

HANDBOOK  
FOR  
CLERKS OF SESSION

2022 Edition

*This handbook is dedicated to all the Clerks of Session  
in the Presbytery of Genesee Valley  
with gratitude to former Stated Clerk Val Fowler, originator of this Handbook*

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Forward: Foundations for Our Ministry as Clerks</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>What Resources Do I Need?</b>	<b>5</b>
“Must Have” Tools for Clerks of Session	
<b>Timeline for Clerks in Relation to Presbytery – 2022</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>What Should I Do First?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>How Do I Prepare for a Session Meeting?</b>	<b>8</b>
Summary Timeline for Preparation	
Before the Session Meeting	
Take With You to the Meeting	
During the Session Meeting	
After the Meeting	
<b>How Do I Prepare the Minutes of Meetings?</b>	<b>10</b>
How do I begin the minutes?	
How should I format the minutes?	
How do I record <i>Routine Business</i> ?	
How do I record <i>Motions</i> ?	
What <i>Routine Reports</i> are required?	
How do I record <i>Other Session Business</i> ?	
How do I record the <i>Annual Report</i> ?	
How do I record the <i>Annual Statistical Report</i> ?	
<b>Actions Which Must Be Approved by More than Just the Session</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>How Do I Clerk a Congregation Meeting?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Continuing Education of the Session</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Maintenance of Rolls &amp; Registers</b>	<b>19</b>
Examples of Typical Roll/Register Entries	
How Do I Manage the <i>Roll of Baptized Members</i> ?	
How Do I Manage the <i>Register of Marriages</i> ?	
How Do I Manage the <i>Register of Deaths &amp; Funerals</i> ?	
<b>How Should We Save / Store Previous Minutes?</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Educational Moments Related to the Work of the Session</b>	
Abstaining From a Vote	<b>27</b>
Election & Installation of Officers: A Matter of Timing	<b>28</b>
Electronic Meetings	<b>29</b>
A Word (or few) about By-Laws	<b>33</b>
Mandated NYS Sexual Harassment Policy & Training	<b>35</b>
<b><u>OTHER CLERK RESOURCES</u></b>	
Session Records Checklist 2021	<b>37</b>

# **Forward**

## ***Foundations for our Ministry as Clerks***

This *Handbook for Clerks of Session* is written for clerks by clerks, 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 *Handbook* is a gift of “received wisdom” passed along so that you will not feel as if you are starting from scratch nor that you are reinventing the wheel.

Our *Book of Order* begins with a chapter titled *Foundations of Presbyterian Polity*. This chapter lays the groundwork for our mission as Presbyterian witnesses to the love of God and the light of Christ. Our Form of Government refers to sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly as **councils**. Formerly, they were called “governing bodies” or “judicatories.” Even though the session is a “council”, this document will continue the use of the word “session” to describe the ruling elders and teaching elders who make up the council of the congregation.

This *Handbook for Clerks of Session* is built upon two foundations:

### **First Foundation: Clerking is MINISTRY**

The Confession of 1967 offers a crucial perspective:

*The church thus orders its life as an institution with a constitution, government, officers, finances, and administrative rules. **These are instruments of mission, not ends in themselves.***

As clerks, we have a vital role to play in keeping the church on track with regard to its mission. If we keep **ministry** foremost in our minds, we will work in a spirit that will be truly energizing and transforming to the life of the church. Within that perspective:

- Every time someone calls with a question, they are providing you the opportunity to minister.
- Keeping accurate minutes honors our collective ministry in the wider church, and of holding ourselves accountable to others for doing what we said we would do.

### **Second Foundation: As leaders we have a RESPONSIBILITY to further the Great Ends of the Church**

The “Great Ends of the Church” are our marching orders, the basic vision of the Church of Jesus Christ:

*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.  
The exhibition of the kingdom of heaven to the world.*

The “Great Ends” appear at the end of the first chapter of the *Book of Order*. They set the stage for all that we do as Presbyterians doing ministry and mission.

