

Presbytery of Plains and Peaks

**Manual for Clerks of Session**

Updated Spring 2013



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## Introduction

Welcome 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/council of the PC(U.S.A.) have a moderator and a clerk (G-3.0104). Clerks of presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly are called Stated Clerks. Those serving Sessions are called Clerks of Session.

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 manual 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. A special thanks to the Presbytery of New Covenant, Heartland Presbytery, and the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy for the use of their handbook to help prepare this handbook.

This manual has been prepared by drawing on information in the *Book of Order* and in various manuals for clerks of session throughout our denomination.

If you have any questions, or need assistance, please contact me at the Presbytery office.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lynn Smit".

Lynn Smit  
Stated Clerk

## **Presbyterians: Who we are**

Although Scripture does not clearly set down any form of church order as such, the Bible does reveal the nature of God, our relationship to God, and our relationship to the fellowship of believers. It does give us the experience of the early church and the beginnings of some form of organization.

Out of the Reformation came a specific form of Protestant church government: Presbyterian, that is, government by ruling elders. In fact, *presbyter* is the Greek term for elder. Elders are considered to be chosen and ordained to serve in their respective positions of leadership. You are called by God and by your congregation to this position of service and leadership.

As ruling elders, you are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather as a session collectively to seek to find and to represent the will of Christ. As a ruling elder you are to be a leader and a listener to the congregation. You are responsible, not to the congregation, but to Christ for the decisions you make.

## **Some Basic Assumptions**

“Unity is God’s gift to the Church in Jesus Christ.” (F-1.0302a) As Presbyterians, we covenant to work with one another as visible expressions of the Body of Christ and as representatives of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

One of the historical principles of our church is that we are to seek to know the will of God for our lives, yet we should exercise forbearance toward each other, understanding that “God alone is Lord of the conscience.” (F-3.0101a) We are to seek unity, yet encourage diversity, and understand that through discussion and prayer we can more clearly discern God’s will and direction.

As a presbytery and as a denomination we believe “The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reaffirms, within the context of its commitment to the Church universal, a special commitment to the basic principles of Presbyterian Polity (F-3.02): One Church (F-3.0201), Governed by Presbyters (F-3.0202), Gathered in Councils (F-3.0203), Seek and Represent the Will of Christ (F-3.0204), Decision by Majority Vote (F-3.0205), Review and Control (F-3.0207), Shared Power, Exercised Jointly (F-3.0208), and General Authority of Councils (F-3.0209).” In other words, in all assemblies we must strive for a balance of expression of individual conscience and the will of the majority. As individuals, we have several rights, among them: the right to know what is going on and why; the right to speak and to be heard under the rules of debate; the right to vote; and the right to hold office.

Serious conflict does arise from premature resolution of an issue without regard to members’ rights. Care must be taken within our polity and parliamentary practice to assure that rights of the minority as well as the majority are protected.

Our call is to seek the truth, not win a battle. In parliamentary procedure, there is no “battle” as such, but there will be open debate.

Even though there is no battle, our polity carries the right of the minority further with the right to dissent and protest as outlined in the *Book of Order* (G-3.0105a, G-3.0105b).

## **Parliamentary Law**

Parliamentary law is not really law as such, but a body of conventions or customs used in decision making. It encompasses common sense and courtesy, is a model for effective conflict resolution, and – when used correctly – will provide accuracy, efficiency, impartiality, objectivity, and uniformity. It helps us transact our business decently and in order. The heart of *Robert's Rules of Order* is protection of the minority as using parliamentary process ensures that all are heard and the rights of each member honored.

The Clerk of Session should serve as the parliamentarian or as resource to the moderator. The relationship between moderator and clerk can work well if both are sensitive, open, and honest.

Some items that are strictly Presbyterian are as follows:

- \* Motions that come from a committee do not require a second.
- \* Session minutes are the property of the session. Members of the congregation (as well as nonmembers) should not have access to the minutes without the permission of the session. The Clerk of Session may provide a summary of any desired information.
- \* Meetings of session are closed except by invitation of the session.

Especially in the church, it is always out of order to use parliamentary procedure as a game to subvert the will of the Holy Spirit as our guide as we seek the truth.

## **Authority of the Session**

“The session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service as ruling elders, together with all installed pastors and associate pastors. All members of the session are entitled to vote.” (G-3.0201)

“The session shall have responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of god in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness.” (G-3.0201) Specific responsibilities and power (duties) are enumerated in section G-3.02 “The Session” and should be studied on a regular basis by all active ruling elders.

Although most churches hold session meetings at least monthly, “the session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly.” (G-3.0203)

Open or closed meetings: Frequently the question is asked, “Are session meetings opened or closed to the congregation?” The session may invite members of the congregation to attend and observe its meetings if it so desires, without restricting its right to meet in executive session whenever circumstances indicate the wisdom of doing so. This statement is interpreted to mean that session meetings are closed except to active elders, co-pastors, associate pastors and the moderator, but others may be invited into a particular meeting or portion of a meeting.

## **Moderator of the Session**

“The pastor of a congregation shall be the moderator of the session of that congregation. In congregations where there are co-pastors, they shall both be considered moderators and have provisions for designating who presides at a particular meeting. If it is impractical for the pastor to moderate, he or she shall invite another teaching elder who is a member of the presbytery or a person authorized by the presbytery to serve as moderator. If there is not installed pastor, or if the installed pastor is unable to invite another moderator, the presbytery shall make provision for a moderator.” (G-3.0104)

The Presbytery of Plains and Peaks policy states: “When the moderator of a session is unable to moderate a specific stated or duly called meeting of session, the Presbytery authorizes the session moderator to appoint another teaching elder, or if one is not available, a ruling elder, to moderator that meeting of the session.”

### **The Office of the Clerk of Session**

“Each council shall elect a clerk who shall record the transactions of the council, keep its rolls of membership and attendance including the rolls of all Certified Christian Educators and Certified Associate Christian Educators and all Ruling Elders commissioned to particular pastoral service, preserve its records, and furnish extracts from them when required by another council of the church. . . . The clerk of the session shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine.” (G-3.0104) The clerk may be a member of the session, or may be a ruling 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 ruling 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.

## Responsibilities at a Glance

- 1) Keep a full and accurate record of the proceedings of the session (G-3.0204).
- 2) Keep the rolls of membership and registers of baptisms authorized by the session, of ruling elder and deacons, of installed pastors with dates of service, and such other registers as the session may deem necessary (G-3.0204b).
- 3) 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).
- 4) Furnish extracts from the minutes when required by another governing body of the church (G-3.0104).
- 5) Maintain and preserve rolls and registers required of session (G-3.0204).
- 6) Be responsible for the preservation of all the records of the church including the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees (G-3.0107).
- 7) Be familiar with the responsibilities of the session as described in the *Book of Order* (G-3.0201).
- 8) Notify the congregation of special meetings, describing accurately the business that will be transacted (G-1.0502).
- 9) Be sure that the annual statistical report requested by the General Assembly is completed accurately, reported to the PC(U.S.A.) by the deadline noted (G-3.0202f), and included in the church minutes. Also, be sure to return other paperwork requested by the presbytery's stated clerk by the deadline noted.
- 10) Each session shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings which shall be submitted at least once each year to the presbytery for its general review and control." (G-3.0108a)
- 11) 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.
- 12) Bring all official correspondence to the attention of session, and respond as directed by the session.
- 13) 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.
- 14) 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.)
- 15) Receive and submit communications from/to other governing bodies.
- 16) Before the session meeting, send meeting notices. Contact committee chairpersons about unfinished and referred business for which they are responsible. Remind chairpersons that all recommendations need to be in writing with enough copies for each member of the session.
- 17) Develop the docket of the session meeting with the moderator. Ensure that minutes of all meetings are reviewed and approved. Record the minutes of each meeting. Many sessions have found that written reports facilitate the flow of business. Historical and informational material always comes first in the report and recommendations come last.
- 18) Assist in church officer training when requested.
- 19) 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.
- 20) Inform the session of the presbytery's meeting dates for the year.
- 21) Perform such other duties as may be assigned by the session or moderator.
- 22) A copy of the annual report of the congregation shall be included in the congregational minutes.

