HANDBOOK FOR

CLERKS OF SESSION

2022

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Table of Contents

Forward

This ***Handbook for Clerks of Session*** is written as a guide to the responsibilities of Clerks of Session. It is designed to be helpful in fulfilling the duties of a Clerk of Session, and to provide guidance and information related to common questions which arise.

The intention of this *Handbook* is to give Clerks of Session a place to start in their work, but is not intended to be a totally authoritative resource. Our *Book of Order* is the best and most thorough resource available and should be consulted any time a Clerk of Session has a question related to their role. Likewise, the Presbytery's Stated Clerk, Executive Presbyters, Moderator, as well as its various committees and commissions are all valuable and knowledgeable resources and are always willing to help as needed.

As part of a connectional church, the Presbytery supports and encourages active and continuous communication between its leadership team and the Clerks of Session for its congregations. The Presbytery wants to hear from its congregations and wants to be a resource and source of support for them.

The Clerk of Session's Role Generally

The ministry of a Clerk of Session is important and plays a vital role within the Presbyterian Church (USA). With that in mind, the Clerk of Session's responsibilities can be generally summed up as follows:

- The Clerk of Session maintains the history of the faithfulness of a particular church, through careful minutes and records.
- The Clerk of Session is interested in and willing to become knowledgeable about Presbyterian polity.
- The Clerk of Session and the Moderator of the Session are partners in leadership.
- The Clerk of Session and the Moderator of the Session are liaisons between the session and the presbytery.
- The Clerk of Session always strives to be a servant of the Session, and seeks to be equipped spiritually to fulfill the servant role.
- The Clerk of Session is elected to be the continuing clerical officer of the congregation.

An effective clerk understands that order expresses the principle that we must live our lives together in accord with our faith, and as a witness to the promises and demands of scripture. A Clerk of Session respects the *Constitution* of the Presbyterian Church (USA) - the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order* - as our covenant with one another to be faithful witnesses. Perhaps most importantly, an effective clerk knows that our rules are never an end in themselves, but always an attempt to be faithful to our covenant.

Our Presbyterian polity commits to a shared ministry among ruling elders, deacons, members, and teaching elders. Our polity commits to corporate governance in which decisions are always communal, never individual. The Clerk of Session plays an important role in preserving our polity and is a position of great responsibility within a congregation. Thank you for your willingness to assume the position of Clerk of Session for your congregation. While it can certainly be a position of challenges, it is also a rewarding and fulfilling way to provide a ministry to your congregation and for God.

Important Resources for Clerks of Session

1. A current edition of the *Book of Order* [***Book of Order 2019-2021 remains valid through 2023***]

   Every other year, the General Assembly prints a new edition of the *Book of Order*. It incorporates recent amendments to the *Book of Order*.

   - The *Book of Order* is the authoritative resource for a Clerk of Session and is divided into sections that address the following:
     - Foundations of Presbyterian Polity – background and theory
     - Form of Government – Main area for a Clerk of Session – how system of governance works
     - Directory for Worship – Rules related to worship/structure of services, etc.
     - Rules of Discipline – when individuals or councils act inappropriately or in violation of the Book of Order
       - This handbook does not address disciplinary actions, but the Presbytery is always willing to answer questions and assist as possible in this area.

   There are two ways you may obtain a *Book of Order 2019-2021:*

   - You may purchase a copy online.
   - You may access a **downloadable** copy (FREE) at this link: www.pcusa.org/constitution

     For the download:

     Scroll down to "THE BOOK OF ORDER" You will see "You can download" Click on "The Book of Order in English (PDF)." The application will download, and you can save it.

2. ***Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 12th Edition (2020)*** ~ PublicAffairs

3. The latest editions of your congregation's ***By-laws*** and/or ***Manual of Operations***.

Also Helpful (and available from Amazon):

Principles of Presbyterian Polity *by Carlos Wilton (Geneva Press, 2016)*

Recent changes in the PC(USA) Constitution have meant fewer rules and more flexibility in governance, making it imperative that leaders understand the historical principles that guide the church. Church leaders will come away with a greater understanding of the *Book of Order* and have confidence using it in practical situations.

Presbyterian Polity for Church Leaders, 4th Edition *by Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker*

This detailed, comprehensive interpretation of the Presbyterian Book of Order is the most complete resource of its kind. The authors have revised this best-selling book to include the new standards from the new Form of Government in the Book of Order. It explains the system of Presbyterian government, from sessions to presbyteries to synods to the General Assembly itself.

Timeline for Clerks in Relation to Presbytery

January	**Requests for Necrology Report** – sometime after the first of the year, you will be contacted by the Presbytery Office seeking the name and death dates of Ruling Elders who died during the calendar year. The Necrology Report will be read at the February meeting of Presbytery. **Elect your congregation's Commissioner to February meeting of Presbytery**
February	**Second Tuesday in February**– Stated Presbytery Meeting
March	**Begin to Prepare Minutes for review** - Begin to prepare your minutes book for the annual review. If you find exceptions, there will still be time to bring them to Session before the annual review. You will receive notice of the reading date and the location to which you are expected to bring your records.
April	**Elect your congregation's Commissioner to May meeting of Presbytery**
May	**Second Tuesday in May** – Stated Presbytery Meeting
July	**Elect your congregation's Commissioner to August meeting of Presbytery**
August	**Second Saturday in August** – Stated Presbytery Meeting
October	**Elect your congregation's Commissioner to November meeting of Presbytery**
November	**Second Tuesday in November** – Stated Presbytery Meeting **Statistical Reports** – In late November or early December you will receive e-mail notice from the Presbytery Office that online materials are available for the Annual Statistical Reports. The e-mail will include the date on which clerks of session may begin entering data, and the date by which entry must be completed.
December	Continue work on the Statistical Report.

First Steps

1. **Locate the Session Minutes Book and the Church Register.** They are likely to be in your church office, but may be elsewhere. Locate all previous record books. Are they properly stored?

> *These records should NEVER be taken from the church (except when the minutes are being reviewed annually by the presbytery). They should be kept in a fireproof safe or fireproof file cabinet when not in use.* ***You are the ONLY person who may authorize entries into these books, or provide official excerpts from them.***

2. **Obtain a current *Book of Order*.**

3. **If your congregation has By-Laws or a Manual of Administrative Operations, locate them.** It is the function of By-Laws to make the general provisions of the *Book of Order* specific to the local situation. For example, while the *Book of Order* specifies three classes of elders and deacons, it does not specify the size of those classes. But remember:

> *Where there is a tension between the By-Laws and the Book of Order, the Book of Order* ***always*** *takes precedence.*
>
> *Congregational By-Laws may not conflict with Book of Order*

4. **Keep the Presbytery Stated Clerk's – and the presbytery office address – close at hand.** They are on the cover page of this Handbook. The Stated Clerk of Presbytery is the one to whom you relate directly. Please do not hesitate to call or e-mail. All of the numbers have voice-mail.

5. **Locate a copy of the current Presbytery Directory.** The Presbytery Directory is now digital. If you contact the presbytery office at karen.harris@presbyteryofwesternkentucky.com, a digital copy will be sent to you. You are also able to request a paper copy if you prefer.

Supplies you will need:

Minutes book papers and binders are available through Cokesbury (800) 672-1789. Many congregations are now using other types of binders. That is perfectly acceptable, so long as the records continue to maintained as required.

The following are available from Cokesbury or from www.pcusastore.com:

- ☐ Member transfer forms: available from Cokesbury or PC(USA)
- ☐ Baptismal certificates: available from Cokesbury or from PC(USA)
- ☐ Marriage certificates: available from Cokesbury or from PC(USA)

PREPARING FOR A SESSION MEETING

Summary Timeline

The following timeline is simply a suggestion. It is a distillation of many conversations with clerks regarding session meetings and incorporates their suggestions and wisdom. If you follow a timeline like this your elders will be better prepared for particular meetings, and the session will function much more efficiently. The **best practice** is for the clerk of session and the pastor to accomplish these preparations in partnership.

Two weeks before the session meeting (but no less than 10 days) . . .

- ☐ Contact committee chairs about unfinished and referred business for which they are responsible. Remind chairs that recommendations for action from their committee should be submitted in writing.
- ☐ Meet with the Moderator to develop the agenda for the meeting. A **best practice** is for the Clerk of Session to initiate the meeting.
- ☐ Prepare a packet for the meeting (agenda, minutes of previous meetings, recommendations from committees, reports and other items that can be gathered in advance). This packet may be digital, but be sure to print a few copies in case elders have not received it, or forgot to bring their copies.

One week before the session meeting (but no less than 3 days) . . .

- ☐ Send electronically the agenda and meeting packet to session members.

During the session meeting . . .

