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# **CHURCH OFFICER HANDBOOK**

**A MANUAL FOR  
ELDERS AND DEACONS**

**PRESBYTERY OF  
WESTERN KENTUCKY  
NOVEMBER, 2018**

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# **CHURCH OFFICER HANDBOOK**

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

**Welcome to leadership, ministry, and service as a church officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The purpose of this handbook is to provide guidance as you learn about the church and live out what it means to seek, with brothers and sisters in Christ, to follow the leading of Jesus Christ under the direction of the Holy Spirit. And it all begins with an understanding of the mission of the church and how we can be faithful in discerning and responding to the will of God as the 'body of Christ' in this world, looking to that day when the prayer 'Thy Kingdom come' will truly be fulfilled.**

### **1. GOD'S MISSION (Book of Order, F-1.01)**

**The good news of the gospel is that the triune God- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit- creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people. This one living God, the Scripture say, liberated the people of Israel from oppression and covenanted to be their God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, this one living God is incarnate in Jesus Christ who came to live in the world, die for the world, and be raised again to new life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the nearness of God's kingdom, bringing good news to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed, and proclaiming the Lord's favor upon all creation.**

**The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God's mission.**

### **2. THE GREAT ENDS OF THE CHURCH (Book of Order, F-1.0304)**

**The Great Ends of the Church are:**

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;**
- the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;**
- the maintenance of divine worship;**
- the preservation of the truth;**
- the promotion of social righteousness; and**
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.**

**OBSERVATIONS:**

1.

2.

**QUESTIONS:**

1.

2.

**SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. What do you personally see as the most important mission priority for the church?

2. If you could number the Great Ends of the church from greatest to least in importance, how would it look?

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

3. Write a brief mission statement for yourself and another one for your church.

## **B. DOCTRINAL STANDARDS AND HISTORY**

The confessional standards of the church and our history provide a foundation for our life together as we are a people rooted in a spiritual heritage. Though the following summary of our confessions and history provide an overview, you are encouraged to read and study the confessions and join with others in exploring resources that give greater depth to the history and heritage of the church.

### **1. THE CONFESSIONS OF THE CHURCH (adapted from the Book of Confessions: Study Edition, Geneva Press, Louisville, Kentucky)**

#### **a. THE NICENE CREED**

This was the first and in fact is the only creed used ecumenically by the vast majority of Christians throughout the world. It was the product of two early councils- Nicea in A.D. 325 and Constantinople in A.D. 381. It sought to answer two questions in particular: First, How could Christians consider themselves monotheists and yet hold that both the God of Israel and Jesus are divine? Second, how can Christians use the Hebrew Scriptures as their holy book and yet disagree with the Jews on how it is to be interpreted?

#### **b. THE APOSTLES' CREED**

The first appearance of the Apostle's Creed, as we know it today, was in the eighth century. However, the roots of this Creed are ancient. Its antecedents can be securely traced to the baptismal liturgy of the mid-second century which was itself based upon New Testament formulas. As Christianity is an historic faith it reminds us of the importance given to maintaining continuity with the witness of the apostles.

#### **c. THE SCOTS CONFESSION**

The Scots Confession, charter document of the Church of Scotland, emerged from a protracted period of political and ecclesiastical turmoil during which religious leadership often proved a risky business. Full constitutional ratification came during the reign of James VI in 1567. It distinguishes the true church from false churches by three visible notes: the true preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the sacraments, and ecclesiastical discipline whereby vice is suppressed and virtue nourished.

#### **d. THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM**

The Heidelberg Catechism is both ecumenical and deeply personal. It became the doctrinal standard for Reformed Churches in Holland, Germany and Hungary. Dutch explorers brought it with them to Manhattan Island in 1609, making it the first Reformed Confession in the North American colonies. It was composed in the midst of controversy, centering around the doctrine of the Lord's Supper and specifically how Christ was present in the sacrament. Calvinist interpreters maintained that in the Supper we have a real and spiritually nourishing communion with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**e. THE SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION**

**“Helvetic” (from the Latin word for Switzerland, Helvetica) means “Swiss.” Unlike most other Reformed confessions, it was written by one man, Henry Bullinger (1504-1575). With the Heidelberg Catechism it is the most widely recognized confessional statement in the worldwide family of Reformed churches. It is the most pastoral and practical of all Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is ecumenical in spirit, seeking the unity of the one catholic Church and is unique in that it emphasizes that God who once spoke through the prophets and apostles continues to speak through preaching.**

**f. THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS**

**The Westminster Standards (The Confession and larger and shorter Catechisms) developed in the unique context of the English Reformation. The history of reformation in England is marked by the desire to purify or reform the existing state from within while remaining loyal to it. In response to that the Westminster Assembly, being controlled at that time by Presbyterian Puritans in the Church of England, sat for 5 ½ years, meeting on average about four times a week, ending its work on February 22, 1649. It remains one of the last great parliamentary bodies in the Western world with the emphasis upon representative democracy, liberty of conscience, and order and responsibility in human affairs, influencing governmental structures throughout the world.**

**g. THE THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION OF BARMEN**

**In May, 1934, one hundred thirty-nine delegates representing eighteen Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches from throughout Germany met in the town of Barmen-Wurppetral to reiterate their common faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In so doing, they were contesting the imposition of Adolph Hitler’s National Socialist agenda on the churches in Germany. Everything hangs on the first of six theses which states that Jesus Christ is the one source of the church’s proclamation. The state is indeed to be “honored,” as First Peter puts it, but God alone is to be “feared.”**

**h. THE CONFESSION OF 1967**

**For most of their history, American Presbyterians have looked to the Westminster Standards to define themselves theologically. The Confession of 1967 broke with this past and challenged the church to think anew about the authority and role of confessions. It clarified that ‘confessions and declarations are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scripture bear witness to him.’ It focuses on the theme of reconciliation, both because it is always at the heart of the gospel and because ‘our generation stands in peculiar need of reconciliation in Christ.’**