### **Assumptions Behind this Handbook**

The ministry of Clerk of Session flows from the above foundations. As Clerk of Session, you play a vital role within the Presbyterian Church (USA). This handbook is written with the following assumptions in mind:

- 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 of a governing body 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. All of us are generally wiser than one of us. "The Holy Spirit works powerfully through groups, as well as through individuals," is a classic Presbyterian approach to common work in the Church.

The Moderator and the Clerk of Session are guardians of this polity . . . all in the hope of enhancing our witness to Jesus Christ and furthering the Great Ends of the Church.

*Thank you . . . for your service in this ministry of love! It is a privilege to share this ministry with you.*

*Susan Orr, Stated Clerk  
Presbytery of Genesee Valley*

You may copy any page or section  
of this handbook for use by your  
Session or any other group, or for  
educational purposes.

## What Resources do I Need?

### “Must Have” Tools for Clerks of Session

1. A current edition of the *Book of Order* [***Book of Order 2019-2023***] **\*\*\*NOTE: Due to the reduced virtual General Assembly in response to the pandemic, the 2019-2021 Book of Order is valid through 2023.**  
Every other year, the General Assembly ordinarily prints a new edition of the *Book of Order*. It incorporates recent amendments to the *Book of Order*.  
**There are two ways you may obtain a *Book of Order 2019-2023*:**
  - You may purchase a copy at the Presbytery office. The price is \$9.00. **\*\*Limited copies**
  - You may access a **downloadable** copy (FREE) at this link: [www.pcusa.org/constitution](http://www.pcusa.org/constitution)  
**For the download:** Scroll down to “THE BOOK OF ORDER”
2. ***Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition (2020)*** ~ PublicAffairs  
There are many Robert’s Rules books out there, but it is [this edition](#) that is the “Parliamentary Bible” worldwide. **Available at Amazon.com.** I have also found ***Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised in Brief (2020)*** to be very helpful, and more accessible in the heat of the moment.
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, 4<sup>th</sup> 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 - 2022**

- January**      **Tuesday, January 4 – Necrology Report** due to Lisa at [communications@pbygenval.org](mailto:communications@pbygenval.org)
- Tuesday, January 4** – Please submit/confirm the name and contact information of your **Elder Commissioner** to Lisa at [communications@pbygenval.org](mailto:communications@pbygenval.org)
- Thursday, January 6, 6:30pm – Help for Clerks of Session: Annual Statistical Report via Zoom**
- Tuesday, January 25, 6pm** – Stated Presbytery meeting via Zoom
- Complete the Annual Statistical report** and submit it. This is done online (<http://oga.pcusa.org/stats>). **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL YOUR SESSION MEETING.** Be sure to print and include a copy of the report in your next Session meeting minutes.
- February**      **Tuesday, February 1 – DEADLINE** to submit Annual Statistical Report
- April**            **Saturday, April 30, 10am**– Stated Presbytery Meeting via Zoom
- July**             **Tuesday, July 12, 6pm** – Stated Presbytery Meeting via Zoom
- September**    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 review options and completion date. Fill in the Review form with the required information and page numbers. **Watch for the mailing announcing the times/locations of minutes review in early September.**
- October**        **Tuesday, October 25, 6pm** – Stated Presbytery Meeting via Zoom
- November**      **Annual Session Minutes Review.** It is expected that all clerks of session will participate in the annual review either electronically, one-on-one or in-person. You will review the minutes of another Session. Anticipated dates are:  
                         **Tuesday, November 1** – *deadline to submit completed electronic and 1:1 review*  
                         **Sunday, November 6** – *in-person option beginning at 1pm at Gates Presbyterian*
- Following the minutes review, prepare a report to the Session regarding the review of your Session’s records. Note specifically any exceptions that were made. It is the Session’s responsibility (not yours) to take steps to correct the exceptions. Record those steps, as determined by the Session.
- In late November or early December you will receive e-mail notice from the stated clerk 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.
- You will receive a form for the *Necrology Report* to be presented during the January Presbytery meeting. The form will ask for the name, ordination and death dates of any Ruling Elders (not Deacons) who died during the calendar year. Complete the *Necrology Report* form and send to the presbytery office.

