery of New Covenant adopted their policy in June of 2011. It is available on our website, [www.pbyofnewcovenant.org](http://www.pbyofnewcovenant.org). It can be used as a model for the policy for your congregation.

## **Anti-Racism/Harassment Policies + Boundaries Training**

The Book of Order 2023/2025 contained a new directive that all councils of the church adopt two new policies, Anti-Racism as well as a Harassment policy. This provision also required boundaries training which includes the topics of sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse prevention training for its members at least every thirty-six months.



# Appendix

## I. A Full Financial Review Defined

The “Form of Government” of the Presbyterian Church requires the following:

*“A full financial review of all financial books and records shall be conducted every year by a public accountant or committee of members versed in accounting procedures. Reviewers should not be related to the treasurer(s). Terminology in this section is meant to provide general guidance and is not intended to require or not require specific audit procedures or practices as understood within the professional accounting community.” (G-3.0113)*

Therefore, a financial review is required for every church organization or group which has a treasury, and which receives and disburses funds. Groups within the local church whose financial transactions must be reviewed might include the General Operating Fund, Benevolence Fund, Memorial Fund, Wills and Endowments, Board of Deacons, Board of Trustees, Building/Maintenance Fund, Choir, Youth, Church School, Presbyterian Women etc. This review benefits the treasurers, the contributors and those who benefit from expenditures ... giving assurance that donations are used as the donor intended, for the benefit of the specific group, and as a witness to the Lordship of Christ.

The persons making the full financial review do not need to be C.P.A.'s, but there should be some understanding of accounting procedures. Look for persons who have been Trustees or who have some experience in business accounting. Remember that those doing the financial review must not be related to the Treasurer(s).

To be available for review are financial ledgers, records of all forms of income, deposit slips and bank account records, withdrawal slips and canceled checks, authorization of payments, copies of invoices and expense vouchers, and a balance sheet. Financial records from relatively small groups would require less validation; but it is important that each report a *Beginning Balance, Income, Expenses, and a Closing Balance*.

Unless a congregation and its income/expenses are very large, it is not necessary to have a professional audit made. A full financial review implies that the financial review committee has checked through the records, has spot-checked those records and (hopefully) has approved them, and (if helpful) has made suggestions for improvement to the Treasurer or Finance Committee. **The report of the financial review committee must be approved by the Session, Trustees or whichever body has created the committee, and this approval must be recorded in the official minutes of that body.**

This report may be a simple statement such as: *“We have reviewed the financial statements of the various Funds of \_\_\_\_\_ Church and affiliated organizations for the year ending December 31, \_\_\_\_\_, as set forth in the \_\_\_\_\_ Annual Report of \_\_\_\_\_ Church. During the course of our review, nothing came to our attention that would require modification of these financial statements.”*

## II. Review the Active Roll of the Church (G-3.0201c)

### A Resource for Clerks of Session in the Presbytery of New Covenant 2013/2015

Reviewing the church rolls is an annual responsibility of session. Under the current Book of Order, a person may be deleted from the active roll when s/he has ceased to participate actively in the work and worship of the congregation for a period of two years. The session shall seek to restore members to active participation and shall provide written notice before deleting names due to member inactivity.

A session may ask the clerk to bring recommendations to them of those who may be considered inactive; or may ask a committee to conduct the review and bring recommendations to the session for action.

Before any member is removed from the active roll, it is incumbent upon session to exhaust all possible avenues of inquiry and pastoral care.

Ordinarily, a person is considered potentially “inactive” if there is no evident support of the church (time, talent, treasure) for a period of two calendar years. While no longer required, a session may want to keep an “Inactive Roll”.

#### **Here are some helpful hints:**

1. In a large church the rolls might be divided so that a portion is reviewed each quarter, or month.
2. Active Members who do not meet the session’s definition of participating in the work and worship of the congregation **MUST** be contacted and encouraged to resume active participation. A visit or phone call **by an elder** (not the pastor) is the best way of doing this. Alternately, the clerk may write a letter to such persons. This contact should
  - a. offer to discuss any difficulties;
  - b. invite resumed participation in the work and worship of the congregation;
  - c. offer to assist them in finding a new church home, and
  - d. be sure they realize that failing to respond to this contact within a specifically set period of time (set by session) will result in removal from the Active roll or transfer to the Inactive Roll (loss of voting privilege or right to hold office).
  - e. assure them that at any future date they can be restored to the Active Roll by making that request to Session.
3. It is recommended that names never be physically deleted, rather applicable notations be made next to names.
4. At all times, anyone, regardless of membership status, should be welcome at worship and communion.

5. A member does not have to be returned to the Active Roll in order to transfer the membership to another church. It is a courtesy to the requesting church to indicate that the person(s) have not been active, but not necessary.

## Following are two sample letters to potentially inactive members – one for those still living in town; one for those who have relocated.

### Letter to those who have relocated:

#### CHURCH LETTERHEAD

Date

(inside address)

The Session of [name] Presbyterian Church is in the process of fulfilling its responsibilities as defined in the **BOOK OF ORDER**, Paragraph G 3.0201c, which states: *"The Session shall review the roll of members at least annually."* Since your move to \_\_\_\_\_, we hope that you have found a new community of faith near home. If, in fact, you have become members of another church, please advise us of the name of that church, so that we might note it in our Church Register.

If you have not yet sought a local church, the Session would like to encourage you to seek the fellowship, support, and spiritual nurture of a faith community. We would be glad help find another church if that is your desire.

Please let me hear from you. You may e-mail me at \_\_\_\_\_, or return the bottom portion of this letter to me in care of the church, marked appropriately. If I have not heard from you by December 31 (concerning your wishes), your name(s) will be placed on our Inactive Roll. At a later date, should you desire to be restored to the Active Roll or transfer your membership to another church, we will be delighted to facilitate your active membership.