- ☐ Seek approval of the minutes of the previous meeting.
- ☐ Record the minutes of the current meeting (see suggested format for Session Minutes, later in this *Handbook*).
- ☐ Keep a running list of actions that will need follow-up in subsequent session meetings. [Examples: Approval of a baptism must be followed by a record of the date the baptism was accomplished. The record of the examination of prospective elders must be followed by a record of the date those elders were ordained and/or installed.]

Following the session meeting . . .

- ☐ Write the minutes of the meeting immediately after the meeting. [They will be fresher in your mind.]
- ☐ Complete all correspondence directed by the session, including letters of transfer. **Remember: all correspondence between governing bodies of the Church is "clerk-to-clerk."**
- ☐ Record in the rolls and registers all membership changes approved by the session.
- ☐ Record any pertinent information regarding baptisms, weddings, deaths.

Before the Session Meeting

Plan the Meeting Agenda. It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session and the Moderator—together—to prepare the agenda, so that all business is handled in an efficient manner. This is one of the many cases where "two heads are better than one." A **best practice** is to list the "hoped-for outcomes" of the particular meeting, and develop the agenda to best accomplish those outcomes. Another **best practice** is to list at the top of the agenda the items included in the meeting packet.

Meeting Notices. Send—or arrange to be sent—notices of the session meeting. It is helpful to accompany the notice with reminders to committee chairs of reports due, business referred, or previous assignments. Many sessions have benefited from a meeting packet which serves as the reminder. Such a packet would include the agenda, reports of committees that have been submitted in time for the packet, recommendations for action, announcements about presbytery events, pastor's report, clerk's report, and other materials that would help members prepare for the meeting.

Written Reports. Most sessions find that written reports enable the efficient flow of session business. In such reports, the recommendations always come first and the historical or informational material comes last. Only the recommendations (as approved or amended and approved by the session) will appear in the session minutes . . . *unless*

. . the session orders the entire report (or a portion of it) to be spread upon the minutes. Many sessions find it helpful for committees to have reports ready in time to be emailed with the call of the meeting.

Regarding Special Meetings of the Session or Congregation. The call for a special meeting <u>**must**</u> include the <u>**exact purpose**</u> for which the meeting is called. No other business than that named can be transacted. The phrase, "and other such business as may come before session" (or the congregation) is **not** appropriate in the call for a special meeting.

Take With You to the Session Meeting

- **Current** *Book of Order*
- Session committee membership lists
- Current year session minutes (in case you need to refer to them)
- Your running list of all referred and/or unfinished actions

As Clerk of Session, you are responsible for all papers and documents that aid the Session in reaching its decisions. It is a good practice to accomplish this in partnership with the Moderator.

During the Session Meeting

The Session cannot meet without its Moderator, who is ordinarily the pastor of the church. The presbytery shall provide by rule who shall preside in the absence of the Moderator [G-3.0104] **BEST PRACTICE:** If the Moderator is absent or ill, the Moderator may appoint another minister of the presbytery to moderate.

The Session cannot meet without a clerk. If you are unable to be present, a first action following the opening of a meeting is a motion to appoint a clerk pro-tem for the meeting.

A quorum of the session must be present to have a meeting at which actions may be taken. A Session shall provide by rule for the quorum [G-3.0203]. The quorum must include the Moderator and either a specific number of ruling elders or a specific percentage of ruling elders in current service. The traditional quorum has been one-third of the members of Session (or two ruling elders if the purpose of the meeting is to receive new members).

Session meetings in most congregations are informal. Many of the actions will be approved by consensus, and *Robert's Rules of Order* is loosely applied. That is OK. However . . . as Clerk of Session, **require** that **all** actions taken by the Session be voted upon. In your role as clerk you may require or request that all motions be in writing. Ask the Moderator to stop the meeting briefly, if you must, until you are given the exact wording of a motion with which the Session is dealing. A **best practice** for moderators is not to call for a vote until the clerk is able to read the motion and everyone agrees with its wording.

Do not include the names of the mover and seconder of a motion. Naming movers and seconders is a tradition that is dictated by custom, not by rule. Again: it is not necessary to record the names of movers and seconders. The preferred format is simple:

"The session VOTED to "

The purpose of a second is **only** to get the item to the floor. A seconder is not even bound to vote in favor of the motion. In Presbyterian polity, once an action is taken it is an action of the body, making it completely irrelevant who made the motion.

You may occasionally be asked to help a session member to word a motion. Helpful questions to ask in framing a motion for session action are:

What—exactly—is going to be done?
Who is going to do it?
When will it be completed and/or reported?
How much will it cost?
Where will the money come from?
Is the action compatible with the *Book of Order*? (If not, the action is inappropriate.)

Do not include a complete summary of discussion in your minutes. Record only the motions made and their disposition (along with any subsidiary motions adopted, e.g. amendments). If you include other information include only that which will help a reader at a later time to understand the motion (e.g. background information, rationale). A common occurrence in situations where an action of Session is challenged or reviewed relates to minutes that are inadequate in their level of detail. For matters of importance or controversy where significant discussion took place before a decision was made, it may make sense to put more details in the minutes to give a complete picture of why the Session acted as it did. While the virtues of succinct minutes are many, for some members of your congregation "if it doesn't appear in the minutes, it didn't happen" so some detail may sometimes be necessary to inform members of Session decisions.

After the Session Meeting

Write up the minutes **immediately.** Prepare a draft and provide it to the session **within a week** for their review and approval at the next meeting. **Best practice** is to provide the minutes within 48 hours of the meeting but with busy schedules that isn't always feasible. When I prepare my minutes for the Presbytery Oversight Commission, I give them a title like this: January OC minutes - Draft. I send them electronically to the members and invite corrections/clarifications. I then incorporate the changes before the next meeting. After approval at the next meeting, I send them to the Presbytery's Administrator and remove "Draft" from the title.

When the minutes have been approved, print on acid free paper and insert them into your Minutes binder. Everything must be printed onto the pages. If your minutes include attachments, label them "Appendix A (B, C...). Be sure to note in the minutes, "See Appendix A (B, C ...) to which the Appendix refers.

Make all necessary entries into the rolls and registers. No entry or deletions should be made unless a Session action appears in the minutes directing that entry or deletion. [There is a section below on maintenance of rolls.]

Complete all necessary correspondence related to actions of the Session. Among and between governing bodies of the PCUSA, **all** official correspondence is **clerk-to-clerk**. The clerk's signature and no one else's authenticates any document coming from the session. **THE MODERATOR OF SESSION HAS NO AUTHORITY TO ATTEST TO SESSION ACTIONS.**

NOTE: Some clerks are fortunate to have church secretaries who will print minutes or update rolls and registers. Still ***the clerk of session supervises the church secretary or the roll clerk in all matters related to the minutes and the rolls.*** *The accuracy of those records is always the responsibility of the clerk of session.*

PREPARING MINUTES OF MEETINGS

This section of the Handbook for Clerks of Session is intended to be guide. It: (a) is offered as suggestion only and (b) incorporates both helpful suggestions and some "best practices" for recording minutes of meetings. In general, this guide will apply to regular meetings of Session, special meetings of Session, and congregational meetings.

Every congregation will have different needs with regard to its minutes. Larger congregations with more activity and staff may have minutes that are significant in length. Smaller congregations may have minutes that are just one page. While adherence to the Book of Order is required, the most important thing is that the minutes are formatted and recorded in a way that works best for your congregation.

The minutes of a Session are a record of the **decisions** and **actions** taken by the Session. The minutes serve the practical function of accurately recording what the body has done.

- Minutes ensure that there is an accurate record of proceedings and who participated.

- Accurate minutes are a significant help in developing the resources to communicate to a congregation what their leaders are doing to further the ministry of the church.

- Minutes are a significant historical record of the life of a particular congregation, and its witness to the call of Christ to be faithful witnesses to God's love.

- Should there ever be a question about what the Session has done, or should there ever be a complaint against what the Session has done, the minutes provide accurate documentation, so that it may be determined fairly whether the particular action was or was not an irregularity, or whether the Session has overlooked something important. [This is rare, but it does happen.]

- **Remember – "If it doesn't appear in the minutes, it didn't happen."**

Beginning the Minutes

Minutes should be titled, and should include: (1) the type of meeting, (2) the name of the church, (3) the date/time of the meeting, and (4) the location of the meeting (e.g. Session meeting room, Fellowship Hall, classroom, library, etc.) The minutes should include a clear indication of who was present, excused and absent (using **full names**), the name of the moderator, and the names of any guests. If there are guests who are given permission to speak, that should be noted as well.

Here is a suggested format for the opening part of the minutes.