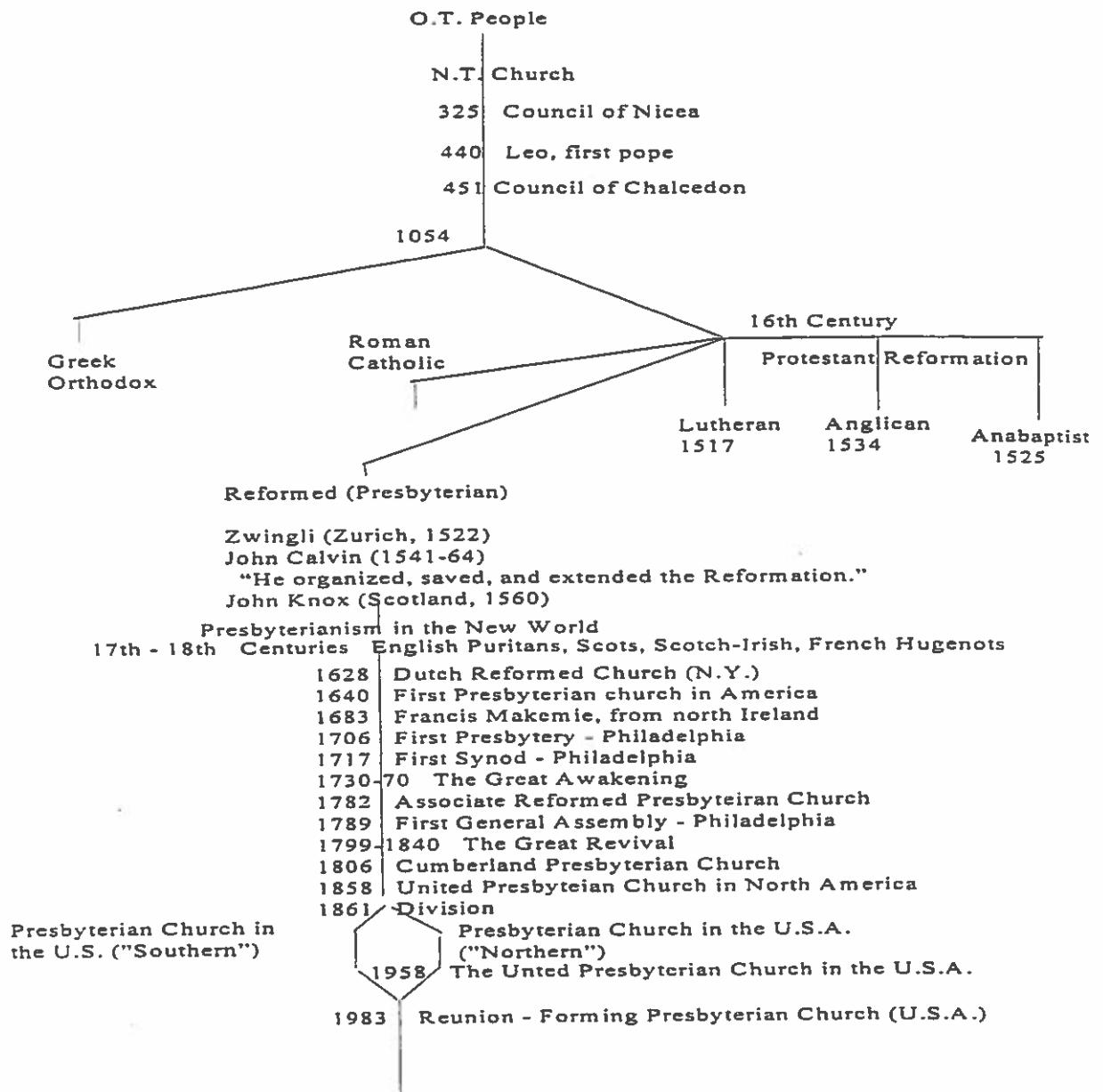
**i. A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

**On the morning of June 9, 1983, the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America reunited, separated from each other since 1859. The Brief Statement is a summary of beliefs confessed through the ages with special emphasis on the sovereignty of God, human sinfulness, and gender inclusiveness in expressing our oneness in Christ.**

**j. The Belhar Confession**

**This confession is the most recent to be added to the Book of Confessions, being approved by more than a two-thirds vote of the presbyteries and placed in the Book of Confessions in 2016. One reason for its inclusion is that it originated in South Africa in response to the struggle against apartheid laws that divided cultures and races, leaving many native people marginalized. As many of the other confessions originated in the context of the European Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Belhar Confession comes from a region of the world where the Christian Church is growing both numerically and spiritually but has faced, and continues to face, opposition in seeking to live out God's justice in this world. Though it takes a strong stand against any sort of racial and cultural discrimination, it also seeks on the basis of the love of Christ to work for forgiveness and reconciliation in our day.**

## 2. PRESBYTERIAN HERITAGE



### Glossary

**Covenanters and Seceders** - These were Presbyterians from Scotland or Ireland who were persecuted for their rebellious attitudes toward the establishment which, they felt, did not adhere to their strict attachment to the great principles of divine truth. They were known for their intelligence and piety.

**New Side** - Congregations and pastors who came out of the period of the increased revivalism nurtured by the Great Awakening in the eighteenth century. They tended to be more emotional in their religious practices, calling for conversion and spiritual evidences and frequently denounced those who did not conform to their standards.



**Old Side** - Congregations and pastors who rejected the demands and zeal of the New Siders. They strongly adhered to the Westminster Confession and were less concerned with the workings of the Holy Spirit.

### **Significant Happenings in American Presbyterianism**

**1562** - Arrival of French Huguenots in Florida and South Carolina. This was the first recorded visit of the French Reformed (Presbyterians) to the New World.

**1611** - Alexander Whitaker arrived in Virginia from England, organized a church and formed a congregational presbytery.

**1629** - Presbyterian Puritan colony arrived at Massachusetts Bay. By 1640, there were 4,000 Presbyterians living in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

**1706** - Organization of the first presbytery in Philadelphia under Francis Makemie.

**1717** - The Synod of Philadelphia, Presbyterian Church of America, is organized.

**1741** - Division into New Side and Old Side over evangelistic fervor and methods, and plan of education for ministry.

**1742** - Associate Presbyterian Church began at Londonderry, PA, majority of which joined in 1858 to form United Presbyterian Church of North America.

**1743** - Reformed Presbyterian Church (Covenanters) began at Middle Octorara, PA. Majority united with Associate Presbyterian Church to form Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (1782).

**1745** - Organization of the Synod of New York. Reunited with Philadelphia in 1758, and known after 1758 as the Synod of New York and Philadelphia until the organization of the General Assembly in 1788.

**1746** - The growing church required more ministers. Having undertaken the education of his four sons, William Tennent included other candidates for the ministry in his Log College on Neshaminy Creek, about 30 miles north of Philadelphia. Soon after his death a small group of Presbyterians secured a charter for the College of New Jersey (Princeton).

**1758** - Reunion of the Synods of Philadelphia and New York into one Presbyterian Church, accepting the main contentions of each synod, namely, that ministers of one presbytery shall not work within the bounds of another presbytery without the latter's consent. Candidates must have learning plus acquaintance with religion. Evangelism is accepted as part of program of church.

**1776** - The Rev. John Witherspoon and eleven other Presbyterians signed the Declaration of Independence.

**1789** - Formation of national church with the title "General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America."

**1801** - Union with Congregational churches during the rapid expansion to the west.

**1810** - Withdrawal and organization of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church largely over the issue of educated ministry. The Cumberland church was thriving in pioneer territory where advanced education was difficult to obtain and some felt unnecessary. The majority reunited in 1906.

**1837** - The Old School rejects the former union with Congregational churches, and the New School holds on to it. Church divides on this issue.

**1857** - The New School, mostly in the west, divides again over the issue of slavery. The United Synod of the Presbyterian Church withdraws to form a southern branch of Presbyterianism.