## **Session Dockets**

The docket (agenda) for a session meeting can be the responsibility of either the clerk in consultation with the pastor or the pastor in consultation with the clerk. Your input and frequent contact with other session members is invaluable. In 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 ruling 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 the docket 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.

**Refer to the Sample Docket on the next page for more guidance.**

**Your Presbyterian Church  
Stated Session Meeting  
September 1, 2010**

**Docket**

- 1) Call to order, declaration of quorum, and opening prayer
- 2) Approval of the docket and minutes of stated meeting of August 2, 2010
- 3) Communication
- 4) Clerk's report
- 5) Narration:
  - a) Session Class of 2011 ordained and installed at the 11:00 a.m. worship service on August 8, 2010.
  - b) Lord's Supper observed during both the 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. worship service on August 15, 2010
  - c) Membership of Sam Jones transferred to the First Presbyterian Church, Kansas City, Missouri, August 9, 2010
  - d) Ellen Smith died on August 13, 2010
  - e) Timothy Brown married Jane Doe on Saturday, August 7, 2010, at Your Presbyterian Church, Reverend Bloom officiating
  - f) Mark White and Karen (Harris) White accepted by transfer of membership from the first Methodist Church, Kansas City, Missouri, on August 22, 2010, along with their baptized children, Nancy born July 1, 1999, in Kansas City, Missouri and George born August 12, 2003, in Kansas City, Missouri.
- 6) Session Committee Reports
- 7) Old and New Business:
  - a) Report from Commissioners to meeting of the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks on August 14, 2010
  - b) Audit Committee Report
- 8) Motion for adjournment and closing prayer

## 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 ruling elders present, ruling elders absent, and any who are excused; the clerk, moderator and other staff present or excused; others present and their identity. (first and last names required) It is most helpful to list the ruling elders by their classes.
- 6) The affirmation of a quorum. Sessions shall provide by rule for a quorum for meetings; such quorum shall include the moderator and either a specific number or ruling elders or a specific percentage of those ruling elders in current service on the session (G-3.0203). This is something that needs to be included in the Manual of Operations.
- 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 session meeting and/or congregational 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 include highlights or the whole report attached to the end of the minutes and referred to in the body of 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.) (List first and last name of person making motion on all action items)
- 12) When a previous action of the session is referred to, the date of the meeting at which it occurred, should be designated.

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

- 13) Requests and approval for marriages, baptisms, or funerals/memorial services (according to church policy) 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 the name of the ruling elder or ruling 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:
  - a) by profession of faith, previously baptized
  - b) by profession of faith and baptism
  - c) by re-affirmation of faith
  - d) 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 ruling elders elected to be commissioners to meetings of the presbytery, and the exact period for which elected (G-3.0202).
- 20) Record that commissioner(s) to the presbytery reported to session (G-3.0202). The report may be highlighted or the whole report attached to the end of the minutes and referred to in the body of the minutes.
- 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:
  - a) name, address, and legal description of the property
  - b) name of buyer/lessee
  - c) sale price
  - d) loan amount, purpose and terms, including the name of the lender
  - e) lease terms and liability insurance
  - f) concurrence of presbytery (G-4.0206)

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

It is the responsibility of the session and the Clerk of Session to see that certain necessary actions that occur annually. The following is a list of some of the actions which a clerk should expect to encounter every year. Many of these occur at the same time each year or in the same sequence with other activities of the church.

- 1) Approval of the annual budget (G-30205). The budget must be included in the minutes at which it was approved.
- 2) Approval of the distribution of the church’s benevolences (G-3.0205).
- 3) Record of the annual review with each pastor regarding the adequacy of compensation (G-2.0804).
- 4) Record of the recommendation to be made to the congregation for the terms of call for each pastor whether or not there are changes.
- 5) Record of the annual review of the adequacy of compensation of all paid staff by the personnel committee (or other responsible body appointed by the session).
- 6) Congregational nominating committee formed and new officers nominated and elected (G-2.0401).
- 7) Record of date when new officers have received training and been examined (G-3.0201c).
- 8) Report of the ordination and/or installation of elders and deacons at the next succeeding meeting.
- 9) Report of the recognition of trustees (if any) at the next meeting.
- 10) Report of property and liability insurance has been obtained (G-3.0112). (insert photocopy of the church’s certificate of insurance)
- 11) Full report of annual financial review or audit (G-3.0113).
- 12) Record of marriages, births, deaths (and session approval of removal from the rolls).
- 13) Election of Clerk of Session (G-3.0104) and treasurer (G-3.0205).
- 14) Annual review of church rolls and names of anyone who is moved to inactive (if used) or removed (G-3.0201c).
- 15) Report of reception of new members including names and means of reception.
- 16) Report transfer of members to other churches including name of the church being transferred to (G-3.0201c).
- 17) Record of approval of curriculum and teachers/leaders for educational programs/classes (G-3.0201c).
- 18) Copy of Annual Statistical Report (to OGA) to minutes (G-3.0202f).
- 19) Minutes of the annual congregational and corporation meetings (G-1.0501).
- 20) Election of commissioner representative(s) to presbytery (G-3.0202a). The stated clerk of the presbytery will inform each church how many commissioners it has for the year. \*If your congregation has a ruling elder on Presbytery Council or other voting position, this person cannot be your commissioner representative.\*

- 21) Approval of observances of Lord's Supper (W-1.4004b).
- 22) Report at least annual of the deacons (G-3.0201).
- 23) Review of Sexual Misconduct Policy Review and any training provided (G-3.0106)
- 24) Review of session records by presbytery (G-3.0108a)

### **Nuts and 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 enters or arranges for someone to enter 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) Do not use erasures, whiteout, strikethroughs or footnotes; or insert in the records separate sheets of paper with written or printed matter on them.
- 8) The records of each session meeting are to be attested (signed in ink) by the Clerk of Session. The records of congregational meetings are to be attested (signed in ink) by the Clerk of Session. The moderator's signature is not required (G-).
- 9) 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.

Each clerk needs to work out the best ways for handling the preparation of the minutes. One suggestion is to prepare a template for use in taking the minutes during the meeting. This template would include the list of ruling elders' names (to aid in taking the roll) and major category headings with blank spaces for writing in the information. If the meetings do not follow a regular format, the usefulness of a template is limited.

An alternative is to use a checklist. Some clerks use a template file and a laptop computer and take notes on the computer during the meeting. A good, rather complete agenda makes this approach more feasible. The template and/or the checklist have an additional benefit in that it will help you and the moderator to remember what needs to be done. This can be carried further by the Clerk of Session and the moderator meeting in advance of the session meeting with the purpose of including more details in the template or checklist. When typing the minutes, it is suggested that a template be established and the information be typed into the appropriate places. This avoids retyping some information such as the list of ruling elders present, and helps ensure that items are not missed.

Session minutes are to be kept in a book designated solely for that purpose. This book may be a loose-leaf binder of good quality. Use acid free paper and the paper may be lignin free. Pages should be numbered consecutively, but do not purchase pre-numbered pages. Having a separate numbering device allows you to include other items that cannot be copied on pre-numbered sheets. Also, be sure to copy front to back.

After the minutes have been approved by the session, they should be placed in the official minute book and signed by the Clerk of Session. Remember that ink jet printer ink will run if it gets wet. Printed pages from ink jet printers can be photocopied onto the minute book pages or other acid-free, substantial paper. A laser printer

with good acid-free paper can be used. A good quality three-ring binder is sufficient for a minute book. You do not have to use the expensive and difficult to use Westminster Binders.

Electronic storage, in place of paper storage, **is not acceptable** because there is no way to attest by signature to the accuracy and correctness of the documents and due to technological changes.

According to *Robert's Rules of Order*, the record of the proceedings of a deliberative assembly is usually called the minutes. In ordinary society, unless the minutes are to be published, **they should contain mainly a record of what was done, not what was said by the members.** Using the journalistic approach of reporting who, what, where, when, why, and how is suggested for accurate accountability.

It is recommended that minutes should be interesting, with enough information so that our grandchildren will know what happened in this church years before. One of the primary reasons for the emphasis on precise, accurate record keeping is the role that the minutes play in recounting the history of the congregation, often retrievable in no other way.