## **What should I do first?**

**Please Remember: *God does not call the equipped; God equips the called.***

A successful Clerk of Session is not made overnight. Knowledge of your resources and diligence in using them will help you become proficient in this rewarding task. The following is a checklist of priorities to pursue from the day you are elected.

**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 fire and waterproof safe or fire and waterproof 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.** You will find ordering information in the “What Resources Will I Need?” section on page 5.

**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 requirements.*

**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 voicemail.

**5. Locate a copy of the current Presbytery Directory.** The new Presbytery Database is expected to go live in early 2022 and will be available from the Presbytery website. It is password protected. Contact the presbytery office at [communications@pbygenval.org](mailto:communications@pbygenval.org) to receive the access codes.

### **Supplies you will need:**

[Minutes book papers](#) and [binders](#) are available through Cokesbury (800) 672-1789. Since the binders are very expensive, we recommend that when your current Minutes book is filled, you have the minutes bound so that the binder may be re-used. If you send minutes to the Historical Society in the binder, the binder may be incinerated.

**The Presbytery utilizes and recommends this Rochester area book binder:**

**NEW RIDGE BINDERY  
74 Clearview Dr. Penfield, NY  
520-3028**

The following are available from Cokesbury or from [www.pcusastore.com](http://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\(USA\)](#)

# **HOW DO I PREPARE FOR A SESSION MEETING?**

## **Summary Timeline for Preparation**

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 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 **must** include the **exact purpose** 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 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).

## **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. When I prepare my minutes for the Presbytery Big Picture Team, or Committee on Ministry, I give them a title like this: January COM minutes-PRELIMINARY DRAFT. I send them electronically to the members and invite corrections/clarifications. After incorporating the changes, I change PRELIMINARY DRAFT to DRAFT-CORRECTED. After approval at the next meeting, I send them to the Communications Coordinator marked FINAL.

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. Some congregations even have a "rolls clerk" for the latter task. 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.*

## **HOW DO I PREPARE THE MINUTES OF MEETINGS?**

This section of the Handbook for Clerks of Session is intended as a helpful 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.

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."

The following guide is organized in “How Do I . . . ?” sections.

In the following sections, suggestions and commentary are indented and printed in italics.

## How do I begin 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]**  
 \_\_\_\_\_ **Presbyterian Church, \_\_\_\_\_, NY**  
**[date, time, location]**

*Here is one example:*

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 \_\_\_\_\_, NY 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.”]*

## How should I format the 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

## **How do I record *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:

- The list of routine business was provided ahead of time.
- 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 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.

## How do I record *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:

- o A **clear** statement of the action taken.
- o **Who will follow through** to implement the motion (whether an individual or individuals, or a committee or board).
- o The **anticipated deadline** for implementation of the motion --OR--the **anticipated time of a report** regarding progress.
- o 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.
- o 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.
- o 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)
- o 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.

- o 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."
- o 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.

## What *Routine Reports* are required?

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 the minutes.
- 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 Genesee Valley, 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 Genesee Valley 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 Genesee Valley 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 Genesee Valley 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 **vitaly** 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

## **How do I record *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)

## **How do I record 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]

## **How do I record the *Annual Statistical Report*?**

**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.

## **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 Committee on Ministry (for CP) 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 <i>any</i> 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. <i>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.</i>	Session ONLY recommends changes Congregation approves changes Committee on Ministry Changes are reported to the presbytery
All proposals for merger, yoking, or dissolution of congregations	Session Congregation Committee on Ministry (through COM liaison) Presbytery Trustees Presbytery
Calls of pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, commissioned ruling elders	See the Committee on Ministry's <i>Transition Manual</i> , available at <a href="http://www.pbygenval.org/committees/committee-on-ministry/frequently-used-com-documents">www.pbygenval.org/committees/committee-on-ministry/frequently-used-com-documents</a> or through the COM liaison
All dissolutions of pastoral relationships and all calls for new pastors.	Congregation Committee on Ministry Presbytery