**1858** - The United Presbyterian Church of North America was formed by the union of the Associate (Presbyterian) Synod (1742) and the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Church (1782).

**1861** - The Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States was founded. In 1864 the United Synod of the Presbyterian Church united with the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States to form the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (Southern).

**1870** - The two northern branches, the Old School and the New School, united again as the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

**1870 - 1920** - The Presbyterian Church experienced tremendous programmatic growth in areas of mission, education, evangelism, ecumenics, women's and youth work.

**1920** - Union with Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church.

**1930** - General Assembly voted to allow women to become elders.

**1956** - Women admitted as ordained ministers.

**1958** - The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. created by union of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the United Presbyterian Church of North America.

**1983** - The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) created by the union of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the Presbyterian Church U.S.

#### **OBSERVATIONS:**

1.

2.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1.

2.

#### **SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. **Of all the confessions of our church, which one interests you the most and motivates you for further study? Why?**

2. **From an overview of our confessions and history, what do you discern as some of the basic beliefs of our church?**

3. **What are some notable events in your church's history?**

### **C. THE BOOK OF ORDER**

The Book of Order is the central document that describes the polity, worship, and rules of discipline for the church. Suggestions for changes in its content can come from a number of different sources, including local churches (through the presbytery), the presbytery, synod, or General Assembly entities. These are presented to the bi-annual meeting of the General Assembly, first in committee, and then to the Assembly as a whole, for approval. If approval is granted, the final proposed changes are then distributed to the presbyteries for their vote. As simple majority is needed for the change to become effective (one year following the conclusion of the General Assembly meeting). As noted, the Book of Order is divided into four separate parts.

#### **1. The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity (F)**

This first section gives an overview of the basis for our polity. It is divided into three chapters: “The Mission of the Church,” “The Church and its Confessions,” and “Principles of Order and Government.” It emphasizes Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church, the purpose of confessional statements, and the rationale for the church order that we follow. It defines term ‘Presbyter’ by stating: “The church shall be governed by presbyters, that is ruling elders, and teaching elders. Ruling elders are so named not because they “lord it over” the congregation, but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Teaching elders shall be committed in all their work to equipping the people of God for their ministry and witness.” (F-3.0202)

#### **2. Form of Government (G)**

The second section defines the polity of the church. It is divided into chapters, giving instruction regarding “Congregations and Their Membership,” “Ordered Ministry, Commissioning, and Certification,” “Councils of the Church,” “The Church and Civil Authority,” “Ecumenicity and Union,” and “Interpreting and Amending the Constitution.” Not only does it define the various entities of the church and different classification of ministry, it provides guidance regarding the specific ways in which all councils of the church (Session, Presbytery, Synod, General Assembly) may function in the most appropriate manner that promotes the unity of the church and brings glory to God. The most current edition of *Robert’s Rules of Order* is to be used in conjunction with the Book of Order with

the understanding that where they differ, the Book of Order is always to be given the higher priority.

### **3. Directory for Worship (W)**

The third section provides a framework for worship within the reformed tradition. Though the format of worship can differ from congregation to congregation based on such qualities as geographic location, average age of its members, availability of resources, and numerical size of the congregation, the focus of worship on glorifying God through various expressions of music, prayer, Scripture reading, the preaching of the Word, and the giving of ourselves in renewed commitment to faithful service, are foundational to our connective life. Worship can occur at any time or place but the setting aside of a regular (usually weekly) time for corporate worship is reflective of spiritual discipline and a commitment to share spiritual life with brothers and sisters in Christ. This section is divided into seven chapters including, "The Dynamics of Christian Worship," "The Elements of Christian Worship," "Ordering of Christian Worship," "Ordering Worship for Special Purposes," "Worship and Personal Discipleship," "Worship and Ministry Within the Community of Faith," and "Worship and the Ministry of The Church in the World."

### **4. Rules of Discipline (D)**

The right administration of church discipline is considered to be one of the signs of the true church. Though we work toward peace and harmony and the assumption that all involved will reflect ethical integrity in their lives both inside and outside of the visible church, the reality of our human condition is that individuals and councils can engage in behavior that is contrary to our ethical standards. When this occurs, a process of discipline (coupled with compassion for all those involved) is often necessary to correct and, hopefully, restore what it means for us to live in accordance with divine truth. Discipline may be put into practice at all councils of the church (Session, presbytery, Synod, General Assembly) with the last three represented by an elected body called "The Permanent Judicial Commission." Decisions made at one level can be appealed to a higher level with the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission being the final interpreter in any given case. Questions regarding concerns can be addressed to the Clerk of Session or the Stated Clerk of the particular council of the church.

- 5. An exercise in becoming familiar with the Book of Order.  
(Provide an answer to each question and the reference where it is found).**
- a. What is the highest goal of human beings?  
Ans:**
  
  - b. What are the responsibilities associated with church membership?  
Ans.:**
  
  - c. For what length of time can ruling elders and deacons serve?  
Ans:**
  
  - d. On what condition can a former pastor provide pastoral services?  
Ans:**
  
  - e. What documents are all councils required to adopt and implement?  
Ans:**
  
  - f. How often shall a full financial review be done?  
Ans:**
  
  - g. When can a session delete names from the membership role?  
Ans:**
  
  - h. Who has responsibility for the elements of worship?  
Ans:**
  
  - i. Who is eligible to receive or be recognized for baptism?  
Ans:**
  
  - j. How often and with whom shall the Lord's Supper be celebrated?  
Ans:**
  
  - k. What is the time limitation regarding judicial charges to be filed?  
Ans:**
  
  - l. What is the definition of "judicial process"?  
Ans:**

**OBSERVATIONS:**

1.

2.

**QUESTIONS:**

1.

2.

**SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. Since the Bible is considered our primary source of guidance, why is it also necessary to have a “Book of Order”?

2. In what ways is the concept of “order” helpful or not helpful in promoting the spiritual life of the church?

3. Reflect on the Apostle Paul’s statement in Galatians 5 as it relates to church government: “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.”

## **D. CONGREGATIONAL LIFE**

Our church, though connectional in nature, finds its foundation in local congregational life. Whether you consider your particular church to be large or small or somewhere in between, the worship and service of brothers and sisters in Christ make the church what it is. As the 'body of Christ' we are joined with one another to promote the presence of God where we live and be a light that shines forth in the darkness and a witness of what it mean to love one another as Christ loves us.

### **1. THE MEMBERSHIP OF A CONGREGATION (Book of Order, G-1.03)**

#### **THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP AND BAPTISM (G-1.0301)**

In Jesus Christ, God calls people to faith and membership in the Church, the body of Christ. Baptism is the visible sign of that call and claim on a human life and of entrance into the membership of the church. The baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith. The baptism of those who enter the covenant of membership upon their own profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior witnesses to the truth that God's gift of grace calls forth a response of faithfulness. Thus, the triune God, incarnate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, gives to the church not only its mission but also its understanding of membership.