Please know that you will continue to be in our thoughts and prayers, and we particularly wish you a blessed Christmas and a joy-filled New Year.

Sincerely yours,

[your name]  
Clerk of Session

-----  
**Please complete as appropriate, and return to [name of church] at the above address.**

\_\_\_\_\_ has/have joined another church.

Name of Member(s)

Church name: \_\_\_\_\_

Church address: \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to speak to **the Pastor**, or **an Elder** concerning this matter. (Circle one, if applicable)

**Letter to those still living locally.**

**CHURCH LETTERHEAD**

Date

(inside address)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

The Session of [name of your] Presbyterian Church is in the process of fulfilling its responsibilities as defined in the BOOK OF ORDER, Paragraph G-3.0201c, which states: *"The Session shall review the roll of members at least annually."* We have missed you during the past year and wonder if you have become involved in another community of faith. If so, we can transfer your membership to that church.

It may be possible, however, that you have not become active in another church. The Session would like to encourage you to return to active participation in the ministry of our church, or to seek the fellowship, support, and spiritual nurture of another community of faith. If there is something I, or another member of Session, or our Pastor can do to facilitate your active participation in a Christian ministry, whether at [name of church] or another church, please do not hesitate to let us know. You can reach me by e-mail \_\_\_\_\_ or at home ( ). The Pastor may be reached at the church office.

Please let me hear from you, either by e-mail, phone call or returning the bottom portion of this letter, marked appropriately. If, however, we have not heard from you by December 31, your name will be moved to the Inactive Roll. At a later date, should you desire to be restored to the Active Roll, or to transfer your membership to another church, we will be delighted to see that your request is honored.

Please know that you and your family will continue to be in our thoughts and prayers, and we pray that you and yours have a blessed Christmas holiday season and joy-filled new Year.

Sincerely yours,

[your name]  
Clerk of Session

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**Please complete as appropriately, and return to [your] Church at the address above.**

\_\_\_\_\_ has/have joined another church.  
Name of Member(s)

Church  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Church Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to speak to **the Pastor** or **an Elder** concerning this matter. (Circle one, if applicable.)

### III. HOW WELL DO WE KNOW OUR *CONSTITUTION*?

Fill in the blank, or circle the letter for the correct answer.

1. The *Constitution* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) consists of two parts; they are:  
Part I: \_\_\_\_\_ Part II: \_\_\_\_\_
2. "...The church is a community of people known by its ...
  - a. membership size.
  - b. building and grounds.
  - c. historical documents.
  - d. convictions and actions. (F-2.01)
3. The elected leaders who govern the Presbyterian Church are called
  - a. Bishops.
  - b. Priests.
  - c. Clergy.
  - d. Presbyters.
  - e. None of the above. (F-3.0202)
4. (T) or (F) When session, presbytery, synod or the General Assembly votes, those voting must reflect the will of their constituencies. (F-3.0204)
5. Session must meet
  - a. at least quarterly.
  - b. at least monthly.
  - c. at least twice a year.
  - d. at least once a year. (G-3.0203)
6. According to the Book of Order, when does the moderator vote in a congregational meeting?
  - a. to break a tie.
  - b. to dissolve the terms of call.
  - c. to decide matters of special importance.
  - d. never. (find the citation ...)
7. (T) or (F) An person who is not baptized may join the church in a private ceremony with friends and family present. (G-1.0301 and G-1.0301a)
8. Meetings of the congregation shall include approval of
  - a. the annual budget.
  - b. matters related to changes in the sanctuary.
  - c. matters related to fund raising.
  - d. matters related to the calling of a pastor or pastors. (G-1.0503)
9. The two officers required of a governing body are
  - a. an executive and a treasurer.
  - b. an executive and a clerk.
  - c. a moderator and a vice-moderator.
  - d. a clerk and a moderator.
  - e. none of the above. (G-3.0104)
10. An associate pastor is related to the session
  - a. strictly as an observer, without voice or vote.
  - b. an observer with voice.
  - c. a member with voice.
  - d. a member with voice and vote. (G-3.0201)

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11. A candidate for ministry is ordinarily ordained
  - a. by the presbytery of care.
  - b. by the calling presbytery.
  - c. by the calling presbytery jointly with a commission of the presbytery of care.
  - d. by the presbytery selected by the candidate. (G-2.0702)
12. The installed pastoral relations to which candidates may now be called are
  - a. pastor, associate pastor.
  - b. pastor, associate pastor, assistant pastor.
  - c. co-pastor, pastor, associate pastor.
  - d. co-pastor, pastor, associate pastor, assistant pastor. (G-2.0504a)
13. The pastoral relationship between a pastor and a church is dissolved by
  - a. the congregation.
  - b. the session.
  - c. the presbytery.
  - d. the chairperson of the Committee on Ministry. (G-2.0901)
14. (T) or (F) Ordained ministers serving churches are members of those churches. (G-3.0306)
15. (T) or (F) Pastors in local churches serve on session and the privilege of voice and vote. (G-3.0201)
16. The session has the responsibility and power to
  - a. develop and supervise the church school and the educational program of the church.
  - b. to challenge the people of God with the privilege of responsible Christian stewardship.
  - c. to lead the congregation continually to discover what God is doing in the world and to plan for change, renewal, and reformation under the Word of God.
  - d. to serve in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.
  - e. none of the above.
  - f. all of the above. (G-3.0201)
17. The session shall
  - a. hold stated meetings at least monthly.
  - b. review and approve the nominees for officers of the particular church.
  - c. review the pastor's sermons.
  - d. keep a complete register of marriages. (G-3.02)
18. The congregation shall
  - a. approve the annual budget.
  - b. review the adequacy of the pastor's compensation.
  - c. determine the mission of the particular church.
  - d. elect an assistant pastor. (G-1.0503)
19. Who sets the quorum for a stated session meeting?
  - a. set by the presbytery.
  - b. set by the pastor.
  - c. set by the session.
  - d. one third of the members (plus moderator). (G-3.0203)
20. All property held by or for a particular church is held in trust for the use and benefit of
  - a. the presbytery.
  - b. the synod.
  - c. the General Assembly.
  - d. the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). (G-4.0203)

## IV. Elders as spiritual leaders

(originally published in 2007 in [Presbyterians Today](#))

By Stephany Jackson and Tammy Wiens



Illustration by Pat Hilliard

Patti Kauffman said “yes” to the call to serve as an elder because she thought her skills in administration would be an asset to her church — Beth Salem Presbyterian in Columbus, Ga.