MINUTES
Regular [or **Special**] **Meeting of the Session [or Congregation]**
First Presbyterian Church,Town, KY
[date, time, location]

CLASS OF 20		CLASS OF 20		CLASS OF 20	
P	Full Name	P	Full Name	P	Full Name
Ex	Full Name	P	Full Name	A	Full Name
P	Full Name	P	Full Name	P	Full Name
P	Full Name	Ex	Full Name		VACANT

Moderator: The Rev. [name]
Guests:

The session of the_____________Presbyterian Church of______, KY held a regular/special meeting in the [location] at [time] on [date]. A quorum being present, the Moderator called the meeting to order and opened the meeting with prayer.

- *Meetings of session and the congregation **must** be opened and closed with prayer.*
- *If it is your session's practice for an elder to offer the devotion and prayer, the above sentence would read, "A quorum being present, the Moderator called the meeting to order. [Name] offered the devotion and the opening prayer."*
- *You **must** indicate that a quorum was present. (You don't need to specify what the quorum is.)*

If the meeting is a special meeting, then you would list the call of the meeting in this way:

CALL FOR THE MEETING (this is ONLY for special meetings) The meeting was called for the following purpose:

- State the purpose of the meeting here.
- ONLY the business stated in the purpose may be conducted at a special meeting.

The session granted the privilege of voice to the following guests: [name(s)]
[NOTE: *It is important to note that you grant guests the privilege of* **voice**. *The common language is "privilege of the floor." This may seem nit-picky, but "privilege of the floor" means only that a person may be present in the room. "Privilege of* **voice**" *means that a person may speak.* ***Best practice*** *is to use the term "voice."]*

Formatting Minutes

First: The main concern for minutes is ***accuracy***. The minutes must be an accurate record of the meeting.

Second: *(And this comes as a surprise to many people)* The minutes do not have to be **chronological**. There is no requirement that the particular minutes of a particular meeting reflect the *chronology* of the meeting. Again, the question is, "Is it an accurate record?" *Robert's Rules of Order* suggest that all minutes follow the same order. Let's take a closer look at this:

What are the benefits of recording minutes chronologically?

- They are slightly easier for the clerk to record. It is a bit easier to record the meeting and actions as they happen, rather than fitting those actions and events into a pre-determined order. And . . . most meetings generally follow the habit of a particular order of business.

What are the benefits of recording minutes by a "standard" order?

- A standard order makes the minutes easier to review by persons who read them (either for the annual review, or for a person researching the historical record).
- It is easier for a subsequent clerk to learn the "pattern" of recording minutes.
- Should there be a question months later about a particular decision in a particular area of the council's work, that decision will be easier to find, than engaging a search of chronologically-recorded minutes.

Some clerks will record a brief "table of contents" for the minutes of each meeting. This is rare, but it is another way of tracking actions. It would also be helpful for reviewing minutes that are recorded chronologically. Some presbytery clerks include the **basic** docket for each meeting at the beginning of the meeting.

Simply know that you have a choice in how to organize your minutes.

However you record the minutes, be sure to use clear **headings** for each section of the minutes. These are some examples of how clerks have organized their minutes:

LEFT MARGIN HEADING Section of the minutes to the right.
  Subsections recorded as appropriate.

SINGLE LINE HEADING
Section of the minutes recorded below the heading. Subsections recorded as appropriate.

NUMBERED SECTIONS
This is a common format for non-chronological minutes.
If this is used, a list of the numbers should be provided at the beginning of each section of minutes. For example:

1.0 Opening
2.0 Routine Business
3.0 Committee Reports
  3.1 Worship Committee
  3.2 Christian Education Committee

Recording *Routine Business*

Routine business is that which usually occurs at every meeting, and which does not involve much discussion, if any. Routine business may be scheduled at any time in the meeting. Some sessions take care of it right away; others handle routine business at the end of the meeting. When it is handled does not matter. Routine business may be referred to as the Consent Agenda.

Routine business (Consent Agenda) may include:

- ☐ Approval of the **agenda** of the meeting (if the Consent Agenda is the first order of business).
- ☐ Approval of the **minutes** of previous meetings (including the most recent congregational meeting). Simply list the date of the meeting and the type of meeting.
- ☐ Reports of **services of** baptism:
    - Name of person baptized (and parents—including the maiden name of the mother—if the baptized is an infant for young child)
    - Date, time, and location of the baptism
    - Name of the officiant (usually the pastor, but it might be someone else)
    - Name of the Ruling Elder who assisted
- ☐ Reports of **services of the Lord's Supper:**
    - Date, time, and location
    - **ALL** services of the Lord's Supper must be approved by the session, and **must** be recorded. (This would include services at other times than Sunday morning, services at locations like a nursing home or senior center, home communion services, services at retreats or other gatherings, etc.)
    - **A session may (annually) give approval for regular services of the Lord's Supper at other times than Sunday morning.** The approval should include indication of who will preside for such services, and all such services **must** be reported to the session. Here are some examples:
        - Approval for communion at confirmation retreats during the next year
        - Approval for monthly communion at a senior living center
        - Other regular celebrations of the Lord's Supper
- ☐ Reports of **weddings:**
    - Session authorization is required for all weddings that occur in the sanctuary
    - Name of the couple (including the bride's maiden name)
    - Date, time, location, and the name of the officiating minister
- ☐ Reports of **funerals**:
    - Name of deceased
    - Date and location of the funeral service and name of the officiating minister
- ☐ Report of the **ordination and installation** of officers:
    - Date and time of the worship service during which the installation occurred
    - Name of the persons ordained/installed and the office to which each was installed
    - Name of the Ruling Elder who assisted
    - *The minutes of a previous meeting will have recorded that persons were **approved** for ordination/installation. Later minutes **must** record that the ordination/installation occurred.*
- ☐ Report of the **public welcome** of new members:
    - Name of persons welcomed (including maiden names, if appropriate)
    - Date and time worship service during which they were welcomed
    - Name of the Ruling Elder who assisted.

  NOTE: *Persons become members of a congregation when they are **received by the Session,** NOT when they are welcomed publicly. However, they should be publicly welcomed during worship, and that public welcome should be reported.*
- ☐ Report of **routine membership actions**:
    - Transfers of membership at a person's request
    - Actions subsequent to the review of church rolls
- ☐ Report of **significant correspondence** received and referral of the correspondence. Examples:
    - A letter from the General Assembly, thanking the congregation for General Mission Giving—referred to the Stewardship Committee for sharing with the congregation
    - A request that our congregation participate in an upcoming county-wide evangelism event—referred to the____Committee
    - Correspondence that requires **action** by the session would not be placed in Routine Business, but would be scheduled as an agenda item

- ☐ Report of the **Moderator** (other than items listed above)
- ☐ Report of the **Clerk of Session** (other than items listed above)

Routine business (Consent Agenda) may be handled by a single motion, if the following requirements have been satisfied:

- o The list of routine business was provided ahead of time.
- o Opportunity was given for specific items to be lifted out for further discussion.

If no items are lifted out for discussion, the routine business may be handled in one motion. That motion would be recorded like this:

> **Routine Business (Consent Agenda)**
> The following business was presented for action by single vote:
> {List the routine business here]
>
> Opportunity having been given for items to be lifted out for discussion, and there being none lifted out, the following the session VOTED to approve the Routine Business (Consent Agenda), as presented.

If items are lifted out for discussion, they may be handled:
(1) after the vote on the remaining routine business is taken, or
(2) at a later point in the meeting.

You would record it this way:

> **Routine Business (Consent Agenda)**
> The following Routine Business was presented for action by single vote:
> {List the routine business here]
> Request was made to lift the following items for discussion:
> [List lifted items here]
> The session VOTED to approve the Routine Business items that were not lifted out.

Then you would either (1) note disposition of items as discussed, or (2) note when the items would be dealt with later in the meeting and record disposition at the time of discussion.

Recording Motions

The simplest way to record motions is this:

Upon motion and second, the Session VOTED to . . . .

--OR--

Upon recommendation by the__Committee, the Session VOTED to . . .

The record of the motion **must** include:

- A **clear** statement of the action taken.
- **Who will follow through** to implement the motion (whether an individual or individuals, or a committee or board).
- The **anticipated deadline** for implementation of the motion --OR--the **anticipated time of a report** regarding progress.
- If **finances are involved**, an indication of (1) the amount and (2) the budget line to be charged, and an indication of who will inform the treasurer of that information.
- If the motion is taken by other than voice vote (e.g. counted vote or secret ballot), both the **manner of voting** and the results must be recorded in the minutes.
- The names of any Ruling Elders who wish to record their dissent from the action (if one or two persons vote no, it is good practice to *ask* if they wish their no votes recorded)
- If it is appropriate to the record, it is good (even advisable) to record below the motion the **rationale** for the action. That rationale may have been presented with the motion, or the Session may deem it important to express the rationale.