#### **WELCOME AND OPENNESS (G-1.0302)**

A congregation shall welcome all persons who trust in God's grace in Jesus Christ and desire to become part of the fellowship and ministry of the Church (F-1.0403). No person shall be denied membership for any reason not related to profession of faith. The Gospel leads members to extend the fellowship of Christ to all persons. Failure to do so constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal to the Gospel.

#### **Entry into Membership (G-1.0303)**

Persons may enter into active church membership in the following ways:

- a. Public profession of faith, made after careful examination by the session in the meaning and responsibilities of membership; if not already baptized, the person making profession of faith shall be baptized;
- b. Certificate of transfer, when a person is a member of another Christian church at the time of transfer;
- c. Reaffirmation of faith, for persons previously baptized in the name of the triune God and having publicly professed their faith.

#### **THE MINISTRY OF MEMBERS (G-1.0304)**

Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ's mission. A faithful member bears witness to God's love and grace and

promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church. Such involvement includes:

proclaiming the good news in word and deed,  
taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation,  
lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support,  
studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life,  
supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,  
demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church,  
responding to God's activity in the world through service to others,  
living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,  
working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment,  
participating in the governing responsibilities of the church, and  
reviewing and evaluating regularly the integrity of one's membership, and considering ways in which one's participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful.

## **2. CATEGORIES OF MEMBERSHIP (Book of Order, G-1.04)**

The membership of a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) includes baptized members, active members, and affiliate members.

### **BAPTIZED MEMBER (G-1.0401)**

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

### **ACTIVE MEMBER (G-1.0402)**

An active member is a person who has made a profession of faith in Jesus 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. In addition, active members participate in the governance of the church and may be elected to ordered ministry. Active members shall regularly, after prayerful consideration, recommit themselves to the disciplines and responsibilities of membership as outlined in G-1.0304. The session shall have responsibility for preparing those who would become active members of the congregation.

### **AFFILIATE MEMBER (G-1.0403)**

An affiliate member is a member of another congregation of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the congregation of membership is situated, has presented a certificate of good standing from the appropriate council or governing body of that congregation, and has been received by the session as an affiliate member. An affiliate member may participate in the life of the congregation in the same manner as an active member except that an affiliate member may not vote in congregational meetings or be elected to ordered ministry or other office in the congregation.



#### **OTHER PARTICIPANTS (G-1.0404)**

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. The invitation to the Lord's Supper is extended to all who have been baptized, remembering that access to the table is not a right conferred upon the worthy, but a privilege given to the undeserving who come in faith, repentance, and love. Confessing members of other Christian churches may present their children for baptism.

### **3. MEETINGS OF THE CONGREGATION (G-1.05)**

#### **ANNUAL AND SPECIAL MEETINGS (G-1.0501)**

The congregation shall hold an annual meeting and may hold special meetings as necessary, for any and all 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.

All active members of the congregation present at either annual or special meetings are entitled to vote. Congregations shall provide by rule the quorum necessary to conduct business.

#### **CALLING A CONGREGATIONAL MEETING (G-1.0502)**

Meetings of the congregation shall be called by the session, by the presbytery, or by the session when requested in writing by one fourth of the active members on the roll of the congregation. Adequate public notice of all congregational meetings shall be given.

Congregations shall provide by their own rule for minimum notification requirements and give notice at regular services of worship prior to the meeting.

#### **BUSINESS PROPER TO CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS (G-1.0503)**

Business to be transacted at meetings of the congregation shall be limited to matters related to the following:

- a. electing ruling elders, deacons, and trustees;
- b. calling a pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor;
- c. changing existing pastoral relationships, by such means as reviewing the adequacy of and approving changes to terms of call of the pastor or pastors, or requesting, consenting to, or declining to consent to dissolution;
- d. buying, mortgaging, or selling real property;
- e. requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption as permitted in this Constitution;
- f. approving a plan for the creation of a joint congregational witness, or amending or dissolving a joint congregational witness.

Whenever permitted by civil law, both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting.

#### **ELECTION OF A PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE (G-2.0802)**

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

#### **4. DISSOLUTION OF PASTORAL RELATIONSHIPS (Book of Order, G-2.09)**

##### **CONGREGATIONAL MEETING (G-2.0901)**

An installed pastoral relationship may be dissolved only by the presbytery. Whether the teaching elder, the congregation, or the presbytery initiates proceedings for dissolution of the relationship, there shall always be a meeting of the congregation to consider the matter and to consent, or decline to consent, to dissolution.

##### **PASTOR, CO-PASTOR, OR ASSOCIATE PASTOR REQUESTS (G-2.0902)**

A pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor may request the presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship. The teaching elder must also state his or her intention to the session. The session shall call a congregational meeting to act upon the request and to make recommendations to the presbytery. If the congregation does not concur, the presbytery shall hear from the congregation, through its elected commissioners, the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the pastoral relationship. If the congregation fails to appear, or if its reasons for retaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the request may be granted and the pastoral relationship dissolved.

##### **CONGREGATION REQUESTS (G-2.0903)**

If any congregation desires a pastoral relationship to be dissolved, a procedure similar to G-2.0902, above, shall be followed. When a congregation requests the session to call a congregational meeting to dissolve its relationship with its pastor, the session shall call the meeting and request the presbytery to appoint a moderator for the meeting. If the pastor does not concur with the request to dissolve the relationship, the presbytery shall hear from him or her the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the relationship. If the pastor fails to appear, or if the reasons for maintaining the relationship are judged to be insufficient, the relationship may be dissolved.

##### **PRESBYTERY ACTION (G-2.0904)**

The presbytery may inquire into reported difficulties in a congregation and may dissolve the pastoral relationship if, after consultation with the teaching elder, the session, and the congregation, it finds the church's mission under the Word imperatively demands it.

##### **OFFICIATE BY INVITATION ONLY (G-2.0905)**

After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session.

##### **OBSERVATIONS:**

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##### **QUESTIONS:**

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## **E. THE OFFICE OF RULING ELDER**

The office of ruling elder has both Old Testament and New Testament roots as lay people possessing spirituality and maturity were chosen to assist in the leadership of the community of faith. Though ruling elders, meeting together, oversee the business aspects of the church, they are primarily servants, seeking what is best and ministering to the spiritual and temporal needs of the congregation.

### **1. RULING ELDERS: The MINISTRY OF DISCERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE**

#### **RULING ELDER DEFINED (Book of Order, G-2.0301)**

As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God's Spirit and governance of God's people. Accordingly, congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit. Ruling elders are so named not because they "lord it over" the congregation (Mt. 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Ruling elders, together with teaching elders, exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationships. When elected by the congregation, they shall serve faithfully as members of the session. When elected as members of higher councils, ruling elders participate and vote with the same authority as teaching elders, and they are eligible for any office.