“I thought that all I had to do was take notes, type up the minutes and send them to the presbytery office,” she says. “I knew that we had some challenges before us, but I had no idea that the presbytery was considering closing the church.”

The truth of the matter was, the church had no lights, the men’s bathroom was inoperative and the roof was in need of repair. Members of Beth Salem had said goodbye to their pastor because they could no longer afford his salary, and they were six months behind on mortgage payments. The situation looked hopeless, but the members of Beth Salem refused to give up. They looked to the session for direction.

Kauffman soon realized that administrative skills alone were not going to be enough. As clerk of session, she began calling the other elders together for regular prayer and Bible study.

“We all knew that we would have to do more than we felt capable of doing,” she says, “and the only way we were going to survive was to rely totally on God.

“We asked God to give us a mission and God answered our prayers,” she continues. “The presbytery has reinvested in our ministry. We have formed mission partnerships throughout the community. A new sense of energy has been generated in the congregation. The lights are back on, the roof is fixed and the bathroom has been repaired.”

With God’s help, Kauffman says, she has even preached twice — “something I never thought I would do.”

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**More than budgets, buildings**

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Like Kauffman, many Presbyterians say “yes” to becoming an elder, thinking it means hammering out a budget once a year, attending a few meetings, counting the offering and making sure the church gets locked up after everyone leaves. The call to serve as elder, however, is a call to serve the spiritual as well as administrative needs of God’s people.

It’s a call to build up the body of Christ, which means much more than planning for building repairs or making budget adjustments. It means ensuring that the members of the body have the opportunity to be engaged in the type of ministry and mission that will help them achieve spiritual maturity.

Elders are called to be spiritual leaders, strengthening and nurturing the faith and life of the congregation committed to their charge. In the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) elders are instructed to engage members in the mission of the church and to provide opportunities for evangelism, pastoral care, worship, education and stewardship (*Book of Order*, G-10.0100). Consider the spiritual vitality that might blossom within congregations if elders would give as much time and attention to providing models for discipleship and evangelism as they give to governance and discipline.

Today the PC(USA) and other mainline congregations stand at a crossroads. Throughout the church and society there is a desire for radically committed and faithful leadership. People are searching for congregations with leaders who both instruct and inspire, and who are willing to lead by example.

Elders lead by example as they regularly attend Bible study, Sunday school or weekly prayer services. They should be equipped to interpret and support the church’s vision. When the need for additional training arises, the elders should be the first to receive it in order to provide new leadership.

**Elders in the Bible**

The Bible portrays various forms of church government, or polity, among the earliest Christians. There are virtues as well as limitations to every human form of government. While Presbyterian polity is not the only one suggested by biblical patterns, it does have strong biblical roots.

In the first five books of the Bible elders are always mentioned in connection with Moses. In Exodus 3:16–18 God directs Moses to “assemble the elders” and lay out a plan that would free the Israelites after years of bondage. Numbers 11 says elders were chosen after Moses complained to God that he needed help leading the people. The role of the elder takes various forms throughout the Old Testament. Elders are responsible for carrying out legislative and administrative functions. They also are responsible for leading the community by teaching and living out models of obedience to the law (see Exodus 19:7–8; Deuteronomy 27:1, 31:9, 32:7).

In the New Testament, God calls to leadership wise, dedicated and mature persons of faith. All members of Christ’s body, the church, are endowed with unique gifts for the purpose of service. “Elder” can refer to one who shares in corporate leadership for a cluster of Christian assemblies or churches (see Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1–2), or to one who has leadership



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over a particular congregation (see Titus 1:5–7). The term does not so much confer a title as describe a function or role in the community.

Ephesians 4:11–13 lists some of the ministries to which church leaders are called: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (see also 1 Corinthians 12:27–31). All of these ministries exist for the purpose of equipping the saints, members of the congregation, for Christ's mission. When people joyfully engage in the work of ministry, the body of Christ is strengthened and the church matures to take on the character of Christ.

**A Presbyterian asset**

Elders are called to exercise leadership, government and discipline (*Book of Order*, G-60302). In the Presbyterian Church congregations share a common polity that ensures due process when disputes arise, and promotes equality for all persons. It provides a way of living together in which the concerns and suggestions of all members are taken seriously. It also helps assure members that finances are managed responsibly and mission is carried out faithfully.

This form of government is one of our denomination's assets. It can even serve as an evangelistic strength, attracting people who have become discouraged by poorly managed religious institutions or independent congregations.

One of the questions that elders are asked before they are ordained is, "Will you be a faithful elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture and service?" The mission that Christ has set before elders requires a constant process of dying to the old self and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Only when elders engage in transformation in their own lives, can they lead others through the process.

This is not something anyone can do on his or her own. All church leaders need the love and support received through regularly engaging in spiritual practices with others. When elders take care of their own spiritual well-being, they are better equipped to model the type of spiritual growth and maturity that will inspire and enable other members of the congregation.