Appointment of Moderator of Session, stated supply, temporary supply, or interim pastor	Session Committee on Ministry Presbytery
Call for a special Session meeting	At least two members of Session, in writing – <b>OR</b> – the Presbytery – <b>OR</b> – the Moderator of Session
Call for a special congregation meeting	Session – <b>OR</b> – Presbytery – <b>OR</b> – 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

## **How do I Clerk a Congregational Meeting?**

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 an 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.**

1. 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."*

**John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt (his name is my name, too) 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. Schmidt'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. Schmidt 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. Schmidt 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. Schmidt 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. Schmidt has been removed from the active roll, and requests transfer to another church . .***

1. The clerk simply informs the other church that Mr. Schmidt 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. Schmidt be received in the new congregation by reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ.

## **How do I manage 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, are they placed on the roll of Baptized Members?**

Yes - For an infant or young child, you would list their 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, they 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 them 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 their name on the chronological roll of Active Members by the next available number, and note the date of Session action receiving them as a member.
4. List their 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 their 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** their faith (this is what confirmation ministries are about in the Presbyterian Church).

### **How Do I Manage 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 their ministry (or the words “Honorably Retired” if they are 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.

### **How Do I Register *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 their 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.

## How Should We Save/Store Previous Minutes?

### **One of your best resources: a Denominational *Treasure***

The Presbyterian Historical Society  
425 Lombard Street • Philadelphia, PA 19147  
history.pcusa.org  
[refdesk@pcusa.org](mailto: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 dehumidifiers, 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 (best practice).
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.

### **ANOTHER OPTION FOR GETTING RECORDS TO THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY:**

Contact the Stated Clerk and ask if there is a planned trip to Philadelphia. This method ensures hand-delivery, free-of-charge! You will be asked to bring your records (boxed and clearly marked) to the Presbytery Office. The stated clerk will deliver them, and confirm to you that the records have been delivered.

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.

# **EDUCATIONAL MOMENTS**

## **Abstaining from a Vote**

### **Stated Clerk Educational Moment**

[Revised February 2, 2012]

#### **“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 do not 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 (Zoom, 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.

## **Election and Installation of Officers – A Matter of Timing**

### **Stated Clerk Educational Moment**

[Original composition, 2008 / Latest revision, 02/2012]

#### **“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.

**Electronic Meetings**  
**STATED CLERK EDUCATIONAL MOMENT**  
**Updated by the Stated Clerk – January 2022**

Over the past few years questions have been regularly raised about the wisdom, propriety, and mechanics of “electronic meetings.” The prevalence of e-mail, Skype, Zoom, video-conferencing, telephone conferencing, Facebook, Twitter and other media have made the issue of electronic meetings an important one. This resource offers some parameters for planning for and conducting electronic meetings. It is in three parts:

1. The complete section of *Robert’s Rules of Order*, for electronic meetings.
2. An “Advisory Opinion” from the Office of the General Assembly.
3. The Presbytery of Genesee Valley’s Electronic Meeting Policy.

**Excerpt from *Robert’s Rules of Order*, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, pp. 97-99**

**ELECTRONIC MEETINGS:**

**EXTENSION OF PARLIAMENTARY LAW TO ELECTRONIC MEETINGS.** Except as authorized in the by-laws, the business of an organization can be validly transacted only at a regular or properly called meeting—that is . . . at a single official gathering in one room or area—of the assembly of its members at which a quorum is present.

Among some organizations, there is an increasing preference, especially in the case of a relatively small board or other assembly, to transact business at electronic meetings—that is, at meetings at which, rather than all participating members being physically present in one room or area as in traditional (or “face-to-face”) meetings, some or all of them communicate with the others through electronic means such as the Internet or by telephone. A group that holds such alternative meetings does not lose its character as a deliberative assembly . . . so long as the meetings provide **at a minimum**, conditions of opportunity for simultaneous aural communication among all participating members equivalent to those of meetings held in one room or area. Under such conditions, an electronic meeting **that is properly authorized in the bylaws** is treated as though it were a meeting at which all the members who are participating are actually present.