### **2. COMPOSITION AND RESPONSIBILITIES (Book of Order, G-3.0201)**

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. The pastoral shall be the moderator of the session, and the session shall not meet without the pastor or designated moderator. If there is no installed pastor, or if the installed pastor is unable to invite another moderator, the presbytery shall make provision for a moderator. Presbyteries shall provide by rule for moderators when the session is without a moderator for reasons of vacancy or inconvenience.

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. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the session shall keep before it the marks of the church (F-1.0302), the notes by

which Presbyterian and Reformed Congregations have identified themselves throughout history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

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

- a. *provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.* This responsibility shall include providing a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, education, and spiritual nurture; providing for regular preaching of the Word by a teaching elder or other person prepared and approved for the work; planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world with the message of salvation and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship; planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community in accordance with the prophetic witness of Jesus Christ; and initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to the love and grace of God.
- b. *Provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received.* This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate, in accordance with the principles of the Directory for Worship; and exercising pastoral care among the congregation in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the congregation may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.
- c. *nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.* This responsibility shall include receiving and dismissing members; reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership; providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship; training, examining, ordaining, and installing those elected by the congregation as ruling elders and deacons; encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources; managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission; directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation; employing the administrative staff of the congregation; leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

### **3. TERMS OF SERVICE (Book of Order, G-2.0204)**

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. However, no ruling elder or deacon shall be eligible to serve more than six consecutive years, and a ruling elder or deacon who has served six consecutive years shall be ineligible for election to the same board for at least one year. Election shall be to classes as nearly equal in number as possible, with the term of only one class ending each year. The presbytery may, upon written request and majority vote, grant a congregation a waiver of this limitation of terms.

Once ordained and while they are active members of any congregation of this denomination, ruling elders or deacons not in active service on a session or board of deacons continue to bear responsibilities of the ministry to which they have been ordained.

#### **4. MINUTES AND RECORDS (Book of Order, G-3.0204)**

Minutes of the session shall be subject to the provisions of G-3.0107. They shall contain the minutes of all meetings of the congregation and all joint meetings with deacons and trustees.

Each session shall maintain the following roll and registers:

**a. *Membership Roll***

There shall be rolls of baptized, active, and affiliate members in accordance with G-1.0401, G-1.0402 and G-1.0403. 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. The session shall seek to restore members to active participation and shall provide written notice before deleting names due to member inactivity.

**b. *Registers***

There shall be registers of baptisms authorized by the session, of ruling elders and deacons, of installed pastors with dates of service, and other such registers as the session may deem necessary.

#### **5. FINANCES (Book of Order, G-3.0205)**

In addition to the responsibilities described in G-3.0113, the session shall prepare and adopt a budget and determine the distribution of the congregation's benevolences. It shall authorize offerings for Christian purposes and shall account for the proceeds of such offerings and their disbursement. It shall provide full information to the congregation concerning its decisions in such matters.

The session shall elect a treasurer for such term as the session shall decide and shall supervise his or her work or delegate that supervision to a board of deacons or trustees. Those in charge of various congregational funds shall report at least annually to the session and more often as requested. Sessions may provide by rule for standard financial practices of the congregation, but in no case shall fail to observe the following procedures:

- a. All offerings shall be counted and recorded by at least two duly appointed persons, or by one fidelity bonded person;**
- b. Financial books and records adequate to reflect all financial transactions shall be kept and shall be open to inspection by authorized church officers at reasonable times;**

- c. **Periodic, and in no case less than annual, reports of all financial activities shall be made to the session or entity vested with financial oversight.**

**6. OFFICERS (Book of Order, G-3.0104)**

- a. **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 no installed pastor, or if the installed pastor is unable to invite another moderator, the presbytery shall make provision for a moderator.**
- b. **The moderator possesses the authority necessary for preserving order and for conducting efficiently the business of the body. He or she shall convene and adjourn the body in accordance with its own action.**
- c. **Each council shall elect a clerk who shall record the transactions of the council, keep its rolls of membership and attendance, maintain any required registers, preserve its records, and furnish extracts from them when required by another council of the church. Such extracts, verified by the clerk, shall be evidence in any 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.**

**d. RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNCILS (Book of Order, G-3.0202)**

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

- a. **elect, as commissioners to presbytery, ruling elders from the congregation, preferably for at least a year, and receive their reports;**
- b. **nominate to presbytery ruling elders from the congregation who may be considered for election as commissioners to Synod and General Assembly, and to serve on committees and commissions of the same, bearing in mind principles of inclusiveness and fair representation in the decision making of the church (F-1.0403);**
- c. **see that the guidance and communication of presbytery, synod, and General Assembly are considered, and that any binding actions are observed and carried out;**
- d. **welcome representatives of the presbytery on the occasion of their visits;**
- e. **propose to the presbytery, or through it to the Synod and General Assembly, such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church; and**
- f. **send to presbytery and General Assembly requested statistics and other information according to the requirements of those bodies, as well as voluntary financial contributions.**

**OBSERVATIONS:**

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**QUESTIONS:**

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**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. What do you see as the most important responsibilities for ruling elders in your church?

2. If someone were asked to become a ruling elder and asked you what it entails, how would you respond?

3. What new insight have you gained regarding ruling elders from the selections from the Book of Order?



## **F. APPROPRIATE ORDERING OF BUSINESS**

The proper ordering of business is essential for the well-being of the congregation and the decision making process of the governing bodies of the church. With reliance upon the Book of Order and the most recent edition of Robert's Rules of Order, following guidelines for conducting business ensures that the biblical imperative that all be done 'decently and in order' will be honored.

### **1. MEETINGS (Book of Order, G-3.0203)**

The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly. The moderator shall call a special meeting when he or she deems necessary or when requested in writing by any two members of the session. The business to be transacted at special meetings shall be limited to items specifically listed in the call for the meeting. There shall be reasonable notice given of all special meetings. The session shall also meet when directed by presbytery. Sessions shall provide by rule for a quorum for meetings; such quorum shall include the moderator and either specific number of ruling elders or a specific percentage of those ruling elders in current service on the session.

### **2. PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE**

#### **Definitions**

When parliamentary procedure is properly used it provides the means whereby the affairs of an organization can be controlled by the general will within the whole membership.

#### **Basic Principles**

- 1. To maintain decorum**
- 2. To aid the orderly transaction of business**
- 3. To determine the will of the majority**
- 4. To safeguard the rights of the minority by means of free debate**

#### **Requirements (for successful parliamentary procedure)**

- 1. Informed members-** with a knowledge of parliamentary procedure, the agenda, and what has happened in past meetings.
- 2. Active members-** who will debate and vote their opinions.
- 3. Cooperative members** who do not use parliamentary procedure to slow down or confuse impending business.
- 4. Able direction-** by a presiding officer who preserves order, keeps the tone of the meeting impersonal and objective, and avoids procedures that waste time.
- 5. A quorum-** the minimum number of members legally required by the by-laws of the organization to conduct business.
- 6. Definite proposals-** which enable discussion and debate to take place (ideas cannot be merely suggested by members, they must be put in the form of proposals for action, or resolutions).