Additionally, the minutes of a meeting should never reflect the Clerk of Session's opinion, favorable or otherwise, on anything said or done.

The moderator, co-pastors, associate pastors, and all active ruling elders should receive and approve the minutes of all session meetings. The *Book of Order*, as well as *Robert's Rules of Order*, specify that ownership of these records resides with the body that constituted them. In other words, the session has ownership and the Clerk of Session has responsibility for preserving these records on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (G-3.0107). Keeping the book(s) in a fireproof file cabinet or safe is highly recommended.

Because session minutes are unique to various churches and Clerks of Session, the **Minutes of Stated Meeting of Session on the following page** are to be used only as a sample or guideline.

## **Minutes of Stated Meeting of the Session of Your Presbyterian Church September 1, 2010**

The session of Your Presbyterian Church held its Stated Meeting in the library on September 1, 2010, at 6:30 p.m. The meeting was called to order by Moderator the Reverend Leanne Thompson, who declared a quorum was present and opened the meeting with prayer.

**Attendance:** The following persons were in attendance:

Class of 2010 - Ruling Elders - Sharon Webb, Diane Kenning

Class of 2011 - Ruling Elders - Lynn Smit (clerk of session - class of 2010), Wayne Wendell

Class of 2013 - Ruling Elders - Sharon Cely, Maria Shupe

Visitors: none

Absent: None

**Docket:** motion was made by Diane Kenning that the Docket and Minutes of the Stated Meeting of August 2, 2010, be approved as written. It was seconded and **approved**.

**Communication:** Reverend Leanne read a letter from the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks that our church be responsible for providing the refreshments for the World Day of Prayer. Motion was made by Wayne Wendell that the Hospitality Committee assume this responsibility. It was seconded and **approved**.

**Clerk's Report:** Motion was made by Sharon Webb and seconded that the membership of Sam Jones be transferred to the First Presbyterian Church, Kansas City, Missouri. Motion was **approved**. Motion was made by Lynn Smit and seconded that Mark White and Karen (Harris) White be accepted by transfer of membership from the First Methodist Church, Kansas City, Missouri, along with their baptized children, Nancy born on July 1, 1999, in Kansas City, Missouri, and George, born August 12, 2003, in Kansas City, Missouri. Motion was **approved**. The Clerk also informed the session that Ellen Smith (#5464) died on August 13, 2010, and funeral services were held at the church with the Reverend Leanne Thompson officiating. The Reverend Leanne Thompson also officiated at the wedding of Timothy Brown and Jane Doe on Saturday, August 7, 2010, at the church.

**Narration:**

- 1) Josh Phillips, son of Scott and Julie Phillips, born on April 30, 2010, in Kansas City, Missouri, was baptized during the 11:00 a.m. worship service on August 8, 2010. Baptism approved at the June 1, 2010 stated session meeting.

The following committee reports were heard:

**Christian Education Committee:** (include a summary or attach report)

**Finance Committee:** See Attachment A for financial report as of August 31, 2010.

**Property Committee:** (include a summary or attach report)

**Worship Committee:** (include a summary or attach report)

**Old and New Business:**

**Report from Commissioners to Meeting of the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks on August 14, 2010:** Rosalie Allen and Beverly Atkins served as commissioners to the meeting of the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks held at Kimball Presbyterian Church in Kimball, Nebraska. Rosalie reported that the presbytery wide worship service

held on July 11, 2010 was well attended and is hoped to be scheduled sometime during the summer in 2010. A report was also heard of work being done at Highlands Presbyterian Camp and Retreat Center.

**Audit Committee Report:** The moderator of the Audit Committee for 2009 reported that the financial records of the church have been reviewed by the committee formed for that purpose. No discrepancies were found and no recommendations were made. The committee was dismissed with thanks for a job well done.

**Motion for Adjournment and Closing Prayer:** There being no further business to come before the meeting, motion was made by Diane Kenning that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded and the meeting was dismissed with prayer led by the Reverend Leanne Thompson.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Smit  
Clerk of Session

## **Actions That Must be Approved by More Than One Council (Governing Body)**

Because the connectional system is one of the hallmarks of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), there are a number of actions that require approval beyond the session. Among them:

- 1) Application to presbytery to enroll an “inquirer” under care of presbytery and the enrolled inquirer accepted as a “candidate”: session and presbytery (G-2.0605).
- 2) Loans that use the church or its property as collateral and all sales of property: congregation and presbytery (ecclesiastical and corporate) (G-1.0503, G-4.0206a).
- 3) Any lease of its real property used for purposes of worship, and all leases of church property or a period of more than five years: session and presbytery (G-1.0503, G-4.0206b).
- 4) All changes of church location, worship place(s), or church name: session, congregation (name change), and presbytery (ecclesiastical and corporate) (G-3.0303b).
- 5) All changes in terms of call for the pastor: congregation and presbytery (G-3.0804).
- 6) Dissolutions of pastorate and calls for new pastors: congregation and presbytery (G-2.09, G-2.08).
- 7) Hiring stated supply, temporary supply, or interim pastor: session and presbytery (G-1.0504).
- 8) Call for special session meeting: by moderator when necessary, two members of session – in writing, or as directed to by presbytery (G-3.0203).
- 9) Call for a special congregational meeting: session, presbytery; session when requested in writing by one-fourth active members of the congregation (G-1.0502).
- 10) Session meeting when pastor is ill or is out-of-town: pastor grants permission and appoints a member of presbytery as moderator pro tem (G-1.0504). When the moderator of a session is unable to moderate a specific stated or duly called meeting of session, the Presbytery authorizes the session moderator to appoint another teaching elder, or if one is not available, a ruling elder, to moderate that meeting of the session.
- 11) All waivers from the *Book of Order* terms of election (G-2.0404): congregation and presbytery.
- 12) All changes of pastoral leadership (G-2.0504a & b, G-2.0801): session and/or congregation and presbytery.

## **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.

**Trustees:** (G-4.01) The Board of Trustees is accountable to the session. Their powers as trustees are listed in G-4.0101 and shall not infringe on the powers of session. G-4.0101 provides that the active elders shall be the trustees of the corporation unless the by-laws provide otherwise. Having such a unicameral board eliminates conflicts between the session and the board of trustees.

**Deacons:** (G-2.02) Deacons may be individually commissioned or organized as a board of deacons. In either case, their ministry is accountable to the session; chooses its own officers; and must submit its plans to session for approval. The pastor(s) are advisory members of the board of deacons.

**Congregational Nominating Committee:** (G-2.0401) The congregational nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not the session. It does not report to session, although the committee may wish to consult with 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 as ex-officio and without vote.

**Pastor Nominating Committee:** (G-2.0802) The pastor nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not the session. Although the Committee on Ministry works closely with the PNC throughout the process of calling a pastor (G-3.0307), the PNC has several points of contact with the session:

- \* the pastor nominating committee (PNC) develops the ministry information form (MIF)
- \* session approves the MIF and forwards it to the Committee on Ministry for approval
- \* the PNC negotiates the salary of the new pastor in consultation with the session
- \* The PNC requests session to call a congregational meeting when it is ready to bring a candidate

**Personnel:** (G-2.0804, G-3.0201c) Session supervises all ordained and non-ordained personnel and annually reviews the adequacy of compensation for all staff, including all employees. Session recommends to the congregation the terms of call of all ordained personnel. This recommendation must meet the minimum guidelines set by presbytery and be reported annually to the presbytery and updated with the Board of Pensions. This may be assigned to a Personnel Committee, but they must report to the session for all action to be taken.

**Outside Organizations:** (G-3.0201c; W-1.4004-9; W-4.9003) 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. It is wise to have a written contract for all organizations using the church building, stipulating any rental fee, honoraria for any staff utilized, maintenance standards, insurance coverage and rooms of the church to be used.

## Congregational and Corporation Meetings

Here is a check-list form with information about the role and responsibilities of Clerk of Session related to congregational and corporation meetings.