It is not necessary to indicate who made the motion and who seconded the motion.

- It is inappropriate to record the name of the person who seconded a motion, because a second ONLY means that the person agrees that the item should be discussed and acted on. Contrary to common assumption, a person who seconds is NOT obliged to vote "yes."
- Within Presbyterian theology and ecclesiology, naming the mover is unnecessary because once a motion is approved or disapproved, the action belongs to the body. You may name the person who moved the motion if you desire, but it is not necessary.

Required *Routine Reports*

The minutes are required to include certain routine reports:

- A monthly report of the Treasurer. [NOTE: This is not **required**, but it is a best practice. It ensures that the session regularly reviews the financial status of the congregation. It also is a level of accountability for those who keep the financial records.]
- Election by Session of a commissioner to presbytery meetings, and a report by that commissioner to the session meeting following a meeting of the presbytery. *Some sessions elect their commissioner meeting-by-meeting; others elect a commissioner for an annual term. Either is fine, but it must be done. The report of the presbytery meeting should not be included in Routine Business.*
- Annual Approval of the Budget, with a copy of the approved budget included as an appendix to theminutes.
- Record and report of the annual review of church membership.

Here are suggested formats for recording these required reports:

REPORT OF THE TREASURER
The session VOTED to receive and file for audit the report of the Treasurer for the period ending [date], summarized as follows:

Receipts for [month]	$_______
Expenses for [month]	$_______
Receipts, year to date	$_______
Expenses, year to date	$_______
Balance, year to date	$_______

ELECTION OF PRESBYTERY COMMISSIONER
The session VOTED to elect Ruling Elder____________as commissioner to the stated (or special) meeting of the Presbytery of Western Kentucky, to be held on [date] at [location].

OR

The session VOTED to elect Ruling Elder___________as commissioner to all stated and special meetings of the Presbytery of Western Kentucky during [note the year or the time frame].

REPORT OF PRESBYTERY COMMISSIONER
Ruling Elder [name] presented a report of the recent meeting of the Presbytery of Western Kentucky held on [date] at [location].

A summary of the report may be made, for inclusion in the minutes.

If the commissioner has recommendations, they would be acted on and noted this way:

Upon recommendation from the commissioner, the session VOTED to:

List the action taken

If your session rotates commissioners, then you might note the following action:

The next meeting of the Presbytery of Western Kentucky is [date] at [location]. The session VOTED to elect Ruling Elder [name] as commissioner to that meeting.

ANNUAL APPROVAL OF THE BUDGET
The minutes would note the beginning of the budget process, whenever that occurs in your congregation. Also noted should be the persons or committee responsible, along with a deadline for reporting.

When the report of the budget proposal is made, the minutes should record Session action on the budget, and the approved budget should be included in the minutes, either at that place in the minutes or as an appendix.

The Session should note its **recommendation** of the pastor's terms of call for the following year. If there are changes in the terms of call, the congregation must approve those at a duly-called congregation meeting. If there are no changes in the terms of call, that is simply noted in the budget. It is **vitally** important that the terms of call be included in the Session minutes, for the sake of the pastor.

- The Internal Revenue Service requires that the terms of compensation be listed in the minutes of Session.
- Housing allowance MUST be noted, and it cannot be noted retroactively. **It is important to note the housing allowance in minutes PRIOR TO THE END OF THE YEAR BEFORE THAT HOUSING ALLOWANCE TAKES EFFECT.**
- It is important (for tax purposes) to specify reimbursable parts of the pastor's benefits and the method of reporting those reimbursable expenses.

NOTE: Terms of call for temporary pastoral relationships (i.e. stated supply, commissioned pastors) are renewed annually by the Session and do not require congregational approval.

ANNUAL REVIEW OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

It is the Session's responsibility annually both to (1) review the rolls of membership, and (2) invite persons to consider the integrity of their membership. There are various models for this, but the action of reviewing the rolls must be included in the minutes. The minutes should include:

- Session's action directing the review
- Who is conducting the review
- The deadline for completion
- Any recommendations of the review group, and the disposition of those recommendations

Recording *Other Session Business*

REPORTS OF SESSION COMMITTEES

(Name of Committee)

Ruling Elder [name] presented the report of the [name] Committee.

You would list a brief summary here.

If there are recommendations you would note them this way:

Upon recommendation by the [name] Committee, the Session voted to:

List the action taken

DISCUSSION OF AN ISSUE BEFORE THE SESSION

The Session engaged in discussion of [*state the subject or the issue*].

- ☐ *ONLY record pertinent facts, background, points of discussion.*
- ☐ *If the Session EXPLORED OPTIONS, list them.*
- ☐ *If the Session MADE DECISIONS, record them.*

It is important to list follow-through information:

- ☐ *Describe* ***who*** *will do* ***what****, and by what* ***deadline****.*
- ☐ *If there is a cost, describe what it is, how much, and where it will come from in the budget.*
- ☐ *Describe other follow-through actions and their responsibility.*

CLOSING

The meeting of the session ended with prayer offered by____________________.

Attest: signature of the clerk of session (or the substitute clerk, if there is one)

Recording the *Annual Report*

Do not include the entire contents of the annual report in the Session minutes book.

In the minutes of the annual meeting, simply record something like this:

The congregation VOTED to receive the Annual Report for [year], with thanks to all those who submitted reports for inclusion. The Annual Report is filed [describe location]. The [year] Annual Report includes the following program reports:

[List here]

The [year] Annual Report includes the following financial reports:

[List here]

Recording the *Annual StatisticalReport*

First . . . The Session does not vote to "approve" the annual statistical report; it votes to "receive" the annual statistical report.

As to recording the report:

You have two options:

1. You may say in the minutes: The session VOTED to receive the annual statistical report for [previous year], which is inserted as Appendix A following these minutes.
2. You may say in the minutes: The session VOTED to receive the annual statistical report for [previous year], summarized as follows: [*then type in a very basic summary of the report*]. Insert the report as Appendix A.

NOTE: The only pieces of paper that may be inserted into the minutes is a copy of the Statistical Report downloaded from the statistics entry program. This would be inserted at the end of the minutes during which the Annual Statistical Report was approved.

Submitting Annual Statistical Report

- Each year the denomination requires its congregations to submit statistical information, primarily regarding changes in membership.
    - You are typically notified digitally toward the end of the year and provided with login information specific to your congregation. Using that login information, you go online and submit the requested information.
    - The process is generally easy and not very time consuming.
    - Website for Statistics: oga.pcusa.org/stats
- For those uncomfortable with technology, the Presbytery Office is happy to assist you.
- Typically the deadline to submit information is in February for online submissions, though you are able to submit your information through Presbytery for a few weeks after that initial deadline.

ACTIONS WHICH MUST BE APPROVED BY MORE THAN JUST THE SESSION

ACTION	GROUPS INVOLVED IN DECISION
Application to the presbytery for a person to begin the process of becoming a Teaching Elder or a Commissioned Pastor (CP).	Session Committee on Preparation for Ministry (Presbytery)
All loans which use the church property as collateral, and all sales of property	Session Church Trustees Congregation Presbytery Board of Trustees Presbytery
All leases of property used for worship for *any* length of time; and all leases of other property for more than 5 years.	Session Church Trustees Presbytery Trustees Presbytery
Capital fund campaigns which total more than 25% of the previous year's budget.	Session Church Trustees Congregation Presbytery Trustees Presbytery
All changes of church location or church name	Session Congregation and Corporation Presbytery Trustees Presbytery
All changes in the terms of call of the pastor. *NOTE: Terms of call for temporary pastoral relationships (i.e. stated supply, commissioned pastors) are renewed annually and do not require congregational approval, only Session.*	Session ONLY recommends changes Congregation approves changes Commission on Ministry Changes are reported to the Presbytery
All proposals for merger, yoking, or dissolution of congregations	Session Congregation Commission on Ministry Presbytery Trustees Presbytery
All dissolutions of pastoral relationships and all calls for new pastors.	Congregation Commission on Ministry Presbytery

Appointment of Moderator of Session, stated supply, temporary supply, or interim pastor	Session Commission on Ministry Presbytery
Call for a special Session meeting	At least two members of Session, in writing – OR – the Presbytery – OR – the Moderator of Session
Call for a special congregation meeting	Session – OR – Presbytery – OR – Session, when requested in writing by ¼ of the active members of the congregation
Session meeting when pastor is ill or out of town	Pastor grants permission, and invites a minister member of the Presbytery to serve as Moderator for the meeting or receives assistance from Commission on Ministry

The Clerk's Duties Related to Congregational Meetings

The Clerk of Session is the secretary of both regular and special congregation meetings. [G-1.0505] If the Clerk of Session is unable to serve, the congregation must—as a first item of business—elect a secretary for the meeting. That action is recorded in the minutes. Minutes are taken exactly as for a session meeting.