*At the time that this article was written Stephany Jackson was associate for congregational leadership and Tammy Wiens was associate for spiritual formation in the Theology Worship and Education office of the PC(USA)'s General Assembly Mission Council. Since 2024, a Unification Commission is working to bring the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly together.*

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**It's Greek to me**    *A glossary***In the New Testament**

Both of the following terms are used interchangeably to refer to "elders":

- *presbuteros*—Greek word for elder, from which we derive the English word presbyter
- *episkopos*—Greek word for overseer, from which we derive the English word episcopal, meaning bishop-led

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The role of elder has its roots in the early church, but various church traditions have come to define the role in different ways. The following terms are used in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and some other churches in the Reformed tradition:

- elders—elected members who are ordained to serve as the governing body (session) of a particular congregation
  - presbyters—both elders and ministers together
  - presbytery—a group of congregations in one geographic region
  - ruling elders—members of a church session
  - teaching elders—ministers
- 

**The Order of Elders**

This program provided by the PC(U.S.A.)’s Theology Worship and Education ministry helps Presbyterian elders find mutual support and encouragement. Members of The Order of Elders receive resources to guide their Scripture reading, prayer and study. Elders benefit from engaging in these spiritual practices along with others across the church. The Order welcomes individual members, but encourages sessions to sign on collectively so that there is a built-in local community to support their discipline. The Order of Elders is open to anyone ordained to the office of elder, whether or not he or she is currently serving on session. Those participating in The Order say it helps them take seriously their intention to nurture a regular rhythm of personal study and prayer.

## V. Other Helpful Resources

Book of Confessions, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I

<https://www.pcusastore.com/AdvancedSearch/DefaultWFilter.aspx?SearchTerm=book+of+confessions>

Book of Order, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, 2023/2025) (*Note: A new edition is published every two years to reflect any changes resulting from presbytery votes following General Assemblies. It is usually available by September.*)

<https://www.pcusastore.com/AdvancedSearch/DefaultWFilter.aspx?SearchTerm=book+of+order+2025-2027>

A Guide to Parliamentary Procedure; by Greg Goodwiller; 2022

[https://www.pcusa.org/sites/default/files/pcusa\\_guide\\_parliamentary\\_procedure\\_2nd\\_edition\\_2022.pdf](https://www.pcusa.org/sites/default/files/pcusa_guide_parliamentary_procedure_2nd_edition_2022.pdf)

Companion to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); by Frank A. Beattie, © 1999, updated by the Office of the General Assembly 2007

<https://www.pcusastore.com/Products/066450146X/companion-to-the-constitution.aspx>

Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition; © 2020. <https://robertsrules.com/>

Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised In Brief, Third Edition; © 2020.

<https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/roberts-rules-of-order-cheat-sheet/>  
[https://assembly.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/roberts\\_rules\\_simplified.pdf](https://assembly.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/roberts_rules_simplified.pdf)

## VI. Helpful People

Lynn R. Hargrove, General Presbyter + Stated Clerk for Administrative Process  
Presbytery of New Covenant:

[lhargrove@pbyofnewcovenant.org](mailto:lhargrove@pbyofnewcovenant.org) (ext. 210)

John Lemen, Stated Clerk for Judicial Process

[jlemen@pbyofnewcovenant.org](mailto:jlemen@pbyofnewcovenant.org)

Charlie Leibold, Director of Business Affairs and Finance

[cleibold@pbyofnewcovenant.org](mailto:cleibold@pbyofnewcovenant.org) (ext. 238)

Sandra Lopez, Assistant for Finance

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Darcy Bryan-Wilson, Coordinator for COM/CPM

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Rosy Murphy, Coordinator for Youth Ministries

[rmurphy@pbyofnewcovenant.org](mailto:rmurphy@pbyofnewcovenant.org) (ext. 232)

**The Presbytery of New Covenant (Administrative and Program Offices)**

**4803 San Felipe St., Houston, TX 77056**

**713-526-2585**

**For Questions ABOUT** Polity, the PCUSA Constitution and other Constitutional Services check out:

<https://pcusa.org/about-pcusa/agencies-entities/interim-unified-agency/ministry-areas/constitutional-interpretation>

## VII. Books & Online Resources

### from the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation

Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers	978-0-664-23198-9
Faithful Disagreement by Frances Taylor Gench	978-0-664-23338-9
The Presbyterian Elder by Paul Wright	978-0-664-50252-2
The Presbyterian Deacon by Earl S. Johnson Jr.	978-0-664-50237-9
The Presbyterian Trustee by Earl S. Johnson Jr.	978-0-664-50255-3
How to Spell Presbyterian by James Angell	978-0-664-50196-9
Making Disciples, Making Leaders by Steve Eason	978-0-664-50263-8
Searching for a Pastor the Presbyterian Way by Dean Foose	978-0-664-50041-2
Ordination Questions by Howard Rice and Calvin Chinn	978-0-664-50213-3
The Presbyterian Handbook	978-0-664-50288-1
Companion to the Constitution by Frank Beattie	978-0-664-50146-4
Book of Confessions: Study Edition	978-0-664-50012-2
Presbyterian Creeds by Jack Rogers	978-0-664-25496-4

All items can be purchased from Cokesbury online [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com).

Also check: <https://www.pcusastore.com/>

### More Suggested Resources

Presbyterian Study Companions to the Book of Confessions & Book of Order Basic Christian Doctrine. John H Leith. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993). 350 pages. ISBN 0664251927. For those who seek a deep study of catholic, evangelic, and reformed theology. Reading Level: 12th grade-College.

Being Presbyterian in the Bible Belt: A Theological Survival Guide for Youth, Parents, and Other Confused Presbyterians. Ted V. Foote Jr and P. Alex Thornburg. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2000). 91 pages. ISBN 0664501095. Good for confirmation classes of all ages, easy read, and helps distinguish at least nine unique doctrines held by Presbyterian Christians. Reading Level: 6-8th grade.