- 1) A congregational meeting may be called by session, by presbytery, or by session on written request of one-fourth of the members of the congregation on the active roll (G-1.0502).
- 2) Check both the *Book of Order* and the congregation's by-laws for what constitutes "due notice" for a congregational meeting (G-1.0502).
- 3) Check your congregation's by-laws and the *Book of Order* for the quorum of the congregational meeting (G-1.0501).
- 4) What business may be done at a congregational meeting? As Clerk of Session, you should take particular care to alert the moderator of the congregational meeting when business is out of order. The business to be transacted shall be limited to items specifically listed in the publicly announced call for the meeting. No other business may be transacted at this meeting. You will find a careful listing of such business in G-1.0503 of the *Book of Order*. **The budget is adopted by the session, not the congregation.** However, session must give full inform the congregation of the budget.
- 5) Business to be transacted at meeting of a congregation may be of two kinds: ecclesiastical and corporate. Whenever permitted by civil law, both kinds of business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting. In other words, the annual meeting of the corporation and a regular annual meeting can be held at the same time (G-1.0503).
- 6) The terms of call of the pastor or pastors must be approved annually by the congregation and reported to presbytery for its approval. The congregation approves the pastor's terms of call for recommendation to presbytery (G-2.0804).
- 7) Proxy voting is not permitted in church meetings (G-1.0501).
- 8) Always be prepared for a ballot vote to elect officers.
- 9) Ordinarily the session may approve the minutes and report its action at the next congregational meeting (*Robert's Rules of Order*). The congregation minutes are attested (signed in ink) by the Clerk of Session.

- 10) The Clerk of Session shall serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If the Clerk of Session is unable to serve, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting. The secretary shall record the actions of the congregation in minutes of the meeting (G-1.0505).
- 11) Some states have laws requiring certain corporations to file annual registration report forms with the state official, office or agency which oversees corporations to remain in good standing. Contact your church's legal advisor or the Stated Clerk of the presbytery for information regarding whether or not such a report is required for your corporation.

In addition to the session minutes, the minutes of the annual meeting of the congregation and all other congregational meetings should be printed in the session minute book. One of the duties of the Clerk of Session is to serve as secretary for all congregational meetings; therefore, all your minutes are to be recorded in one book.

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, date, time, and place of the meeting.
- 4) Name of the moderator.
- 5) Election of clerk pro-tem if the Clerk of Session is unable to attend.
- 6) Statement of quorum and evidence of 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) a complete, itemized report of income and expenditures for the year
  - b) provide the complete, itemized proposed budget adopted by the session for the coming year (G-3.0205)
  - c) details of the status of loans from General Assembly, synod, or presbytery, if any are outstanding
  - d) If the congregation does not approve the minutes before adjournment, session may approve the minutes at its next scheduled meeting (*Robert's Rules of Order*).
- 11) Congregational meeting minutes must be attested (signed in ink) by the Clerk of Session.

As with the sample of session minutes, the minutes of congregational and corporation meetings are unique to various churches and clerks of session. Again, the **Minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting on the following page** are to be used only as a sample or guideline. A sample of a **Congregational Meeting Docket** is also provided for information.

**Your Presbyterian Church  
Annual Congregational Meeting  
January 1, 2011**

**Docket**

- 1) Call to order, declaration of quorum, and opening prayer
- 2) Secretary
- 3) Reading of the call
- 4) Approval of the docket
- 5) Minutes of the congregational meeting for 2010
- 6) Review of the "Facts for 2010"
  - a) Pastor's report
  - b) Committee reports
  - c) Adopted 2011 budget
  - d) Year-end financial reports for 2010
- 7) Approval of the change in the pastor's call
- 8) Congregational Nominating Committee
- 9) Adjournment

**Minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting  
Your Presbyterian Church  
January 1, 2011**

- 1) The congregation of Your Presbyterian Church was called to meet on Sunday, January 1, 2011, immediately following the 11:00 a.m. worship service. The meeting was called to order by Moderator the Reverend Leanne Thompson, who declared a quorum was present and opened the meeting with prayer.
- 2) **Secretary:** Elder Lynn Smit, was present and served as secretary.
- 3) **Reading of the Call:** The Moderator read the Call for the Meeting as recorded in the Minutes of the Session Stated Meeting of December 2, 2010, as follows: "That the Annual Congregational Meeting of Your Presbyterian Church will be held immediately following the 11:00 a.m. worship service on Sunday, January 1, 2011." The call was found to be in order.
- 4) **Approval of the Docket:** The docket was found to be in order and approved by consent.
- 5) **Minutes of the Congregational Meeting for 2010:** The Minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting of January 1, 2010 have been reviewed and accepted by the Session as an accurate reflection of the actions taken at this meeting.
- 6) **Review of the "Facts for 2010":** The annual report to the congregation was made available to the congregation and members of the congregation were invited to ask questions. At the end of the discussion, the Facts for 2010 were received as information. See attachment a. (Include Pastor's Report, Committee Reports, Adopted 2011 Budget, Year End Financial Reports for 2010)
- 7) **Approval of the Change in the Pastor's Call:** Ruling Elder Sharon Webb moved that the congregation approve the following changes in the pastor's call: Salary, a \$1,000.00 increase, from \$40,000 to \$41,000; housing allowance, no change, car allowance set at IRS current rate; Board of Pensions participation, from \$18,000 to \$18,500. This change in the pastor's call represents a 2% increase. Motion was **approved**.
- 8) **Congregational Nominating Committee:** Ruling Elder Diane Kenning moved that the Officer Nominating Committee for 2011 be composed of three members from the session class of 2012 and one member from each of the following organizations: Board of Deacons, Presbyterian Women, Presbyterian Man, and that Mike Wilkinson be elected to serve as Member at Large (class of 2013). Motion was **approved**.
- 9) **Adjournment:** There being no further business to come before the meeting, Ruling Elder Sharon Cely moved to adjourn. The meeting closed with the Reverend Leanne Thompson's charge to the congregation and benediction.

Attest:

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Moderator

Secretary

## Rolls and Registers

**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.

The session is responsible to maintaining the church rolls and registers. Even if a session committee, a membership secretary, or the church secretary takes on this responsibility, it falls on the clerk to see that the job is done correctly.

The rolls and registers include sections for each of the different rolls and registers required to be kept. Even if your church maintains rolls using some sort of computer program, there needs to be a permanent written record so plan on printing them at least once a year. The permanent paper records should be kept in a secure waterproof/fireproof environment at the church.

A roll is a record of information which changes from time to time (it is “rolling” so to speak). A register records events (baptisms, marriages, ordinations/installations, deaths) and does not change. You never strike a name from a register. It is a permanent record. Your rolls on the other hand will change frequently.

- 1) Names of members shall be placed upon, removed, or deleted from the rolls of the church only by order of the Session (G-3.0204).
- 2) Session shall maintain the following membership rolls (G-1.04, G-3.0204):
  - a) A **Baptized Member** is one 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 but who has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly issued a “clarification of meaning” that baptized members are children who have been baptized in a Christian church (Trinity baptism) but who have not been received as Active Members (G-1.0401).
    - i) 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.
    - ii) It is important to maintain an accurate baptism register because it can serve as a legal backup for birth certificates, especially for infant baptisms.
  - b) 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 this church, and participates in the church’s work and worship (G-1.0402).
    - i) 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 (if used), or removed.
  - c) 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 membership is situated. (G-1.0403) An example of an affiliate member would be a snow bird living in your community during the summer months.
    - i) 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 Other Participants (Inactive) member rolls in the same binder.

**Other Participants** are persons who are not members of, or who may have ceased active participation in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are welcome and may participate in the life and worship of this church and receive its pastoral care and instruction. (G-1.0404) This roll could also be called "Inactive Roll" if the session so chooses, but is no longer required.

Pages containing columns for the information requested may be obtained through Cokesbury (800) 672-1789.

**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.

Session shall maintain the following registers:

**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.

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

**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.

**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.

**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.

All registers may be kept in the same binder, or in the binder with the rolls. Pages for each register listed may be obtained through Cokesbury Book Stores (800) 672-1789.

## Preserving your Records

The clerk, in keeping records, is creating the history of your church for posterity. The Department of History of the General Assembly (425 Lombard Street, Philadelphia, PA 19147; 215-627-1852) is a nationally recognized archive for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Local historical societies are **NOT** to be used to archive church records. It is important that you protect your minutes and register book from loss, theft, and fire or water damage. Current records that have not been sent to the Department of History should be stored in the church in a waterproof/fireproof safe.