A congregation meeting may be called only by the session, the presbytery, or by the session when requested in writing by one-fourth of the active members of the congregation.

It is important to ensure that **adequate public notice** be given for a meeting of the congregation. [G-1.0502] Such notice **must** specify the nature of the business for which the meeting is called. The *Book of Order* specifies that the congregation shall provide by its own rule for the minimum notification requirements. The *Book of Order* requires that notice shall be given at regular services of worship prior to the meeting (but does not specify details as to how many worship services).

> **Best practice:** Try to ensure that the notice has several layers: verbal announcements in worship (required), bulletin announcements (including the purposes of the meeting), newsletter article, general e-mail notice, placement on the church website (if there is one). With such layers, you can be pretty certain that everyone has received notice of the meeting.
>
> **Best practice:** The moderator and the clerk work together to develop the agenda for a congregation meeting, in the same way they work together to prepare the agenda for a session meeting.

The *Book of Order* specifies the business that may be conducted at congregation meetings: G-1.0503. The annual meeting of a congregation may include in the call for the meeting a phrase like ". . . and other business which may rightly come before the congregation." Such other business must be within the parameters of G-1.0503.

A special or called meeting of the congregation may ONLY consider the business listed in the call for that particular meeting. **The phrase ". . . and other business which may rightly come before the congregation" is NOT PERMISSIBLE for a special or called meeting.** Nor is it permissible to call for new business and consider it.

The church budget is adopted by the Session, NOT by the congregation. The Session has a duty and responsibility to inform the congregation of the budget they have approved. (**Best practice:** At an informal gathering of the congregation after worship or at a church supper, Session should present the proposed budget before adoption, invite comment, and solicit suggestions.)

Changes to the pastor's compensation package (terms of call) **must** be approved by the congregation and reported to the presbytery. With respect to **changes in the pastor's compensation**, the Session has only the authority to recommend. This is the one part of the church budget for which the congregation has authority.

> **NOTE:** This only affects called and installed pastors. Yearly contracts for pastors in a temporary role (ex. stated supply, commissioned pastors) are between a Session and the pastor and therefore do not require congregational approval. All new contracts, or changes to existing contracts, must be reported to Presbytery.

Proxy voting and absentee voting is not allowed for any meeting, session, congregational or corporate. Only active members **who are present** may vote.

The congregation is responsible for establishing the **quorum** for congregation meetings. [G-1.0501]

> **Best practice:** Check your congregation's by-laws or Manual of Operations to determine what has been established by your congregation for a quorum. If you cannot find this information, at the next congregational meeting, have the session recommend a quorum to be followed at that meeting and all subsequent meetings.
> **NOTE:** The quorum determines that the meeting may convene and proceed. If people choose to leave before the end of the meeting and there is suddenly less than a quorum, the meeting may continue. Those who leave are effectively the same as those who stay, but don't vote. WHY? Because it would be possible for a particular group of people to determine by leaving that a duly-called meeting would have to end. However, if there is a break in the meeting (for a meal, for instance), quorum must be reestablished prior to reconvening.

Minutes of the congregational meeting may be approved by the session at the next session meeting following the congregation meeting. Those approved minutes would be reported at the next regular or special congregation meeting.

Continuing Education of the Session

National studies show that very few Presbyterian elders understand their office or the history, theology, and polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The *Book of Order* requires the session plan for the continuing education of elders.

As Clerk of Session, you have in important role to play in the session's continuing growth and education.

- ☐ *You have the opportunity to become a student of the church's governance.*
- ☐ *You can model what it means to seek assistance with problems and concerns.*
- ☐ *You can share the fruit of your study and of the assistance you have received.*
- ☐ *You are an important advocate for attendance at the annual Congregational Learning Day event.*
- ☐ *You can consistently raise the question, "What are our plans for session education?"*

Each meeting of the session is another opportunity to learn something about the *Book of Order*. Here are some possibilities, each of which could be accomplished in fifteen minutes or less:

- ☐ Spend 15 minutes with one of the Historic Principles of Church Order, F-3.0101 through F-3.0108.
- ☐ Discuss the implications of the first sentence in F-1.0202.
- ☐ Discuss F-1.0302, especially the last sentence.
- ☐ Discuss the "Great Ends of the Church" [F-1.0304], sharing how each is manifested in your congregation.
- ☐ Read the Preamble to the Rules of Discipline (D-1.0101, 1.0102, 1.0103) and discuss implications.

MAINTENANCE OF ROLLS AND REGISTERS

First . . . Please know that the current Form of Government makes no provision for the previous category of "Inactive Member." You are not *prohibited* from having such a category; it is simply not a part of the current Form of Government.

In the current Form of Government, these are the categories of members: Active Members and Affiliate Members. All others are in the category of "Other Participants."

What follows is a set of suggestions for how to maintain the rolls and registers. Each membership scenario is listed in bold print, followed by the "tip" for making entries in the rolls and registers.

The standard Church Register book has the following sections:

Register of Pastors
Register of Elders
Register of Deacons
Chronological Roll of Members (recorded by date of their being received as members)
Alphabetical Roll of Members
Roll of Baptized Members

Other registers may include:

Register of Deaths
Register of Marriages
Register of Baptisms

An important general principle: **Every entry or change in a membership roll or register MUST be connected to a particular action of the Session.** Every entry or change. Without exception.

Examples of Typical Roll / Register Entries

The Rev. So-and-So becomes pastor of the congregation.

1. Record the full name of the pastor on the Register of Pastors.
2. Record whether the person is pastor, associate pastor, co-pastor, interim pastor, stated supply, temporary supply or commissioned pastor.
3. If the pastor is installed (pastor, associate pastor, co-pastor) list the date of installation.
4. If the pastor is temporary (interim, stated supply, temporary supply, commissioned pastor), note the date that their service begins.

The relationship with the Rev. So-and-So is dissolved.

1. If the pastor is installed, record next to their name (1) the date of congregation action dissolving the relationship and (2) the date that the pastor's service ends. [*Those dates are not always the same.*]
2. If the pastor is temporary, record next to their name (1) the date of session action ending the service and (2) the date that the pastor's service ends.

A member of the church is ordained as an elder or a deacon (never having previously served as an elder or a deacon).

1. Record the person's name on the Register of Elders or the Register of Deacons.
2. Note the date of the Service of Ordination and Installation.
3. When the person's term of service ends, note that date next to their name on the appropriate roll.
4. If the person is re-elected to a second term in the same office, they would be installed to that second term, and you would note the date of that installation.

A member of the church who previously served as an elder or deacon is some years later elected to serve again in that office.

1. Next to the person's previously-entered name for that office, note the date of their installation.

Mr. & Mrs. John Adams are received as members by letters of transfer.

1. Record John [middle name] Adams on the chronological roll, opposite the next available membership

number. Indicate the way he joined the church (letter of transfer), the church from which he transferred, and the date of the session action.

2. Record Abigail (maiden name) Adams on the chronological roll in the same manner as with Mr. Adams.
3. Record both members in the alphabetical roll, noting their chronological membership numbers.

Mr. & Mrs. Adams have a three year old son, John Quincy, who was baptized in the former church.

List John Quincy Adams on the roll of Baptized Members, with the date and place of his baptism, and the names of his parents (including mother's maiden name).

Mr. & Mrs. Adams' infant daughter, Elizabeth, is baptized after they join the church.

1. List Elizabeth (middle name) Adams on the roll of Baptized Members, with the date and place of her baptism and the names of her parents (including mother's maiden name).

__If the child is the child of a single mother or father__ who does not wish to list the other parent's name, list only the mother's or father's name (including mother's maiden name).
__If the child is the adopted or legal ward__ of the parents, their names are listed as the parents.

Benjamin Harrison has never been a member of any church, nor has he been baptized.

1. Session votes to receive Mr. Harrison by profession of faith with baptism.
2. List Benjamin (middle name) Harrison on the chronological roll, opposite the next available membership number.
3. Note that he was received by profession of faith and the date of session's action.
4. Note the date and location of his baptism.
5. List his full name on the alphabetical roll, noting his chronological membership number.

Martha Washington was a member of another church, but (a) it has been many, many years since she was active, or (b) she can't remember where she was a member, or (c) that previous denomination does not provide letters of transfer.

1. Session votes to receive Mrs. Washington by reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ.
2. List Martha (maiden name) Washington on the chronological roll, opposite the next available membership number.
3. Note that she was received by profession of faith and the date of session's action.
4. List her full name on the alphabetical roll, noting her chronological membership number.