Calvin for Armchair Theologians. Christopher Elwood. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). 182 pages. ISBN 0664223036. Good companion to Calvin's Institutes edited by McKim. Reading Level: 9-12th grade.

Calvin's Institutes: Abridged Edition. John Calvin. Donald K. McKim, ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). 189 pages. ISBN 0664222986. Good introduction to Calvin's Institutes, and lifts up major sections which have influenced our historic Presbyterian beliefs and polity. Reading Level: 12th grade-College.

Christian Doctrine. Shirley Guthrie. (Revised Edition). (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994). 434 pages. ISBN 0664253687. Well indexed and keyed to Confessions and Scripture, provides study questions. Reading Level: 9-12th grade.

Presbyterian Beliefs: A Brief Introduction. Donald K. McKim. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2003). 126 pages. ISBN 0664502539. Good follow up to Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers. References scripture and Confessions, and provides study questions at the end of each chapter. Reading Level: 9-12th grade.

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Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions. Jack Rogers. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985). 292 Pages. ISBN: 0664254969. This book provides Presbyterian clergy, laity, and students with a thorough introduction to their faith as set forth in the Confessions. Rogers explains the technical terms and places current issues in perspective by examining the meaning of creeds, confessions, and declarations. He examines their role in history, their full meaning, and their continuing relevance to the Christian community. Good for discussion groups. Reading Level: 9-12th grade.

Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers (3rd Edition). Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999). 204 pages. ISBN 0664500188. Good introduction to historic Presbyterian polity. Includes scriptural and Constitutional citations.

Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers: Exploring Christian Faith. Donald K. McKim. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2003). 113 pages. ISBN 0664502504. Probably the best introduction book to Presbyterian history and beliefs out on the market. Easy to read and covers history, doctrine, polity, and Christian witness (piety). Cites scripture and its clear one of his primary sources is the Confessions. Reading Level: 6-8th grade.

Sealed in Christ. John M. Mulder. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1991). 77 pages. ISBN 0664500048. Looking at the seal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Mulder argues that one can discern at least 8 doctrines the Presbyterians hold as essential and formative for their Christian witness. Good for confirmation classes of all ages, easy read. Reading Level: 6-8th grade.

Selected to Serve: A Guide for Officers. Earl S. Johnson, Jr. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2000). 200 pages. ISBN 0664501656. An ideal handbook for church officers and text for the mandated officer training. Includes scripture and Constitution citations, and study questions. Reading Level: 9-12th grade.

**Online PC(USA) Resources for Elders**

The PC(U.S.A.) Web site: [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org) has many helpful resources and articles. Here are some to enrich the service of elders:

Church Leaders [Church Leaders | Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](http://www.pcusa.org/about-pcusa/agencies-entities/interim-unified-agency/ministry-areas/leader-formation)

Regarding Ruling Elders (Archive)

<https://pcusa.org/about-pcusa/agencies-entities/interim-unified-agency/ministry-areas/leader-formation>

Leader Formation -

<https://pcusa.org/about-pcusa/agencies-entities/interim-unified-agency/ministry-areas/leader-formation>

<https://www.pcusa.org/about-pcusa/agencies-entities/interim-unified-agency/ministry-areas/leader-formation/training>

Ruling Elder Training Resources

<https://www.pcusa.org/about-pcusa/agencies-entities/interim-unified-agency/ministry-areas/leader-formation/training>

Ruling Elder Resources

<https://equip.pcusa.org/course/index.php?categoryid=35>

Presbyterians Today Archive

<https://www.pcusa.org/search?query=presbyterians%20today&page=1>

How Presbyterians Make Decisions along with some church history

<https://centernet.pcusa.org/what-we-believe/decisions/>

What Makes Us Unique

<https://centernet.pcusa.org/what-we-believe/what-makes-us-unique/>

How to speak Presbyterian: What is all this Presbyterian lingo?

<https://centernet.pcusa.org/what-we-believe/how-to-speak-presbyterian/>

P.C.(USA) Structure and Governing Bodies

<https://www.pcusa.org/sites/default/files/howitworks.pdf>

Light Our Way: A Guide for Spiritual Care in Times of Disaster

[https://www.nvoad.org/wp-content/uploads/light\\_our\\_way\\_2018\\_final-published-copy.pdf](https://www.nvoad.org/wp-content/uploads/light_our_way_2018_final-published-copy.pdf)

Seeking To be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement

[Seeking to be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians in Times of Disagreement | Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#)

<https://pcusa.org/resource/seeking-be-faithful-together-guidelines-presbyterians-times-disagreement-korean>

<https://pcusa.org/resource/seeking-be-faithful-together-guidelines-presbyterians-times-disagreement-spanish>

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## Clerks of Session: New Roles and Possibilities

*A Leader Reader by Paul Rack*

### The New Clerk

Under the old Form of Government it was often the job of the clerk (of session and presbytery) to interpret its detailed rules and procedures. In this role, the clerk had to give balanced, neutral advice uncontrolled by other agendas (like those of pastors or executives). We clerks were always primarily responsible to the constitution.

Our new Form of Government emphasizes flexibility and permission giving. The rules and regulations have been significantly trimmed, leaving more room for local presbyteries and sessions to organize themselves according to their own mission. This means that the *Book of Order* has a more general and less immediate influence on our daily work, while we will be increasingly governed by the body's administrative manual.

As a presbytery stated clerk, also charged with resourceing and advising session clerks, I feel a need to rethink our work for this new way of operating. We clerks have skills and expertise that our councils will require as they reorganize for mission. But we have to see ourselves less as "canon lawyers" and more as functional and critical enablers of mission. This is a very exciting time for us!

As we move forward with the flexibility and permission given by the new Form of Government, sessions and presbyteries will require insight in developing new approaches to mission. It is the clerk who is often already equipped with the knowledge, background, and experience that the council will need to advance its mission. This expertise emerges in three areas.