7. **An agenda- or a plan of the meeting, i.e., an order of business to be followed.**

#### **Basic Principles**

1. **Equality of members in the group.**
2. **Majority rule- the vote of the majority prevails in all matters.**
3. **Orderliness- in which business is arranged and conducted. The simplest method of dispatch is followed, and only one item of business should be considered at a time.**
4. **Avoid personalities of members- members are addressed through the moderator.**
5. **Free debate- both pro and con for every proposal under consideration.**
6. **Privileges- each member has a right to know at all times what question is being considered. The secretary keeps a record of all transactions to provide exact information to members.**

#### **Participation**

1. **Session meetings are open meetings, meaning that any member of the church has the right to attend, whether or not previous notice has been given.**
2. **Elected Session members are the only ones with the right to vote.**
3. **Those attending who are not session members may be given the right to have 'voice but no vote' regarding the issues at hand in the following manner:**
  - a. **By official approval from a vote by the session;**
  - b. **By general consensus to speak as long as done in a respectful manner.**
4. **By majority vote the session may determine to go into executive session, by which all visitors and others in attendance who are not session members are asked to excuse themselves for the duration of the executive session.**
  - a. **Executive session should be called only for the express purpose of dealing with very sensitive issues, usually related to personnel.**
  - b. **It is inappropriate and will be ruled out of order to request an executive session simply to block someone in attendance from speaking in opposition to an issue supported by certain members of the session.**
  - c. **Though an executive session is usually the last item on an agenda, if it occurs at an earlier time in the meeting, those excused are invited to return at the conclusion of the executive session.**

#### **Order of Business**

1. **Call to order**
2. **Reading and approval of minutes of previous meeting**
3. **Reports from officers and standing committees, then special committees**
4. **Unfinished business from previous meeting**
5. **New business**
6. **Adjournment**

#### **Conduct of Business**

**A motion is a proposal that the group take action.**

**A resolution is a formal statement of the views and opinions of the group. It is usually submitted in written form and is preceded by the word, 'resolved.'**

- 1. Putting a motion before the assembly: before the motion is on the floor (before the assembly) for debate it must be:**
  - a. Introduced (a member must be recognized by the moderator, address the chair and say, "I move that \_\_\_\_\_")**
  - b. Seconded (any member may say, "I support the motion.")**
  - c. and stated by the moderator.**
  - d. If a motion is presented by a committee or other entity it does not need a second.**
- 2. A motion should be stated affirmatively so that a "yes" vote means to act and a "no" vote means refusal to act.**
- 3. A motion should be referred to as the "question" once it has been restated by the chair and is thus before the assembly. No member can be granted the floor for actual debate until the motion is stated by the chair.**
- 4. Treating a motion- when a motion is before the assembly it can be debated, altered, delayed, disposed of, and voted upon.**
  - a. Limiting debate- the group may determine ahead of time the length and number of times each member may speak. Debate can be limited or extended by offering a specific motion (this motion is not debatable, is amendable, and requires a 2/3 vote to pass).**
  - b. Amending the motion- no main motion can have more than two amendments at one time. A secondary amendment (amendment to an amendment) has precedence over the primary amendment, which itself has precedence over the main motion.**
  - c. Delaying actions on motions:**
    - 1. A motion to lay on the table, if passed, postpones the matter under discussion until a later, unspecified time, when a motion to take from the table would be in order. The motion is not debatable or amendable and requires a majority vote.**
    - 2. A motion to postpone definitely, if passed, postpones consideration of a motion until a definite time that has been specified. This motion is both debatable and amendable.**
    - 3. A motion to refer to a committee- is both debatable and amendable.**
  - d. Disposing of motions: when a motion seems undesirable, an assembly may refuse to discuss it by:**
    - 1. Objecting to its consideration- any member may object to consideration of a matter so long as he/she does so before the first speaker. Such a motion requires a 2/3 majority.**
    - 2. Postponing indefinitely.**

3. **Withdrawing the motion-** may be requested by the maker of the motion, if the seconder agrees, and there is no objection from the assembly the moderator declares the motion withdrawn. If there is an objection a vote is taken.

#### **Methods of Voting**

1. **By acclamation (vocal).** The form is: "Those in favor of \_\_\_\_\_ say, 'yes.'" Those opposed, "no."
2. **By show of hands.**
3. **By standing.**
4. **By ballot.**
5. **By roll call-** used when a record of the vote is requested.
6. **By general consent-** a method of silent voting when business is not deemed sufficiently important to take the time to go through the routine procedure.
7. **An omnibus motion** is the placing of more than one motion together to be voted on at the same time. This can be proposed by the moderator as part of the setting of the agenda for the meeting. Any voting member, however, can request that any item from the 'consent agenda' be removed for individual consideration.

**Announcing the Vote-** the moderator must state clearly whether the motion has been carried or lost.

### **3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS (Book of Order, G-3.0105)**

Meetings of councils shall be opened and closed with prayer. Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, except when it is in contradiction to this Constitution. Councils may also make use of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body.

When a council makes a decision, a member of the body who voted against the decision is entitled to file a dissent or a protest. Filing a dissent or protest neither initiates nor prevents judicial process.

- a. A dissent is a declaration expressing disagreement with a decision of a council. It shall be made at the particular session during which the decision is made. The names of members dissenting shall be recorded.
- b. A protest is a written declaration, supported by reasons, alleging that a decision of a council is or contains an irregularity or a delinquency. Written notice of the protest shall be given at the particular session of the council during which it arose and shall be filed with the clerk before adjournment. If the protest is expressed in decorous and respectful language, it shall be entered in the minutes of the meeting, and may be accompanied by an answer prepared by the council. No further action is required.

**OBSERVATIONS:**

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**QUESTIONS:**

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**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. What is the main purpose for parliamentary procedure?

2. What is most important to ensure that meetings are conducted 'decently and in order'?

3. What new insights have you gained about parliamentary procedure from the readings in this section?

## **G. THE BOARD OF DEACONS**

The concept of deacons has always been at the forefront of the ministry of the church. From the first deacons in Acts, chapter 6, who were given the responsibility of looking after the needs of widows, to the formal organizational structure of the office of deacons as described in the pastoral letters, setting aside spiritual people to focus on the meeting of temporal needs reflects the love of Jesus Christ who did not hesitate to touch lives broken by the weight of everyday concerns. Deacons who serve well are to be held in high regard.

### **DEACONS: THE MINISTRY OF COMPASSION AND SERVICE**

#### **DEACON DEFINED (Book of Order, G-2.0201)**

The ministry of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion, and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry.