Andrew Jackson requests that session transfer his membership to First Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tennessee.

1. Session votes to transfer Mr. Jackson.
2. Fill out the transfer certificate, noting on the back any ordinations Mr. Jackson holds (Ruling Elder, deacon) and the date(s) of ordination and date(s) of service.
3. Draw a thin line through Mr. Jackson's name on the chronological roll, noting the date of transfer and the church to which he was transferred. Do this **after** you have received notice that he has been received by the other church.

Mr. Jackson's ten year old son, Archibald, is on the roll of Baptized Members.

1. Note Archibald's name on the back of Mr. Jackson's transfer form, along with the date and location of his baptism.
2. Draw a thin line through Archibald's name on the roll of Baptized Members, and note that his father was transferred to the First Presbyterian Church of Nashville, Tennessee.

Dolly Madison dies.

1. Draw a line through her name on the chronological roll, and note the date of her death.
2. If you have a death register, list her name in that register along with the date of death, the date of her funeral, the location of her funeral service, and the location of her interment or inurnment, if known.

John Tyler requests that he be removed from the membership roll.

1. Session acts on the request for removal.
2. Draw a thin line through Mr. Tyler's name on the chronological roll, and indicate the date of the session

action to remove him from the roll, and that it was by Mr. Tyler's request.

The following tips anticipate what the clerk would do, depending on the decision to maintain a roll of Inactive Members or to follow the current Form of Government's category of "Other Participants."

Abraham Lincoln lives in town but has not been involved in the church for several years.

If your session uses the "Other Participants" provision of the New Form of Government . . .

1. The session makes attempts to encourage Mr. Lincoln's participation in the church, including inviting him to communicate how he understands his membership.
2. If there is no response to these attempts, session notifies Mr. Lincoln that, after a certain reasonable time for response they will remove his name from the roll of Active Members, at which time he will become an Other Participant.
3. Session acts to remove Mr. Lincoln from the roll of Active Members.
4. Draw a line through his name, and note the date of the action and that he is an "Other Participant."

If Mr. Lincoln is an "Other Participant" and resumes activity in the church, and desires to restore his membership . . .

1. Session acts to receive him as a member by reaffirmation of faith.
2. List his name on the chronological roll next opposite the next available membership number (yes, you are creating a new entry) and note the date of session action.
3. Note the new membership number next to his name on the alphabetical roll.

If Mr. Lincoln has been removed from the active roll, and requests transfer to another church . .

1. The clerk simply informs the other church that Mr. Lincoln was removed from the roll of Active Members (either by personal request or by action of session), and that there is no membership to transfer.
2. Suggest that Mr. Lincoln be received in the new congregation by reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ.

Managing the *Roll of Baptized Members*

Who is placed on the Baptized Members roll?

The roll of Baptized members is for all persons who have been baptized, but who have not made a profession of faith.

If an infant is baptized in our church, is he/she placed on the roll of Baptized Members?

Yes - For an infant or young child, you would list his/her name on the roll, along with the date and location of the baptism (sanctuary, lake, river, etc.).

What *adults* would be on the roll of Baptized Members?

If a baptized child grows to adulthood, but has not made public profession of faith, he or she would remain on the roll of baptized members.

If a family moves to your church and one of the spouses becomes a member but the other does not, you would put that other person on the roll of baptized members.

What happens when a child on the roll becomes confirmed, or an adult on the roll becomes a member?

You would do four things:

1. Make a note by their name on the roll of Baptized Members, the date of the session's action receiving them as a member. For a child that would most likely be when the session received her or him at the time of confirmation. For an adult that would be when the session received them as a member of the church.
2. Draw a thin line through their name on the roll of Baptized Members.
3. List her/his name on the chronological roll of Active Members by the next available number, and note the date of session action receiving her/him as a member.
4. List her/his name on the alphabetical list of members, with their chronological roll number.

What do I do when they and/or their family move?

In the case of an infant or young child on the roll of Baptized Members: If the family moves and requests a membership transfer, you would note the name and baptism date on the transfer form (or letter), note the family's move next to the child's name on the roll, and draw a thin line through the child's name.

In the case of an adult on the roll of Baptized Members: You would simply draw a thin line through her/his name.

A BRIEF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
The above reflects the Presbyterian approach to baptism and profession of faith. We baptize both infants and adults. Baptism is the visible sign of God's presence and action in the lives of people. That visible sign may be enacted for adults who were never baptized, who make a profession of faith (which is accompanied by baptism and reception as a member of the congregation).

NOTE: *It would be inappropriate for a session to approve baptism for an adult* ***without*** *profession of faith and membership in the church. Baptism is itself a profession of faith, and in the case of adults who are baptized, is accompanied by the constitutional faith questions.*

The visible sign of baptism also may be enacted **on behalf** of someone who is not able to make a public profession of faith, but is no less a part of Christ's body and no less a recipient of God's presence and action. This is the case with infants, very young children, and some people with developmental disabilities. In both cases (baptism of adults and
baptism of children) we look toward the public profession of faith. An adult makes public profession of faith at the time of baptism. In the case of an infant or very small child, the parents and the congregation anticipate the time when the child will **confirm** his or her faith (this is what confirmation ministries are about in the Presbyterian Church).

Managing the *Register of Marriages*?

Regardless of who is being married or if the officiating pastor is not the church's pastor, the authorization of and the reporting of a marriage that occurs in the church sanctuary are to be recorded in the minutes. The roll book is to be updated for members only.

For weddings in which at least one of the couple is a member of the congregation:

The Minutes would record the approval of the wedding, with the full names of the couple and the date, time, and location of the wedding service; and the name of the person officiating.

If the person officiating is not the pastor of the congregation, and the wedding is to take place in the church sanctuary, the service must be approved by the Session. The Minutes should record the approval, with the full name of the officiant and place of his/her ministry (or the words "Honorably Retired" if she/he is retired).

After the wedding service has occurred, the following information would be entered in the Marriage Register:

- Full names of the bride and groom
- Name of the officiating pastor
- Date and location of the wedding service

What about weddings of persons who are not members of the congregation, and/or such weddings officiated by a guest minister approved by the Session?
These weddings would be recorded in the Session Minutes only. The action of approval would be recorded, and subsequently a report that the wedding service occurred. The same information would be recorded as for the Marriage Register.

	Pastor		Not the church's pastor	
	Minutes	Roll Book	Minutes	Roll Book
Member	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Non-Member	Yes	No	Yes	No

NOTE FROM THE STATED CLERK: Careful recording of wedding information is an example of how important minutes, rolls, and registers are as an historical record. Clerks often receive calls from persons who are doing genealogical research, seeking information about a wedding, a baptism, or a funeral. Usually they know the basic information that a person was, for example, married on a certain date in a particular congregation, but have no information beyond that. Grown children who are Presbyterian and who are marrying a Catholic will be required by the diocese to provide proof of baptism. Careful records are a powerful ministry to the wider world.

Registering *Deaths and Funerals*

The process is basically the same as that for weddings. For the death of a church member (or the spouse or relative of a church member), the clerk would record the following information in the Register of Deaths:

- ☐ The name of the deceased (a good practice is to place their chronological membership number by his/her name)
- ☐ The date of death
- ☐ The date and location of the funeral service or memorial service
- ☐ The name of the officiant
- ☐ The date and location of the interment. [NOTE: Sometimes the interment is some time after the memorial service. Sometimes the interment is miles away from the location of the service. Again, the information, if known, is important as an historical record.]

In the case of persons who are not members of the congregation, the above information would be recorded in the Session minutes. HOWEVER, clerks may use their discretion to record all funerals conducted by the church and/or officiated by the pastor. To do so is not breaking any rule.

Saving/Storing Previous Minutes

One of your best resources:

The Presbyterian Historical Society
425 Lombard Street • Philadelphia, PA 19147
history.pcusa.org   refdesk@pcusa.org
Records Archivist: David Staniunas – 215-928-3884

First, the Minutes Themselves:

The Book of Order charges clerks with the "permanent safekeeping" of all official records. Certain types of records are deemed permanent because of their legal, administrative, or historic nature. Permanent records document many aspects of the historic development of the denomination and the commitment to the community of faith. In addition, they are valuable in understanding legal and financial developments and have ongoing administrative uses within the synod, presbytery, congregation, and national office. Just like physical records, some electronic or "born-digital" records are deemed permanent and must be preserved.

Preservation solutions

The following are some basic steps you can take immediately to reduce threats and extend the life of your records:

BEST: PC(USA) congregations can deposit their permanent records in the Presbyterian Historical Society's secure, climate-controlled archives free of charge, and have their records digitized at a subsidized rate.