### Clerks Hold Institutional Memory

First, clerks carry the institutional memory of the body. While it may no longer be expressed in terms

#### Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the gifts and dedicated service of our clerks. Give them continued energy, creativity, and humor as they help the church live into a new era of mission. To Jesus name we pray. Amen.

of detailed legislation to be enforced, our institutional heritage is still relevant to the decisions we make today. This is true even if our awareness of our past often tells us more about what not to do and what didn't work, or at least won't work today. Having this longitudinal scope is essential if a session or presbytery is going to avoid some of its previous mistakes. The clerk is the person in the structure who has most direct access to this data.

Clerks are, in a sense, story-keepers. We maintain the narrative that constitutes the group's identity. On one level this story is given in our constitution and written in the minutes. But on a more subtle level, presbyteries and churches have an "oral tradition" of anecdotes, memories, habits, and even legends. Clerks, especially those who have been around a while, and who have served in many different areas, are intimate with this stash of material. We conserve and integrate both the written and oral stories of the body, making it available to inform its current witness.

### Clerks Know Structures and Relationships

Second, clerks have extensive knowledge of organizational structures and relationships. We have



always dealt with the interactions among many different entities, on both the congregational and presbytery levels. Therefore, we can give cogent and sometimes pointed advice about the promises and consequences of particular decisions and proposals. Instead of resisting an initiative by stating, "The Book of Order says you can't do that," now we can respond, "That might work, but here are the pitfalls; and here are some examples of where that sort of thing worked well." Now it's not just about what the Book says, though that is important. Moreso, we need to ask about how a proposed action is effective, fair, authentic, or faithful.

In other words, the role of the clerk is evolving to have more to do with assisting a presbytery or congregation in turning its often vague, abstract vision into actual working structures, procedures, and relationships. We are moving away from the role of referees and toward that of structural architects.

### Clerks Ensure Inclusion of All

Third, this knowledge about structures and history also entails a commitment to the openness and inclusion that are hallmarks of our history, as reflected in the new Foundations section of the Book of Order. Clerks are still called to ensure that all of a council's

constituencies have a voice and that minorities are not shut out or marginalized.

Clerks have always been called to give unbiased assistance and advice to those wanting to do things that went against the grain of the leaders. The clerk is still the one best positioned to "watch the back" of those called to risk-taking or innovative ministries. From their perch near the center of ecclesiastical leadership, clerks can work actively to slow the momentum of initiatives that threaten to roll over weaker parties. At the same time, the clerk can also clear a way for new things to happen, chipping away at the crippling inertia and distrust for which many sessions and presbyteries are justly infamous.

### Living into the New Order

In short, the new clerk will serve as the agent and guardian of the spirit of flexibility and permission-giving embodied in the new Form of Government.

But for our church to live into this new order, two things will have to happen. In the first place, clerks will have to realize that we are indeed in a new ecclesiastical world now. Functioning under the new Form of Government as if it were the old will simply not work. Too often we were simply the "brakeman," enforcing detailed rules and regulations. At the same time, we always had a positive and enabling role, seeing the "rules as tools" for mission. This aspect of our work now moves to the center.

Moreover, our knowledge of the old rules gives us credibility and creates trust among those who are unsure of and even threatened by these changes. We can convey to people that we will not be mindlessly rushing into the latest fad. Rather, we will be guided with care, discernment, and circumspection.

Presbyteries especially will also have to realize the potential major asset they have in a good, forward-looking clerk. Fortunately, many do. But those others that are carelessly folding the clerk's job into that of the executive in order to save money are robbing themselves of invaluable insight and perspective. Most importantly, they are possibly severing the council from the most fruitful connection it has to its own story, structures, and commitment to inclusion. And they are removing the only independent agent upon whom churches and the presbytery may rely for clear and neutral insight. The trust that clerks

#### Continuity and Change (Book of Order F-1.0401)

The presbyterian form of government set forth in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is grounded in Scripture and built around the marks of the true Church. It is in all things subject to the Lord of the Church. In the power of the Spirit, Jesus Christ draws worshipping communities and individual believers into the sovereign activity of the triune God at all times and places. As the Church seeks reform and fresh direction, it looks to Jesus Christ who goes ahead of us and calls us to follow him. United with Christ in the power of the Spirit, the Church seeks "not [to] be conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds, so that [we] may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

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have earned by being above the agendas of various forces may be lost if their position is subsumed under something else.

Understood wisely, clerks now have more to do and, arguably, greater importance. And councils have a deeper need for someone in leadership who brings the skills clerks have. We carry the memory, the organizational understanding, and the commitment to inclusiveness that presbyteries need if they are to fulfill their vision and missional vocation.

### About the Writer

Paul Rack is stated clerk of the Presbytery of Elizabeth, which is based in Plainfield, N.J.

### Editor's Note

This article was originally published by The Presbyterian Outlook on September 3, 2012, accessed at <http://www.pres-outlook.com/infocus/features/current-features/17208-the-new-clerk.html>. Used by permission.



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## The Role of Ruling Elders on Session

*A Leader Reader by Steve Litch*

### Qualities of a Session Member

Since the time of the Bible, God has called on leaders for God's people. Moses, Deborah, and David in the Old Testament and Peter, Paul, and Priscilla in the New Testament are just a few of the people God chose to lead Israel and the church. God still calls women and men to lead God's people. When the members of a Presbyterian congregation elect someone to be a session member, it means they see gifts of faith and judgment that God has given that person so he or she can lead the church.

The most important responsibility session members have is to nurture their relationship with Christ. He is the head of the church. He is the one to whom they are accountable, and their duty is to lead the church where Christ directs it. That doesn't mean that session members should disregard the insights and opinions of those who elected them. In fact, good session members are good listeners. Christ often speaks through the collected wisdom of his people. But ultimately, session members make decisions based on their understanding of what Christ wants the church to do. Session members cannot discern Christ's will unless they are continually cultivating their relationship with him through daily prayer, Bible study, and other spiritual disciplines.