#### **UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE SESSION (Book of Order, G-2.0202)**

Deacons may be individually commissioned or organized as a board of deacons. In either case, their ministry is under the supervision and authority of the session. Deacons may also be given special assignments in the congregation, such as caring for members in need, handling educational tasks, cultivating liberality in giving, collecting and disbursing monies to specific persons or causes, or overseeing the buildings and property of the congregation. Deacons shall assume other duties as may be delegated to them by the session, including assisting with the Lord's Supper (W-3.616). A congregation by a majority vote may choose not to utilize the ordered ministry of deacons. If the congregation has neither a board of deacons nor individually commissioned deacons, the function of this ordered ministry shall be the responsibility of the ruling elders and the session.

#### **OBSERVATIONS:**

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#### **QUESTIONS:**

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**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

- 1. Why is it important to include the meeting of temporal needs in a religious faith whose main focus is on eternal and spiritual values?**
- 2. What are some specific tasks you would like to see the deacons in your church (or diaconate part of the session) be committed to perform?**
- 3. How much of the financial priorities of your church should be devoted to ministries of compassion and service? Why not more or less?**

## **H. RESPONSIBILITIES OF TRUSTEES**

The office of trustee has been established to aid the church in overseeing and responding to the realities of business management. Sound business practices necessitate the selection of spiritual people who will be responsible for matters related to property issues and the handling of finances under the direction of the session and approval of the congregation. The session may act as the trustees of the church with such officers as the church treasurer and financial secretary assuming responsibility for the handling of money, reporting to the Session on a regular basis.

### **TRUSTEES (Book of Order, G-4.0101)**

Where permitted by civil law, each congregation shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained. If incorporation is not permitted, individual trustees shall be elected by the congregation. Any such individual trustees shall be elected from the congregation's members in the same manner as those elected to the ordered ministries of deacon and ruling elder. Terms of service shall be governed by the provisions of G-2.0404.

The corporation so formed, or the individual trustees, shall have the following powers: to receive, hold, encumber, manage, and transfer property, real or personal, for the congregation, provided that in buying, selling, and mortgaging real property, the trustees shall act only after the approval of the congregation, granted in a duly constituted meeting; to accept and execute deeds of title to such property; to hold and defend title to such property; to manage any permanent special funds for the furtherance or the purposes of the congregation, all subject to the authority of the session and under the provisions of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). The powers and duties of trustees shall not infringe upon the powers and duties of the session or the board of deacons.

If any congregation chooses not to elect trustees, the responsibilities of the trustees will be assumed by the session, with the clerk of session or moderator being the official representative in giving written confirmation to appropriate session or congregational action.

### **OBSERVATIONS:**

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### **QUESTIONS:**

1.

2.



**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

- 1. From your perspective what are some important guidelines for your church to follow in dealing with money and property?**
- 2. What criteria should be used in selecting people to have responsibility for financial and property matters?**
- 3. How does the proper handling of business matters affect the life and witness of your church in your community?**

## **I. ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS**

**Orientation and training are essential for proper ministry. And adherence to the standards of the church provides a common bond among those who serve as church officers. The constitutional questions not only seek to formulate the basic understanding of our mission and purpose, they give opportunity to affirm our beliefs and intentions as ruling elders and deacons.**

### **1. GENERAL PROVISIONS FOR RULING ELDERS AND DEACONS (G-2.04)**

#### **ELECTION OF RULING ELDERS AND DEACONS (G-2.0401)**

**Ruling elders and deacons are men and women elected by the congregation from among its members. The nomination and election of ruling elders and deacons shall express the rich diversity of the congregation's membership and shall guarantee participation and inclusiveness. Ruling elders and deacons shall be nominated by a committee elected by the congregation, drawn from and representative of its membership. Congregations may provide by their own rule for a congregational nominating committee, provided that the committee shall consist of at least three active members of the congregation, and shall include at least one ruling elder who is currently serving on the session. The pastor shall serve ex officio and without vote. When elections are held, full opportunity shall always be given to the congregation for nomination from the floor of the congregational meeting by any active member of the congregation. A majority of all active members present and voting shall be required to elect.**

#### **PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY AS A RULING ELDER OR DEACON (G-2.0402)**

**When persons have been elected to the ordered ministry of rulings or deacons, the session shall provide a period of study and preparation, after which the session shall examine them as to their personal faith; knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church; and the duties of ministry. The session shall also confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the ministry appropriate to the order. If the examination is approved, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation.**

#### **SERVICE OF ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION (G-2.0403)**

**The service of ordination and installation shall focus upon Christ and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church, and shall include a sermon appropriate for the occasion. The moderator of session or person authorized to preside shall state briefly the nature of the ministry of ruling elder or deacon. The act of ordination and installation takes place in the context of worship.**

### **2. ORDINATION QUESTIONS (Book of Order, W-4.4003)**

- a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?**

- b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?**
- c. Do you 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 will you be instructed by and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?**
- d. Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?**
- e. Will you be governed by the church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?**
- f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?**
- g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?**
- h. Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?**
- i. (1) (For ruling elder) Will you be a faithful ruling elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in the councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?**  
**(2) (For deacon) Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?**  
**(3) (For teaching elder) Will you be a faithful teaching elder, proclaiming the Good News in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith and caring for people? Will you be active in government and discipline, serving in the councils of the church; and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?**  
**(4) (For ruling elder commissioned to particular pastoral service) Will you be a faithful ruling elder in this commission, serving the people by proclaiming the good news, teaching faith and caring for the people, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?**

**(5) For certified Christian Educator) Will you be a faithful certified Christian Educator, teaching faith and caring for people, and will you in your ministry try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?**

**OBSERVATIONS:**

**1.**

**2.**

**QUESTIONS:**

**1.**

**2.**

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

**1. Why is it important for those selected to serve as officers in your church to respond to constitutional questions in a public setting?**

**2. What would be helpful for you to feel adequately prepared to assume the responsibility of being a church officer?**

**3. What constitutional questions do you find the most difficult to agree with or comply with? Why?**

## **J. GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE**

All church denominations as well as national governments have an organizational structure. This provides a sense of identity and well as a means for conducting business in a meaningful way. With that in mind, we have a representative form of government and the structure of our church above the local level is Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly. All three have a valuable role in the life of our church.