> **Use acid-free paper:** When creating important permanent documents such as minutes or reports, use acid-free, lignin-free paper with a minimum pH of 8.5 and a buffer of calcium carbonate of about 3% to supply alkaline reserves. Paper that is at least 25% cotton or rag will supply additional durability.
>
> **Minimize light exposure:** Store records in an area without windows or skylights. If this is not possible, cover windows with dark shades or ultraviolet-filtering plastic films. Keep lights off when the area is not in use.
>
> **Maintain environmental control:** In general, keeping temperature and relative humidity low and stable will benefit all materials. High temperatures increase the rate of chemical reactions which cause deterioration. High humidity, generally over 60%, will cause mold to grow, metals to corrode, and encourage pest infestations, while very low humidity, under 20%, will cause materials to become brittle. Pollutants also interact with materials to encourage deterioration and infestations. However, not all formats require the same environmental conditions.
> Paper-based records generally benefit from temperatures below 70°F. It is much easier to maintain these conditions in storage areas that are not occupied by people. While the ideal is difficult to reach, the use of de- humidifiers, humidifiers, and air-conditioning can help maintain a good environment.
>
> **Improve storage practices:** Archival, buffered, acid-free storage enclosures are a great way to provide extra protection against damaging fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity.
>
> **Handle permanent records with care:** Do not curl, fold, or bend books and papers when placing them in storage. Metal fasteners (staples, metal paper clips, etc.) will rust and damage paper over time. Post-it™ notes and tape will leave an acidic residue on records.

When our Minutes Book is full, what should we do?

1. Empty the heavy binder of its pages, and store those pages in acid-free (archival) folders, or have the pages bound.

2. Store the folders (marked with the beginning and ending dates of the minutes) in a fireproof/waterproof location (a fireproof safe or a fireproof filing cabinet).
3. Take the empty binder and fill it with fresh pages. It is your choice whether you start that book with the next consecutive number from the last page of the immediately previous minutes OR start the new book with "page 1."
4. See "Best Practice" just below.

We have minutes going back to the Garden of Eden. What should we do with them?

BEST PRACTICE: Send them to the Presbyterian Historical Society at the above address. (It's a good idea to call ahead to make sure they know your minutes will be coming.)

- The storage archive at the Historical Society is designed to withstand any natural or human agency that might destroy the records. The Historical Society is safer than any other place you might store your records.
- The records at the Historical Society are **accessible**. The turn-around time for sending requested minutes is less than a week.

RECORDS ACCEPTED BY THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY (PHS)

Session minutes and registers are of chief importance, but PHS also holds minutes of other church councils, including deacons, trustees, women's associations and youth groups. Records are housed in an environmentally controlled archival storage area with specialized fire detection and security systems. Congregations retain ownership of the records on deposit and may request the return of records at any time with written authorization from the Clerk of Session.

PHS recommends shipping records in as near their original state as possible. Do not cut the text block out of bound volumes. Do not remove bindings. Pack the materials in a sturdy, corrugated cardboard box, densely enough that volumes are unlikely to shift, insulated from the edges of the box with bubble wrap or wadded packing paper.

TOPICS RELATED TO WORK OF SESSION

Abstaining from a Vote

"What are the effects of abstaining from a vote?"
Often, members of a voting body will register that they are abstaining from voting. There are many assumptions about the effect of abstaining, which usually fall under three categories:

It has no effect.
It counts as a "yes" vote.
It counts as a "no" vote.

Actually, the effect of abstaining relates to the **stated principle by which the body decides.**
Are actions approved by "a majority of those present and voting?" Or are the actions decided by "a majority of those present?" Look at the two statements carefully, for they are different statements.

First . . . a "majority" is one more than 50%.

If decisions are made by a "majority of those present AND VOTING" then a vote to abstain has *no effect*, positive or negative. For example:

A session has 15 members and the practice is "those present and voting." During a particular meeting, 12 members are present.
If all members vote a majority is 7 (one more than 50% of those present).

So . . If the vote on a proposal is 6/6, the motion fails, for it is not a majority. If the vote were 7/5 the motion would pass, having achieved the majority.

But what if two persons abstain, with the result that the vote is 5 yes, 5 no, and 2 abstentions?

The motion would fail, because it does not achieve the majority of those present AND VOTING.
(The majority is 6 – one more than 50% of the ten who were present and voting.)
If one person abstained (6 yes, 5 no, 1 abstention) the motion would pass, having such a majority.

If decisions are made by a "majority of those present," then a vote to abstain would have the effect of a no vote. For example:

A session has 12 members and the practice is "those present."
During a particular meeting, all twelve members are present. The majority would be 7 (one more than 50% of those present).
If the vote were 7 yes, 4 no, and 1 abstention, the motion would pass, having achieved majority.
If the vote were 6 yes, 5 no, and 1 abstention, the motion would fail, having failed to achieve the majority
(Even though more persons voted "yes" than "no" the positive votes donot achieve the required majority.)

THE "PRESBYTERIAN APPROACH" . . .
The common *assumption* in the Presbyterian Church is that decisions are made by those present **and voting**. That said, it is important that bodies in the church (particularly sessions) make it clear which of the above positions they take, **and follow that practice consistently.**

- Proxy voting is **not** allowed . . . ever . . . in the Presbyterian Church. If a person is absent, they are absent. One **cannot** vote if one is not present . . . not ever . . . not under *any* circumstances.
- Regarding e-mail votes: The newest edition of *Robert's Rules* maintains that such a vote is appropriate **only** after face-to-face discussion of an issue.
- Regarding electronic (Skype, etc.) – the same rules apply, However, ALL members of the body must have the opportunity to participate.

Abstaining is appropriate when a person has a personal or financial interest in the decision being made. In such a case, abstaining is done to avoid a conflict of interest. *Robert's Rules* maintains a right of a person to abstain, but notes that under the second provision above (a majority of those present) abstaining loses its neutrality. *Robert's* also maintains that a person has a *responsibility* to vote in a manner consistent with their opinion on the issue. Our Presbyterian polity and theology would affirm the *responsibility* to vote in a manner consistent with one's opinion on the issue, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"When does a person who is elected an elder or deacon actually take office?"

This question is important, given the varied practices of congregations in the timing of electing and ordaining/installing officers.

The **service of ordination and installation** effectively begins a person's term of service. So too, the ordination and installation of a particular officer signals the end of service for the person whom they are replacing.

Example:

- ☐ An elder is elected in December of 2009 to begin service in mid-January 2010.
- ☐ The service of ordination/installation is held the second Sunday of January 2010.
- ☐ At the conclusion of the ordination/installation service, that elder becomes an active elder.
- ☐ The person whom they are replacing ends their term of service at the conclusion of that service of ordination/installation.

It is important to note the different responsibilities along the way:

- ☐ The *congregation* elects a Nominating Committee (which is a committee of the *congregation*, not a committee of the session).
- ☐ The *Nominating Committee* nominates candidates to the congregation. [NOTE: The session's **sole** responsibility is to call a congregation meeting for that purpose, at the request of the Nominating Committee. Please understand that the session has no more inherent right to know the names of the nominees than any other members of the congregation. There is no requirement that the Nominating Committee run names by the session, and it is certainly inappropriate for a session to "approve" or "disapprove" a slate of nominees prior to their being presented to the congregation. Again, the Nominating Committee is a committee of the *congregation*.]
- ☐ The *congregation* elects the officers who will lead them.
- ☐ The *session* examines the elected officers and approves or disapproves proceeding with their ordination and/or installation. [If the session disapproves the ordination and/or installation of an officer or officers, that decision is communicated to the Nominating Committee, which will initiate a subsequent search for nominees.]
- ☐ The *session* ordains and installs the officers.
- ☐ The *officers* begin their service upon their ordination and/or installation.

If the "lag time" between election and ordination/installation is long, it is very appropriate for a session to invite the elected persons to attend session or deacon meetings (and, if the respective bodies deem it wise and appropriate, to grant them privilege of voice).

It is not appropriate for an elected officer to vote prior to his or her ordination and/or installation. This is purely a matter of "orderly practice." Some congregations have a practice of an "expanded session" in the transition period between officer classes. This may be fine most of the time, but it is risky, and makes the church vulnerable. If an action of the "expanded session" were complained against, it is likely that a Permanent Judicial Commission would take note of the irregularity of the composition of such a session, and even void the decision made under such circumstances, requiring that action be reconsidered and taken only by those authorized to vote.

BY-LAWS & MANUALS of OPERATION

The *Book of Order* does not require congregations to have by-laws. In fact, the words "by-laws" do not appear in the *Book of Order*.

What does the *Book of Order* require?