Session members do not lead God's people in a historical vacuum. They inherit a rich tradition that informs and enriches their work. Therefore, they need to be familiar with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that is made up of the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*. Presbyterians do not claim that the way we do things is the only way to serve God faithfully. There is much we can learn from other Christians. Nevertheless, we have been entrusted with a particular way of approaching the gospel and orga-

### Prayer

We give thanks for the diversity of people who are called to be parents. Remind us that the gift of parenthood comes to all kinds of people from different lifestyles and cultures who share a common bond to love and nurture children. May you give to all parents the ability to model the gifts of humility, compassion, and love that bespeak the presence of your own perfect love manifested in our homes and in our hearts.

—Christopher H. Evans, "A Prayer for Parents," in *Prayers for the New Social Awakening Inspired by the New Social Creed*, ed. Christian Josso and Elizabeth Flinson-Hasty (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

nizing Christ's work. It is a lively tradition that is always being reformed. It is always open to criticism and change, but session members need to understand the tradition they have inherited so they can critique it in love. They are not expected to be experts but to be familiar enough with the basic principles of our statements of faith and our church government that they can lead within the framework of the Presbyterian branch of the family of faith.

People inside and outside the church look to session members as examples of what it means to be a Christian. Therefore, they should take special care that the way they live reflects well on Christ. This doesn't mean session members are expected to be perfect. In fact, the longer we follow Christ and the closer we come to him, the more we realize how imperfect we are and how much we rely on his grace. All Christians should



live upright lives, but session members have a special responsibility to do justice, love mercifully, and walk humbly with God.

Finally, session members lead by example. They can't encourage church members to be good stewards of their financial resources unless they themselves are generous givers. They can't ask others to help the poor and needy unless they are engaged in ministries of service. It's hard to expect members to invite friends to church unless session members are comfortable speaking about their faith in Christ. But living a Christlike life also means recognizing our human limitations. It's not up to session members to do all the work of the church. In fact, if they do, they have fallen down in their responsibility to involve others. Even as session members lead by example, they need to obey the fourth commandment and observe a regular Sabbath rest.

## Responsibilities of a Session Member

The specific responsibilities of the session are spelled out in the *Book of Order* in chapter 3 of the "Form of Government." They include:

- providing worship for God's people,
- receiving and dismissing church members as well as equipping them to do Christ's work,
- overseeing all the congregation's programs,
- approving the annual budget (while clearly communicating with the congregation),
- overseeing church property, and
- guiding the church's ministries of justice, service, and evangelism.

Many sessions delegate these responsibilities to committees. Session committees provide opportunities to draw on the leadership gifts of other members of the congregation.

### Taking Risks

The only security in life lies in embracing its insecurity. And faith in Jesus Christ, far from diminishing the risks, inspires the courage to take them on— all of them, including the risk of intellectual uncertainty.

—William Sloane Coffin, *Credo* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 144.

It is also important that session members cultivate their relationship with the pastor and others on the church staff. The church staff relies on session members to lift them up in prayer daily and to show pastoral concern for them and their families. Session members should develop the kind of relationship with the pastor in which they can offer support and constructive guidance. It is the responsibility of session members to let the pastors and the rest of the session know about any pastoral concerns and also any groups within the church that need attention.

## A Session Member Serves the Whole Church

Session members are ordained to serve the whole church, not just the local congregation. They should keep up with what is going on within the life of the presbytery, the synod, and the General Assembly so they can interpret the actions of those councils for the local church and participate as commissioners to the other councils.

While session members are involved in the day in and day out work of the church, it is important that they always keep the big picture in mind. They should be able to step back from the work of their committees and see how all the work of the church fits together. Session members need to work together as a team of spiritual leaders. This involves spending time together in prayer, Bible study, faith sharing, and strategic planning. It means keeping in touch with what is going on in the community and the world so that they can identify new ways for the church to respond to new circumstances. Session members should always be thinking about what the church will be like at least three years into the future.

The role of a session member is key in the life of the church. Many people feel overwhelmed when they are chosen to serve. But Christ gives us what we need when he calls us. The most important thing a session member can do is to show the rest of the church how graciously the Lord provides for those who follow him in faith.

## About the Writer

Steve Lytch is a Presbyterian pastor who has served in Virginia, New Jersey, South Carolina, and Kentucky. He currently lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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## The Meaning of Church Membership

*A Leader Reader by Susan Andrews*

### Meeting Our Members

- Anna is a thirty-year-old single woman who is a successful lawyer in a large metropolitan area. She lives a comfortable and busy life, but finds herself restless and unfocused much of the time. She has started attending worship at a local Presbyterian Church, drifting back to the congregation where she was confirmed fifteen years earlier. She is looking for something to give meaning to her life and a way to serve others beyond her small, private world.
- Doug has never attended church or found anything attractive about religion. But recently he married Beth, who is a practicing Christian, and he finds something deep and compelling about her life of faith. He has started reading the Bible and exploring theological ideas, and finds himself opening up to the presence of God through the weekly ritual of worship. Doug feels drawn to Jesus Christ and yearns to make a commitment. But he still has intellectual doubts about some of the traditional doctrines of the faith.
- Sheila is married to Don, an Air Force officer who moves around every two or three years. Such constant mobility is hard on the family, but Sheila has learned that the church welcomes her wherever she goes. Her faith is strong and simple and nourishing, and she quickly finds a congregation in each new community where her gifts and talents are warmly welcomed.