### **1. PRESBYTERY (Book of Order, G-3.0301)**

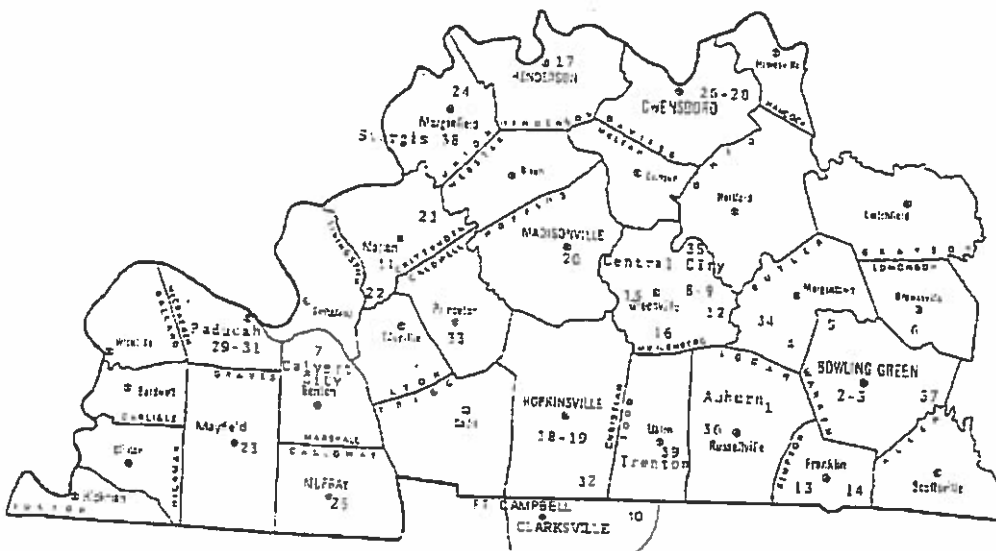
The presbytery is the council serving as a corporate expression of the church within a certain district and is composed of all the congregations and teaching elders within that district. The Presbytery shall adopt and communicate to the sessions a plan for determining how many ruling elders each session should elect as commissioners to presbytery, with a goal of numerical parity of teaching elders and ruling elders... The presbytery is responsible for the government of the church throughout its district, and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness...

In light of this charge, the presbytery has responsibility and power to:

- a. provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard...
- b. provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received...
- c. nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.

### **THE PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN KENTUCKY**

Thirty churches, which are located from Smiths Grove in the east to Paducah in the west, from Indiana on the north to Tennessee on the south, with one church located in Clarksville, Tennessee. Regular meetings are held four times per year (the second Tuesday of February, May, and November, and the second Saturday in August) in the churches of the Presbytery. Staff include Coordinating Presbyter, Administrative Assistant, Office Assistant, Stated Clerk, and Treasurer. Office is located in Hopkinsville, Kentucky.



## 2. SYNOD (Book of Order, G-3.0401)

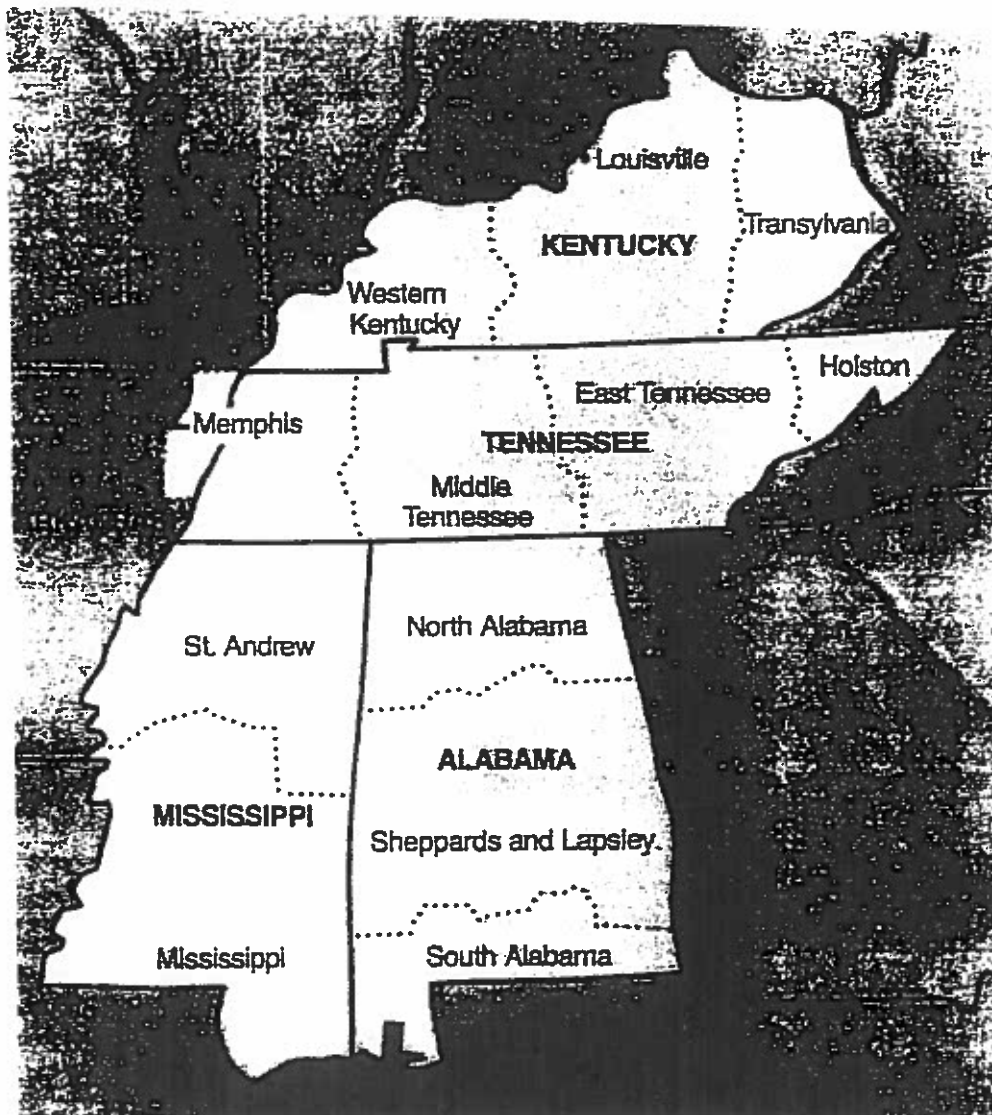
The Synod is the intermediate council serving as a corporate expression of the church throughout its region. It shall consist of not fewer than three presbyteries within a specific geographic region.

When a synod meets, it shall be composed of commissioners elected by the presbyteries. Each presbytery shall elect at least one ruling elder and one teaching elder to serve as commissioners to synod...

Synod is responsible for the life and mission of the church throughout its region and for supporting the ministry and mission of its presbyteries as they seek to support the witness of congregations, to the end that the church throughout its region becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness.

### THE SYNOD OF LIVING WATERS

Twelve presbyteries in the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and a part of Arkansas, make up the synod. Our synod meets annually, usually during the last week of January, and supports campus ministry, 'Living Waters for the World' clean water project, among others, and promotes shared partnerships between presbyteries in common mission outreach.



### **3. GENERAL ASSEMBLY (Book of Order, G-3.0501)**

**The General Assembly is the council of the whole church and it is representative of the unity of the synods, presbyteries, sessions, and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). It shall consist of equal numbers of ruling elders and teaching elders elected by the presbyteries and reflective of the diversity within their bounds...**

**The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love and witness...**

**The General Assembly shall hold a stated meeting at least biennially.**

#### **OBSERVATIONS:**

**1.**

**2.**

#### **QUESTIONS:**

**1.**

**2.**

#### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

**1. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of our governmental structure?**

**2. When have you seen the church (at various levels) at its best and when have you seen it at its worst?**

**3. In what ways would you like to be involved in the governing of the church beyond the local church level?**