The *Book of Order* now requires sessions to prepare and maintain a *Manual of Administrative Operations*.

What is the purpose of a *Manual of (Administrative) Operations*?

The purpose of the *Manual* is simple:

A Manual serves to make specific what the *Book of Order* leaves general.

For example:

- The *Book of Order* specifies classes of officers, but does not specify the size of those classes. So by-laws (or a Manual) would specify how many people are in a particular class of officers.
- The *Book of Order* specifies that a congregation must hold an annual meeting., but does not specify when such a meeting is to be held. By-laws (or a manual) would specify when the annual congregation meeting is held.

By-Laws for the Church:

By-Laws are the "skeleton" of how the church operates as a religious corporation. Certain items need to be in a church's by-laws in order to conform to the Constitution (Book of Order). There is now more flexibility regarding certain ways of operating that each church needs to address in its by-laws. Items that need to be addressed are:

- Name of the church, and its purpose/mission
- How is the church related to the Presbyterian Church (USA)
- The church and her relation to the Constitution
- Congregational meetings, quorum for these meetings, how these meetings are called
- Session meetings; quorum for these meetings
- Officers: Moderator, Clerk, Treasurer
- How a nominating committee is formed
- Officers of the church: elders, deacons if applicable and trustees if applicable
- How the by-laws are amended.

By-laws can only be changed by 2/3 vote of the congregation.

Manuals of Operation:

Every church should have a Manual of Operations. These manuals are for practical purposes, how the church functions on a day to day basis. The By-Laws are the skeleton, the manuals are the flesh. The Book of Order does require that churches produce some kind of Manual of Operation (G-3.0106). All church policies should be contained in these manuals. There are certain items that must be there:

- A policy on Child Protection
- A policy on Sexual Misconduct

Prevention/Response Optional items if they apply:

- Committees and their areas of responsibility
- Committee member job descriptions
- Personnel policies related to hiring and dismissal
- Use and procedures of petty cash
- Wedding policies
- Use of building policies
- Who has keys?
- Reimbursement for expenses

And much more!!!

Policies in the Manual of Operations are developed and changed by vote of the Session.

A very important <u>word</u> to use in by-laws or a *Manual* . . .

Whenever your by-laws or the *Manual* specify a date or a particular procedure, use the word **"ordinarily."**

For example:

The annual congregation meeting will ordinarily be held on the fourth Sunday of January, following Morning Worship.

In the above example, the word "ordinarily" affords the session the privilege and responsibility of making necessary changes due to unforeseen circumstances, without having to have a special meeting to approve a change or to approve "suspending the by-laws." If a huge snow-storm should make it impossible to meet on the fourth Sunday of January, the session and congregation will be grateful that the word "ordinarily" appears in the by-laws or *Manual*.

What is the relationship of the *Manual of Operations* to the *Book of Order*?

- The basic relationship is spelled out above: the *Manual* makes specific the general provisions of the *Book of Order*.
- The *Manual* may not conflict with the provisions of the *Book of Order*. In any conflict between the *Manual* and the *Book of Order*, the *Book of Order* prevails.
- It is inappropriate to include in the *Manual* any provisions that are already in the *Book of Order*. Such inclusion is
(1) unnecessary, (2) redundant, and (3) makes the *Manual* too long. Such provisions are already stated in the *Book of Order*; it is unnecessary (and inappropriate) to include them in by-laws.

What about amending the by-laws or the *Manual*?

By-laws and the Manual should include a final paragraph concerning how they may be amended, by whom, and by what vote (majority or two-thirds). The basic *Robert's Rules* principle is that, with prior notice, the amendment may be approved by a simple majority; with no prior notice, the amendment may be approved by a two-thirds vote.

Regarding who may approve amendments:

The general rule is that provisions which are under the authority of the session may amended by the session; provisions which are under the authority of the congregation (and those mostly relate to officers) may be amended by the congregation. Such amendments would be handled at duly-called meetings of the session or congregation, with such amendment clearly noted in the call for the meeting.

Examples of items under session's authority:

- The quorum of a session meeting
- The number of meetings in a year
- The provisions for electing a treasurer and the term of the treasurer
- The provision for electing a clerk of session and the term of the clerk
- The ordinary date of the annual congregation meeting
- The ordinary date of other congregation meetings (e.g. to elect officers, to review the session-approved budget)

Examples of items under a congregation's authority:

- How large are the classes of officers
- How many classes of officers there are (the *Book of Order* no longer requires three classes of officers)

Presbytery of Western Kentucky - Session Records Review Sheet

Presbytery of Western Kentucky

Church Name ______________________ **Year(s) Covered by Minutes** __________

Page # **in Minutes to be filled in by Clerk of Session** **BEFORE** **the Review**

Included Y/N and Comments to Completed by Reviewer DURING the Review with Presbytery Church Administration Committee

Recorded Item	Reference	Page #	*Included Y/N*	*Reviewer's Comments*
Date, time, place of each meeting, and stated or special meeting	G-3.0203			
Meeting at least quarterly.	G-3-0203			
Names of ruling elders present.	G-3.0101			
Name of moderator	G-3.0203			
Opened and closed each meeting with prayer	G-3.0203			
Minutes approved by session	G-3.0204			
Financial report at each meeting or regularly	G-3.0205			
Session plan and approval for Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (at least quarterly) and to home bound members.	G-3.0201b W-2.4012			
Report of administration of the Lord's Supper (next meeting).	G-3.0201			
When taken to sick or shut-in members, names of those officers who served the sacrament	W-2.4012			

Recorded Item	Reference	Page #		Included Y/N	Reviewer's Comments
Approval of the Sacrament of Baptism.	G-3.0201b W-2-3011				
Report of administration of Baptism (next meeting).	G-3.0201				
Commissioner(s) to presbytery meetings elected by session	G-3.0202				
Report of Commissioner(s) given at next session meeting following each presbytery meeting.	G-0302				
Signature of Clerk of Session	G-3.0107				

Items to be Recorded __Annually__ in Minutes:

Recorded Item	Reference	Page #		Included Y/N	Reviewer's Comments
Training, examination of newly elected ruling elders and deacons.	G-3.0201c				
Ordination and Installation of ruling elders and deacons	G-3.0201c				
Report of annual review of compensation for pastor and all other staff	G-2.0804				
Session review of annual statistical report.	G-3.0202f				
Annual statistical report included with minutes.	G-3.0204				
Election of Church Treasurer(s) by Session	G-3.0205				
Election of Clerk of Session by Session	G-3.0104				
Session approval of budget.	G-3.0205				
Full financial review or audit	G-3.0113				
Review of all committees and organizations of the church.	G-3.0201c				

Recorded Item	Reference	Page #		Included Y/N	Reviewer's Comments
Review of Deacons	G-2.0202				
Provision for education, nurture, and fellowship opportunities	G-3.0201				
Insurance Review - adequate property and liability coverage, including officers	G-3.0112				
Session efforts to restore less active members to active participation, if any	G-3.0204				
Session composition with regard to racial ethnic members, women, men, age groups, and how this corresponds to composition of the congregation.	F-1.0403				

Minutes of Congregational Meetings:

Recorded Item	Reference	Page #		Included Y/N	Reviewer's Comments
Congregation met at least annually	G-1.0501				
Presentation of Session approved budget in minutes	G-3.0205				
Election of Nominating Committee by congregation	G-2.0401				
Election of elders, deacons, trustees (where applicable).	G-1.0503				
Minutes of all congregational meetings are signed by clerk	G-1.0505				
Review of compensation of pastor(s) by the congregation.	G-1.0503				
Pastor(s) Terms of Call (compensation) included in congregation minutes.	G-5.0505				

Church Rolls and Registers:

Recorded Item	Reference	Y/N		Included Y/N	Reviewer's Comments
Roll of Active Members maintained by Session	G-3.0204				
Roll of Baptized Members maintained by Session	G-3.0204				
Roll of Affiliate Members, if any, maintained by Session	G-3.0204				
List of Ruling Elders and Deacons, with ordination date	G-3.0204				
List of Pastors, Associates, with dates of service	G-3.0204				
Record baptisms with date of birth and name of parents.	G-3.0204b				

Date: ____________________________

____

Name of Reviewer ____

Minutes and Registers Approved:

( ) Without Exception - OR -

( ) With Exception(s): ____

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HELPFUL LINKS

Annotated Book of Order:

https://index.pcusa.org/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates$fn=default.htm

Annual Statistical Reporting:

https://oga.pcusa.org/section/churchwide-ministries/stats/statistical-reporting-faq/

Presbytery of Western Kentucky:

https://presbyteryofwesternkentucky.yolasite.com/

Synod of Living Waters:

https://synodlw.org/