Anna, Doug, and Sheila represent different kinds of members in our congregations today—approaching church membership from a variety of places on their spiritual journeys. Anna will join a church by reaffirmation of faith—returning to an active life of faith after a long period of inactivity. Doug will make a profession of

### Prayer

Protect your people, O God,  
and keep us safe  
until the coming of your new dawn  
and the establishment of your righteous rule.  
By your Holy Spirit,  
stir up within us a longing  
for the light of your new day,  
and guide us by the radiance of Jesus Christ,  
your Son, our risen Lord.  
Amen.

—*Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY:  
Westminster John Knox Press, 1993) 522.

faith—claiming Jesus as Lord for the first time in his life, not out of intellectual certainty but out of a heart yearning for a personal relationship with God. And Sheila will join by transfer of letter—easily moving from one community of faith to another, finding a common story and a spiritual family wherever she goes.

### The Three Cs of Church Membership

There are three central values or ideas that shape our understanding of church membership:

**1. Covenant.** As with all aspects of the Christian life, church membership begins with God—with God's covenant made with each one of us through baptism. From the beginning of the Bible to the end, God says to us, "I will be your God and you will be my people—no matter what." And God fulfills this covenant promise again and again by forgiving us and re-creating us and encourag-

ing us through all the failures and all the struggles and all the perplexities of life. The ultimate expression of God's tenacity and love for us comes through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—where God's Word becomes flesh and dwells among us—taking every moment of human living and transforming it into the likeness of God. Such extraordinary love and faithfulness is the heart of God's covenant with us. And this holy covenant becomes the model for our human covenants, our human promises to be loving and faithful and constant in all the relationships of our living. Church membership is our primary covenant response to God's dependable presence in our lives.

**2. Commitment.** Just as God stays connected to us no matter what, we are called through church membership to stay connected to God faithfully, regularly, permanently—in good times and in bad. Loyalty and fidelity are becoming rare values in our fast-paced and novelty-oriented world. But it is only through long-term commitment and disciplined participation that church membership can change us and root us in what is really important. Every member of a church is a “minister”—one who serves God. And commitment is the fuel that energizes our ministry, year in and year out.

**3. Community.** In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul offers an organic image of the church. We are the body of Christ, an interconnected, interdependent, integrated community of believers, dependent on one another to make the church whole. Our covenant commitment is not just with God but with one another. And so as church members we admit our need for others and their need for us.

### Joining a Church

It seems to me that in joining a church you leave home and home town to join a larger world; the whole world is your new neighborhood and all who dwell therein—black, white, yellows, red, stunted and starving, smart and stupid, mighty and lowly, criminal and self-respecting, American or Russian: all become your sisters and brothers in the new family formed in Jesus. By joining a church you declare your individuality in the most radical way in order to affirm community on the widest possible scale.

—William Sloane Coffin, *Credo* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 142-3.

## Conclusion

And so, becoming a church member is a commitment to a covenant relationship—a relationship with a living and risen Jesus, and a relationship with a vulnerable and growing community of faith. Or, as the *Book of Order* says: “One becomes an active member of the church through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and acceptance of his Lordship in all of life.” (G-5.0101)

Profession of faith in Jesus Christ is first of all a matter of *trust*—not intellectual certainty or moral perfection. In the Presbyterian Church, we do not have to understand or know all the doctrines of the faith. Neither do we have to master all the disciplines of a mature spiritual life. Profession of faith is the beginning of a journey toward the knowledge and certainty of God, and it will take the rest of our lives to complete this journey. To trust is the key.

But trust in Jesus Christ only comes alive through *discipleship*—through obedient living, loving service, and daily disciplines of faith. The *Book of Order* (G-5.0102) is explicit about what faithful church membership requires:

- a. proclaiming the good news,
- b. taking part in the common life and worship of a particular church,
- c. praying and studying Scripture and the faith of the Christian Church,
- d. supporting the work of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,
- e. participating in the governing responsibilities of the church,
- f. demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church,
- g. responding to God's activity in the world through service to others,
- h. living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social responsibilities of life,
- i. working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment.

Active church membership calls us and equips us to be God's yeast and salt and light in the unfinished cathedral of the world.

May it be so!

## About the Writer

Susan Andrews is the General Presbyter of Hudson River Presbytery, after serving over thirty years as a parish pastor. She also served as the Moderator of the 215th General Assembly in 2003.

toward, our polity expresses our faith. Once we are called by God, trained in Scripture, and empowered in worship, then our polity gives us a way to go forth together in ministry, truly being the church for the world God has made.

## For More Information

James W. Angell, *How to Spell Presbyterian*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2002). See the chapter on polity.

*Book of Order* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2009). There is no better book on Presbyterian polity—for historical context, theological foundation, and daily application—than the *Book of Order* itself. It would not be a bad thing for every Presbyterian to have a copy; for officers, it is a “must-read,” especially the first four chapters of the Form of Government, which represent the foundation of our governance.

William Chapman, *History and Theology in the Book of Order: Blood on Every Page* (Louisville, KY: Witherspoon Press, 1999). The long-time polity instructor at Princeton Theological Seminary, Chapman’s book brings a passion (as the dramatic subtitle

suggests) borne of a lifetime reading and using the church’s constitution.

Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker, *Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999). This book is still the defining polity textbook and an interesting and accessible read for anyone who desires to learn more. The fourth edition provides the most up-to-date information on the *Book of Order*, published in 2012 by Geneva Press.

Clifton Kirkpatrick and William H. Hopper Jr., “Presbyterians Do It Decently and in Order,” in *What Unites Presbyterians* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1997). Kirkpatrick, past Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, was charged with preserving the Constitution of the church. It is no surprise, then, that he and Hopper do an excellent job of laying out simply and clearly the theological foundations of our governance.

## About the Writer

Brian Ellison is pastor of Parkville Presbyterian Church in Parkville, Missouri, and a former stated clerk of Heartland Presbytery.