At present, the Department of History will microfilm your records for a minimal charge under an arrangement between the Presbyterian Historical Society. Acceptance of this agreement releases a copy of the church records to the Society. The session would need to make a decision about such a release and acceptance of the agreement.

### The Presbyterian Historical Society

**Why microfilm?** - Microfilming is the best method currently available for the long-term preservation of records. Brittle paper, deteriorating bindings, fire, flood, and the rapidly changing electronic environment all pose substantial threats to records. Most paper produced since the mid-19th century contains acidic wood pulp which causes rapid deterioration of paper. Records may also be damaged or destroyed by water, fire, insects, or other natural disasters. Changing computer software and hardware, as well as the fragility of electronic media present preservation challenges as well. Archival quality microfilm has an expected life of 500 years and allows copies or records to be stored in several locations to minimize the change of loss due to natural disaster. Additional information about microfilming is available at [www.history.pcusa.org](http://www.history.pcusa.org).

### Heritage Microfilming Grant - If you . . .

- . . . are a PC(U.S.A.) Congregation of 250 members or less and are a congregation at least 50 years old
- . . . are interested in the preservation of your history
- . . . are looking for financial assistance to microfilm your records

### Consider applying for a Heritage Microfilming Grant.

In honor of its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2002, the Presbyterian Historical Society established the Heritage Microfilming Grants. This grant is awarded annually to encourage and support the preservation microfilming of congregations' official records. The grants will cover most or all of the cost of microfilming a small church's official records including session minutes and church registers, as defined in the *Book of Order*, G-3.0107.

### The Application Process:

The Clerk of Session will need to submit an application, including a letter describing:

- \* the storage conditions for the records and the records' condition;
- \* the financial need of the congregation;
- \* plans the congregation has for preserving its original records in the future;
- \* a copy of the congregation's most recent annual budget; and
- \* a completed records inventory form

The Committee for the Presbyterian Historical Society will review applications and announce the recipients of the grant at its annual meeting (late fall). The grants, which must be used within a two-year period, will be applied to either the total or partial cost of microfilming a congregation's official records.

## Annual Statistical Report

### Introduction

The presbytery must make an annual report to the General Assembly (G-3.0202f), 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.

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.

Those pages were:

- \* New members received by profession or reaffirmation of faith: 17 & Under
- \* New members received by profession or reaffirmation of faith: 18 & Over
- \* New members received by certificate (letter of transfer)
- \* Other additions: Restoration from Inactive Roll; Correction to make Total correct; etc.
- \* Active Members transferred to other churches (certificate)
- \* Active Members lost due to death
- \* Other losses: Active Members transferred to Inactive Roll; Correction to make Total correct; etc.
- \* Baptisms: children (17 & Under)
- \* Baptisms: adult

### Reporting Active Members

The report gives the number of active members at the beginning of the reporting period. Places are given for active members added in two major categories. A third category is given (All other gains) which also allows for corrections. Places are given for losses in active membership in two major categories plus the All other losses category, which would include transfer to the inactive roll as well as corrections. The result of this portion gives the total number of active members at the end of the reporting period.

Two lines follow for number of persons on the inactive roll and the number of baptized members.

The sum of Active Members and Baptized Members is called Total Adherents.

## Reporting Other Membership Data

This information will need to be collected from a variety of sources. These include:

- \* Number of female members
- \* Age distribution of members
- \* Average attendance at Sunday worship
- \* Church school enrollment Baptisms
- \* Sex distribution of elders and deacons
- \* Number of persons with disabilities
- \* Racial ethnic composition of congregation, session, and deacons

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.

Note that it requests Church School *enrollment* not *attendance*. This includes groups that meet other than on Sunday Morning such as "The Tuesday Bible Study".

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".

## Reporting Finances

The financial reporting is broken down into broad categories. 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. The workbook is reasonably understandable and gives some specific examples to help.

## 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.)

## **Minimum Compensation for Pastors**

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 in terms of call must be brought to the congregation for approval, contingent upon the approval of presbytery that, finally, approves all 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 call forms must be returned to the Committee on Ministry for recommendation to presbytery. (Note: Congregational approval applies only to churches with installed pastors.)

The Clerk of Session or Treasurer should complete the proper form reporting any change in terms of their installed, temporary, or lay pastor and send it to the Board of Pensions.

## **Annual Review of Session Records**

“Each council shall review annual or biennially, based on the body’s meeting frequency, the proceedings and actions of all entities related to the body, all officers able to act on behalf of the body, and lower councils within its jurisdiction..” (G-3.0108a) In the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks it is the Stated Clerk who arranges for the review. Copies of the forms used in that review process are included in this Handbook. Using it throughout the year will expedite your preparation for the review which is over the previous calendar year (January 1 - December 31) and/or previous years that have not been reviewed.

## **Commissioners to Presbytery**

Presbyterian polity is a representative polity. It works only when each church takes seriously its responsibility to send their pastor and elect ruling elder commissioners who attend the meeting, stay until the end of the meeting, and report to the session. There are four stated meetings each year. Times and dates are published annually on the presbytery website. Churches are encouraged to volunteer to host a presbytery meeting through the stated clerk’s office.

Each session is responsible for electing commissioners to presbytery (G-3.0202a). The number of commissioners depends upon the size of the congregation (G-3.0501). The number of commissioners to which a congregation is entitled also varies according to equalization. At presbytery, synod, and General Assembly meetings there must be an equal number of teaching elder members and ruling elder commissioners. Before the first presbytery meeting of each year, the stated clerk of presbytery will notify each Clerk of Session by letter of the number of ruling elder commissioners the congregation is entitled to send to presbytery.

Equalization is based on the information collected through the churches’ annual statistical reports. The formula is developed by the Stated Clerk and reported to the presbytery at its first meeting. That representation formula is in effect on an annual basis.

Session may elect one or more commissioners who may serve for the entire year or different commissioners for each meeting of presbytery. In order to assure continuity and understanding of presbytery business, it is best to elect commissioners for extended periods. An alternative would be to elect a commission and an alternate for each meeting, with the alternate becoming the commissioner at the next meeting.

If your congregation has a ruling elder serving on Presbytery council or another position with a vote, this person may not serve as your ruling elder commissioner.

The docket and the supporting reports for each presbytery meeting are posted on the presbytery's website and should be distributed in print to the commissioners prior to the meeting. After the presbytery meeting, these papers should be distributed by the commissioners to the appropriate people in the congregation.

Commissioners are expected to report to session about the meeting (G-3.0202a), 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 raising of consciousness of the congregation's participation in the total ministry of Jesus Christ through the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Session members including presbytery commissioners, should bear in mind that opportunities and need for nominations to presbytery divisions and committees. The Presbytery of Plains and Peaks is committed to finding Presbyterians with skills and interests in serving on a presbytery organizational units. Nomination forms are available through the presbytery office. If each church nominated one member to serve at the presbytery level, we would have more people than was needed to staff all of the organizational units. Please share the gifts of your congregation with your presbytery. It's a great way to enrich the programs at your own church.

### **Proposed Amendments Voted on by Presbyteries**

Each year following the meeting of the General Assembly, overtures passed at General Assembly are sent to all presbyteries as proposed amendments to the constitution. Overtures are proposals to amend the *Book of Order* adopted by that year's General Assembly. If a majority of presbyteries approve, the *Book of Order* is amended effective immediately.

At the presbytery meeting prior to the meeting at which the overtures will be acted on, the stated clerk generally distributes amendment books for the ruling elder commissioners and teaching elder members from that particular church during registration. Depending on the nature of the amendments to be acted on the presbytery may hold educational events so Presbyterians can provide issues of importance to them in light of the potential impact on the *Book of Order*. Although ruling elder commissioners cannot be pledged by session to vote in a particular way, it is useful for session to spend time studying and discussing the proposed amendments so that the ruling elder commissioners will have guidance when they vote on the amendments.

## Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Per Capita Apportionment Payments

From [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org)

### What is per capita?

*The official definition:* “Per capita is an opportunity for all communicant members of the Presbyterian church through the governing bodies to participate equally, responsibly, and interdependently by sharing the cost of coordination and evaluation of mission; and of performing ecclesiastical, legislative, and judicial functions that identify a Reformed Church, while at the same time strengthening the sense of community among all Presbyterians” (GA Minutes, Part I, 1995).

*In essence:* Per capita is a set amount of money (apportionment) per member that congregations pay to the larger Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Said another way, it is a Presbyterian Covenant Community Fund — part of the glue that holds Presbyterians together. Because every Presbyterian shares in the benefit of the PC(USA)’s system of government, the expenses associated with coordinating and performing the functions of that system should be shared by everyone as well.

### How old is per capita?

The first-known mention of per capita dates back to 1734 in a letter to ministers!

### Who pays per capita, and how much?

Congregations (through their sessions) pay an annual amount of money per church member – per capita apportionment – to their respective presbyteries.

The per capita amount requested from a congregation is a combined total of requests from that congregation’s presbytery, the synod in which the presbytery is located, and the General Assembly – based on their respective budgets for the coming year(s).

Example: Congregation A is asked by Presbytery A to pay a total of \$20 per member. That amount breaks down as follows:

- \* Presbytery A’s per capita rate is \$12 per member
- \* Synod A’s per capita rate is \$3 per member
- \* General Assembly’s per capita rate is \$5 per member

### Why does the per capita rate differ among presbyteries?

Each presbytery begins with the General Assembly per capita rate and adds the amount needed to support its specific mission and administrative functions.

A presbytery’s per capita rate requested from its congregations depends on its geographical location and size, as well as its mission needs and the needs of the respective synod. Requests of congregations typically range from \$5 to \$30.

### How is the General Assembly per capita rate set?

The General Assembly per capita rate is set every two years at the biennial General Assembly meeting.

At each GA, a proposed budget for the coming two-year period is approved. The per capita rate is set by dividing the total GA-approved budget by the total PC(USA) church membership after adjusting for income earned from investments and the amount of accumulation or reserves used in the prior period.

The rate is based on the membership of PC(USA) churches two years earlier, which are the most recent figures available when GA budgets are adopted.

### **What do GA per capita dollars provide?**

Per capita funding is how we mutually share the costs of coming together to discern the Spirit's leading for the future.

For example, the funding provides for the cost of bringing together:

- \* commissioners and advisory delegates to the General Assembly (as well as the cost of planning and holding the meeting)
- \* church leaders from presbyteries and synods for training events
- \* necessary tools to develop and administer ordination exams to seminarians preparing to become future pastors
- \* those who are elected by the GA to serve on permanent GA committees (as well as each committee's work), such as the GA Nominating Committee and the GA Committee on Representation

Per capita also funds:

- \* the expenses of the Moderator and Vice Moderator of the General Assembly as they travel across the church to attend church anniversaries, presbytery meetings, retreats, ecumenical gatherings and so forth
- \* work in the area of vocation, helping all Presbyterians discern their sense of God's call in their lives
- \* information, advice and counsel to presbyteries and pastors whose members have immigration issues
- \* the Presbyterian Historical Society, assuring that our witness to the gospel today will be preserved for future generations, just as we have learned about the history of past generations
- \* the production (in multiple languages) and distribution of the *Book of Order*, *The Book of Confessions* and other GA publications
- \* a Presbyterian presence at ecumenical groups and gatherings in this country and worldwide, which extends our mission efforts and our work for peace and justice far beyond what we can do by ourselves and promotes Christian unity
- \* the staffing and administrative costs necessary to coordinate all of the above, including the office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

### **What happens if a presbytery cannot or will not pay its per capita to the General Assembly?**

The PC(USA)'s Constitution does not mandate the payment of per capita by congregations. At the same time, the Constitution provides no provision on the part of congregations (sessions) to withhold per capita as a form of protest.

If a presbytery has a congregation within its bounds that is withholding per capita because of insufficient funds or protest, the presbytery is still obligated to pay per capita, as funds are available.

For more information, read the Advisory Opinion on Per Capita Apportionments.

## **Important Documents**

### **Manual of Operations (G-3.0106)**

Councils higher than the session may provide examples of policies and procedures that may be gathered into advisory handbooks. These examples illumine practices required by the Constitution but left to councils for specific implementation. Such handbooks may also offer information that enhances or secures the ministry of the particular council. Each council shall develop a manual of administrative operations that will specify the form and guide the work of mission in that council.

### **By-laws (G-3.0106)**

If your congregation does not have by-laws (or standing rules), please contact the stated clerk of the presbytery for information about how to establish them. A current copy is required to be on file in the presbytery office.

### **Incorporation**

The *Book of Order* (G-4.0101) states, "Wherever permitted by civil law, each congregation shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained." This language is not considered permissive as the word "shall" is used. If your church is not incorporated, please contact the stated clerk of the presbytery for suggestions on how to begin the process. A current copy of your Articles of Incorporation are required to be on file in the presbytery office.

### **Insurance**

"Each council shall obtain property and liability insurance coverage to protect its facilities, programs, staff, and elected and appointed officers." (G-3.0112) Also, churches should consider registering with their insurance company the names of people in the congregation who will be driving for church events. A current copy of your policy is required to be on file in the presbytery office.

### **Sexual Misconduct Policy (G-3.0106)**

If your congregation does not have a Sexual Misconduct Policy, please contact the stated clerk of the presbytery for information about how to establish one. A current copy is required to be on file in the presbytery office.

### **Financial Policy (G-3.0205)**

If your congregation does not have a financial policy, please contact the stated clerk of the presbytery for information about how to establish one. A current copy is required to be on file in the presbytery office.

## **Certificates Used in the Life of the Church**

Certificates are used to denote baptism, church membership, ordination of ruling elders and deacons, transfer of membership, and marriage. One task of the Clerk of Session is to see that all certificates are properly completed. Correct spelling, dating, and other details are important to the person receiving them. The information on the certificates should agree with the records in the session minute book and the church register.

# Appendix

## 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 a committee of members versed in accounting procedures. Reviewers should not be related to the treasurer (or treasurers). 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 *and 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.”*

**Session Records Check-List**

**Annual Review of Records Report Form**

**G-3.0108a** – Each council shall review annual or biennially, based on the body’s meeting frequency, the proceedings and actions of all entities related to the body, all officers able to act on behalf of the body, and lower councils within its jurisdiction. In reviewing the procedures of the lower council, the higher body shall determine whether the proceedings have been correctly recorded, have been in accordance with this Constitution, have been prudent and equitable, and have been faithful to the mission of the whole church. It shall also determine whether lawful injunctions of a higher body have been obeyed.

Church \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Shaded areas to be used by reviewer ONLY*

**Session Meetings**

<b>Routine Matters</b>	<b>Page #/ Month</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1) Date, time, place, and type (stated/special) of each meeting.			
2) First and last names of moderator (G-3.0104), clerk of session (G-3.0104), and elders present and absent plus non-session members present.			
3) Meetings opened and closed with prayer. - G-3.0105			
4) Minutes of previous meetings read/approved.			
5) Minutes of each meeting signed by clerk.			

Notes by examiner(s):

<b>Annual Actions</b>	<b>Page #/ Month</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
6) The session shall prepare and adopt a budget . . . . It shall provide full information to the congregation concerning its decisions in such matters. - G-3.0205 *The budget needs to be included in the minutes - not just stated that it was adopted.*			
7) A full financial review of all financial books and records shall be conducted every year. - G-3.0113 *The results needs to be reported in the minutes - not just stated that it was done.*			
8) Send to General Assembly requested statistics. - G-3.0202f *The annual statistical report needs to be approved before submitted and needs to be included in the minutes - not just stated that it was approved and sent.*			
9) Those in charge of various congregational funds shall report at least annually to the session and more often as requested. - G-3.0205 (PW, PM, Deacons, Youth, etc.) *The financial reports needs to be included in the minutes - not just stated that the session has accepted the report.*			

10) Records of the deacons (board or office) reviewed by session (if you have deacons). - G-3.0201c			
11) Annual review of the adequacy of compensation for teaching elders. - G-2.0804			
<b>Annual Actions</b>	<b>Page #/ Month</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
12) Annual review of the adequacy of compensation for administrative staff. - G-3.0201c			
13) Newly elected ruling elders and deacons - G-2.0402 & G-3.0201c a. trained, b. examined, c. ordained and/or installed.	a. b. c.	a. b. c.	a. b. c.
14) Results of the Presbytery record review entered in the minutes with any corrective action recorded. - G-3.0108a			

Notes by examiner(s):

<b>Other Actions</b>	<b>Page #/ Month</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
15) Each session shall elect a clerk who shall record the transactions of the session, keep its rolls of membership and attendance. . . . The clerk of the session shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine. - G-3.0104			
16) The session shall elect a treasurer for such term as the session shall decide and shall supervise his or her work. - G.3-0205			
17) Election of ruling elder commissioners to Presbytery, preferably for at least a year. - G-3.0202a			
18) Receive reports of Presbytery commissioner(s). - G-3.0202a			
19) Periodic, and in no case less than annual, reports of all financial activities shall be made to the session. - G.3.0205c *The financial report needs to be included in the minutes - not just stated that the session has accepted the report.*			
20) a. Authorization of all celebrations of the Lord's Supper. – G-3.0201b b. Administration of the Lord's Supper to shut-ins. – W-3.3616e(3)	a. b.	a. b.	a. b.
21) Authorization of all baptisms. - G-3.0201b *List date and name in full*			
22) Supervision and approval of educational programs. - G.3.0201c			

Notes by examiner(s):

Memberships	Page #/ Month	Yes	No
23) <i>Nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.</i> This responsibility shall include receiving . . . members. - G-3.0201c *First and last name and means of reception (name and location of church if transferring) need to be recorded.*			
24) The session shall delete names from the roll of the congregation upon the member's death, admission to membership in another congregation or presbytery, or renunciation of jurisdiction. The session may delete names from the roll of the congregation when a member so requests, or has moved or otherwise ceased to participate actively in the work and worship of the congregation for a period of two years. - G.3.0204a *First and last name and name and location of the church if removed by transfer.*			
25) Reviewing the roll of active members at least annually. - G-3.0201c			

Notes by examiner(s):

### Congregational Meetings

Congregational Meetings	Page #/ Month	Yes	No
26) Date, time, place, and quorum noted.			
27) The congregation shall hold an annual meeting and may hold special meetings (make note as kind of meeting) as necessary, for any or all of the purposes appropriate for congregational consideration. The business to be transacted at special meetings shall be limited to items specifically listed in the call for the meeting. - G-1.0501			
28) The annual report shall be included in the minutes.			
29) Minutes of previous congregational meetings read/approved. Session may be approved to do this task, but it still needs to be recorded.			
30) a. Electing ruling elders, deacons, and trustees. - G-1.0503a b. Ruling elders and deacons shall be elected to serve terms of no more than three years on the session or board of deacons, and may be eligible for reelection according to congregational rule. – G-2.0404 *Terms need to be recorded.*	a. b.	a. b.	a. b.
31) Changing existing pastoral relationships, by such means as reviewing the adequacy of and approving changes to the terms of call of the pastor or pastors, or requesting, consenting to, or declining to consent to dissolution. - G-1.0501			

32) 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. - G-2.0401			
33) Upon receiving the report of the Pastor Nominating Committee, the congregation approve the terms of call. - G-1.0503b			
34) The clerk of session shall serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. - G-1.0505 *The clerk must sign the minutes.*			

Notes by examiner(s):

### Presentation of Minutes

Presentation of Minutes	Page #/ Month	Yes	No
35) Pages typed and consecutively numbered on acid free paper (front and back).			
36) Blank spaces crossed out. If a revision is necessary, note in margin date the session authorized revision. All notations initialized by the clerk.			
37) No insertions. Addendums, etc. may be copied into the minutes book at the end of the minutes where they are referenced.			

Notes by examiner(s):

### Rolls and Registers

**G-3.0204** – Each session shall maintain the following rolls and registers: a. Membership Roll, b. Registers.

Rolls and Registers	Page #/ Month	Yes	No
38) Baptized members roll - W-2.3012d			
39) Members roll - G-1.0402			
40) Roll of other participants (if used)			
41) Affiliate members roll - G.1.0403			
42) Deaths			
43) Marriages in church, by ministers of church, and of members			
44) Baptism of children (full name, parents' name, date of birth) and adults			

45) Elders and dates of ordination and service (name of church if different)			
46) Deacons and dates of ordination and service (name of church if different)			
47) Pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, interim pastors, stated supplies, and parish associates with dates of service			

Notes by examiner(s):

**Documents Sought by the Presbytery**

<b>Documents Sought by the Presbytery</b>	<b>Page #/ Month</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
48) Manual of Operations - G-3.0106			
49) Copy of Articles of Incorporation - G-4.0101			
50) Current copy of By-laws - G-3.0106			
51) Financial Policy - G-3.0205			
52) Property and liability insurance adequate to protect facilities, programs, and officers - G-3.0112			
53) Sexual Misconduct Policy - G-3.0106			

Notes by examiner(s):

Additional notes by examiner(s):

Signature of Reviewer

Date

## Review of the Active Rolls of the Church (G-3.0201c)

Reviewing the church rolls is an annual responsibility of session. A session may ask the clerk to bring recommendations to them of those who may be removed from the active roll; or may ask a committee to conduct the review and bring recommendations to the session for action.

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

Ordinarily, a person may be removed if there is no evident support of the church (time, talent, treasure) for a period of one calendar year (if still used).

### 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 a ruling 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 transfer to the Inactive Roll (if still used) (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) Only active members can be transferred to another church.

Following are two sample letters to potentially removed 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)

Dear:

The Session of [name] Presbyterian Church is in the process of fulfilling its responsibilities as defined in the **BOOK OF ORDER**, Paragraph G-3.0201, 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 to help you find another church if that is your desire and transfer your membership.

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 deleted from the rolls of this church. At a later date, should you become an active member of a local congregation, please contact that church.

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 **a ruling 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-3.0201, 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 deleted from the rolls. At a later date, should you desire to return to the church please contact the church.

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

-----

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 a **ruling elder** concerning this matter. (Circle one, if applicable)

## Request for Letter of Transfer

For Presbyterian churches, address the letter to the clerk of session. Addresses of Presbyterian churches can be found online at [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org). For churches other than Presbyterian, address the letter to Membership Secretary.

Include full names and family relationships where appropriate. Use Mary Smith Jones and Robert F. Jones rather than Mr. & Mrs. R. F. Jones. Use William Lopez and his daughter Alice rather than William and Alice Lopez. Small churches will have few problems but more detail will substantially help larger churches.

### CHURCH LETTERHEAD

Date

(inside address)

Dear:

Mary Smith Jones and Robert F. Jones have met with our session and expressed their desire to unite with First Presbyterian Church by transfer of letter from your church. Will you please issue the necessary transfer paper at your earliest convenience? Thank you.

*It is always appropriate to add a few words such as:*

Mary and Bob have been attending regularly and have already become active in the Sunday School program and the Dinners for Eight group. We are fortunate to have them join our fellowship.

Sincerely yours,

[your name]

Clerk of Session

## 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:
  - a) Part I: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) 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) When session, presbytery, synod, or the General Assembly votes, those voting must reflect the will of their constituencies.
  - a) True
  - b) False (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) A person who is not baptized may join the church in a private ceremony with friends and family present.
  - a) True (G-1.0402)
  - b) False (W-2.3011)
  
- 7) 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)
  
- 8) The two officers required of a council are
  - a) An executive and 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)

- 9) 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)
- 10) 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)
- 11) 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)
- 12) Installed pastors in local churches serve on session with the privilege of voice and vote.  
 a) True  
 b) False (G-3.0201)
- 13) 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) All of the above  
 f) None of the above (G-3.0201)
- 14) The congregational business may include  
 a) Approving the annual budget  
 b) Reviewing the adequacy of the pastor's compensation  
 c) Determining the mission of the particular church  
 d) Electing an interim pastor (G-1.0501)
- 15) A quorum for a regular (stated) session meeting is  
 a) Set by the presbytery  
 b) Set by the pastor  
 c) Sessions shall provide by rule (manual of operations)  
 d) One third of the members (plus moderator) (G-3.0203)
- 16) 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)

## Ruling 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.”

### **More than budgets, buildings**

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. 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 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. 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.

Stephany Jackson is associate for congregational leadership and Tammy Wiens is associate for spiritual formation in the Theology Worship and Education office of the PC(USA)'s General Assembly Mission Council.

### **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

#### **In the PC(U.S.A.)**

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.

## Sample Clerk's Calendar for Session

### **January**

- \* Session approved minutes of annual congregational meeting, pending on meeting date
- \* Session officially receives various report submitted at annual congregational meeting
- \* Clerk prepares annual statistical report – session approval
- \* Annual joint meeting with Deacons – officers' retreat – not required but recommended
- \* Session approves communion schedule for the year
- \* Any special communion services for Lent/Holy Week are authorized
- \* Session designated members (and moderator) of Congregational Nominating committee for current year
- \* Session elects/appoints commissioners to Presbytery meetings for coming year

### **February**

- \* Session approved annual statistical report, if not in January, clerk submits on-line
- \* Session approved annual congregational meeting minute (if not done in January)
- \* Session receives report of Presbytery commissioners from February Presbytery meeting
- \* Session arranges for financial review of previous year's financials
- \* Minutes report that newly elected officer were examined and installed  
Clerk enters names of newly installed officers in the church register

### **March**

- \* Session authorizes One Great Hour of Sharing special offering

### **April**

- \* Session receives report of financial review which is entered into minutes

### **May**

- \* Session receives report of Presbytery commissioners from the May Presbytery meeting
- \* Clerk reports results of annual record review which are entered into the minutes

### **June**

- \* Session reviews insurance policy for adequacy of coverage

### **August**

- \* Session receives report of Presbytery commissioners from the August Presbytery meeting

### **September**

- \* Session engages in process of reviewing active member rolls – minutes record any action taken  
Clerk makes appropriate entries in church register
- \* Session provides for review of staff compensation
- \* Session approves Peacemaking Offering

### **October**

- \* Session receives report of staff compensation review with budget recommendations
- \* Session sets date for congregational meeting for election of officers and approval of pastor's terms of call

### **November**

- \* Session receives report of Presbytery commissioners from the October Presbytery meeting
- \* Session adopts budget for following year
- \* Session approves plan for new officer training and examination
- \* Session approved the Christmas Joy Offering

### **December**

- \* Session approves minutes of congregational meeting
- \* Session elects clerk, if necessary, for next term
- \* Session sets date for annual congregational meeting
- \* Session elects treasurer for the year

## Other Helpful Resources

The *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* is divided into two parts: The *Book of Confessions* (Part I; see below) and the *Book of Order* Part II (*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 August.*).

The three sections of the *Book of Order* that specifically govern the life of the congregation are the *Form of Government*, the *Directory for Worship*, and the *Rules of Discipline*.

The *Book of Order* may be considered our denomination's by-laws as well as its standing rules. It is essential for the Clerks of Session to study the *Book of Order* because it contains the fundamentals for working within the church.

The *Form of Government* may be seen as the how and when: how and when we function within these beliefs. It explains thoroughly and (usually) clearly the polity of orderly workings of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) We turn to the *Form of Government* to find answers to our frequent questions, and it is one of the standards under which the church makes decisions.

The *Directory for Worship* "reflects the conviction that the life of the church is one, and that its worship, witness, and service are inseparable," as its Preface declares.

The *Rules of Discipline* contain information regarding the nature and discipline of the church. In it you will find judicial process, how to file dissents and protests, administrative review, jurisdiction and process of permanent judicial commissions, procedural safeguards, and much more. The Preamble to the *Rules of Discipline* reminds us that church discipline is for the building up of Christ's church, not for tearing it down, and for restoration to wholeness of the offender. Church discipline is never taken lightly.

The *Book of Confessions* contains our historic Christian confessions that are basic to the theology of the church. All ordained church officers are to affirm that they will be instructed by these confessions; therefore, it is essential that this book be available to individual and group study as well as to be used at times of ordination and installation of officers. While officers are not required to agree with everything in these confessions, they are required to "sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and [to] be instructed and led by those confessions as [they] lead the people to God." (W-4.4003c) Through the *Book of Confessions*, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) declares to its members and to the world the who, what, and why of our beliefs.

*Companion to the Constitution: Polity for the Local Church*, published by the Office of the General Assembly, is an effective, simply written book that is considered a how, what, and why to do book.

*Parliamentary Procedures in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*; by Marianne L. Wolfe, © 2000 is a booklet that fits into the *Book of Order* and is a valuable rapid reference.

(All of the above, including searchable versions of the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*, are available online at <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications.htm>.)

*Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers*, by Joan Gray and Joyce Tucker (Westminster John Knox Press), is considered exceptional reading. This is the *Book of Order* in simple terms.

The latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*, Newly Revised, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition; © 2011, is mandated for use by the *Book of Order* (G-3-0105). Parliamentary law is common sense and politeness put into practice in meetings. It is

a body of conventions and customs that aids decision making, is a model for conflict resolution, and works for the protection of individual rights in the church.

*Robert's Rules of Order*, Newly Revised In Brief; © 2004

*Called to Serve* is a 1997 resource from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) That is designed to assist churches in preparing officers for leadership; suggested uses include individual study, a preordination retreat, or specific training workshops.

*History and Theology in the Book of Order - Blood on Every Page* by William E. Chapman

## Helpful People

Elder Lynn Smit – Stated Clerk – Presbytery of Plains and Peaks

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## Books & Online Resources

### from the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation

<i>Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers</i>	978-0-664-23198-9
<i>Faithful Disagreement</i> by Frances Taylor Gench	978-0-664-23338-9
<i>The Presbyterian Elder</i> by Paul Wright	978-0-664-50252-2
<i>The Presbyterian Deacon</i> by Earl S. Johnson Jr.	978-0-664-50237-9
<i>The Presbyterian Trustee</i> by Earl S. Johnson Jr.	978-0-664-50255-3
<i>Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers</i> by J.Tucker & J.Gray	978-0-664 50018-4
<i>Selected to Serve</i> by Earl S. Johnson Jr.	978-0-664-50165-5
<i>How to Spell Presbyterian</i> by James Angell	978-0-664-50196-9
<i>Making Disciples, Making Leaders</i> by Steve Eason	978-0-664-50263-8
<i>Searching for a Pastor the Presbyterian Way</i> by Dean Foose	978-0-664-50041-2
<i>Ordination Questions</i> by Howard Rice and Calvin Chinn	978-0-664-50213-3
<i>The Presbyterian Handbook</i>	978-0-664-50288-1
<i>Companion to the Constitution</i> by Frank Beattie	978-0-664-50146-4
<i>Book of Confessions: Study Edition</i>	978-0-664-50012-2
<i>Presbyterian Creeds</i> by Jack Rogers	978-0-664-25496-4

All items can be purchased by calling Cokesbury at 800-672-1789, shopping at the Cokesbury store nearest you, or by visiting [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com).

### 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:

### Helpful articles on many topics

Interesting statistics about elder training from Research Services

<http://www.pcusa.org/research/monday/eldersmm.htm>

A Listing of all articles about What Presbyterians Believe

<http://www.pcusa.org/today/believe/believe.htm>

What Presbyterian Believe: Elders As Spiritual Leaders

<http://www.pcusa.org/today/believe/2008/elder.htm>

How Presbyterians Make Decisions along with some church history

<http://www.pcusa.org/today/believe/pastor/apr03/decisions.htm>

What Presbyterians Believe: A Balancing Act

<http://www.pcusa.org/today/believe/pastor/mar03/balancing.htm>

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

<http://www.pcusa.org/today/archive/believe/speak.htm>

Information on The Order of Elders

<http://www.pcusa.org/pastorselders/aboutorder.htm>

PC(U.S.A.) Structure and Governing Bodies

<http://www.pcusa.org/presbytel/structure.htm>

Peacemaking Resources

<http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/pubs/pubs.htm>

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

<http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/guidelines.pdf>