If electronic meetings are to be authorized, it is advisable to adopt additional rules pertaining to their conduct.

**TYPES OF ELECTRONIC MEETINGS.** Various provisions for electronic meetings are possible, so that more than the minimum standard of an audioconference may be required. Thus, if the bylaws provide for meeting by video conference (but not merely by “teleconference” or by “audioconference”), the meeting **must** be conducted by technology that allows all participating members to see each other, as well as to hear each other, at the same time. Provision may also be made for the use of additional collaborative technology to aid in the conduct of a meeting.

It is important to understand that, regardless of the technology used, **the opportunity for simultaneous aural communication is essential to the deliberative character of the meeting.** Therefore, a group that attempts to conduct a deliberative process in writing (such as by postal mail, e-mail, “chat rooms,” or fax) does not constitute a deliberative assembly. Any such effort may achieve a consultative character, but it is foreign to the deliberative process as understood under parliamentary law.

**ELECTRONIC MEETINGS IN COMMITTEES.** As in the case of a board or any assembly, committees that are expressly established by the bylaws can hold a valid electronic meeting **only if authorized by the bylaws to do so.** A committee that is not expressly established by the bylaws, however, may instead be authorized by a standing rule of the parent body or organization, or by the motion establishing the particular committee, to hold electronic meetings.

**ADDITIONAL RULES FOR THE CONDUCT OF ELECTRONIC MEETINGS.** If an organization authorizes its assembly, boards, or committees to hold electronic meetings, such a provision should indicate whether members who are not present in person have the right to participate by electronic means, or whether the body may choose to allow or disallow such participation; and, conversely, whether there is required to be a central location for members who wish to attend meetings in person. The notice of an electronic meeting must include an adequate description of how to participate in it (for example, the telephone number to call for a teleconference must be provided). Various additional rules (in the bylaws,

special rules of order, standing rules, or instructions to a committee, as appropriate) may also be necessary or advisable regarding the conduct of electronic meetings, such as rules relating to:

- the type of equipment or computer software required for participation in meetings, whether the organization must provide such equipment or software, and contingencies for technical difficulties or malfunctions;
- methods for determining the presence of a quorum;
- the conditions under which a person may raise a point of order doubting the presence of a quorum, and the conditions under which the presence of a quorum is presumed if no such point of order is raised;
- methods for seeking recognition and obtaining the floor;
- means by which motions may be submitted in writing during a meeting; and
- methods for taking and verifying notes.

In addition, depending on the character of the organization, it may be advisable to adopt provisions for ensuring that non-members cannot participate in meetings (unless properly invited to do so), especially during any meeting or portion of a meeting held in executive session.

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**FROM THE OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**Constitutional Musing - Note 18 -  
Guidelines for Electronic Assemblies  
When Participants Are Unable to Meet Face-to-Face**  
Issued August 2009

The polity and theology of the Presbyterian Church recognizes the importance of elders and ministers assembling together to make decisions about the work and ministry of the church. There is no substitute for the richness of conversation and debate that is possible when we gather in one place to listen and watch and open ourselves to the work of the Spirit. We best subject ourselves to each other and to God's discerning power when we are together.

There are circumstances though, when being physically present with one another is impossible or impractical. The following are guidelines for the extraordinary times when we must use other means of accomplishing the business of a governing body when we cannot meet face to face.

1. The 216th General Assembly provided an Authoritative Interpretation concerning votes by email or mail (2004 item 04-14). In that opinion the church was reminded that:
  - a. G-3.0105 says that "Meetings (of councils) shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised..."
  - b. RRONR (page 482) states that "The opportunity for simultaneous communication is central to the deliberative character of the meeting, and is what distinguishes it from [other] attempts to do business..."
  - c. The summary conclusion of the 216th General Assembly was that "voting by e-mail is permissible only if there has been provision for deliberation, and the governing documents of the governing body provide for vote by mail or email."
2. Furthermore, at the Reunion meeting of the General Assemblies, the UPC General Assembly (1983) reaffirmed the following as reflecting the Historic Principles of the Presbyterian Church:
  - Every governing body is composed of persons who are elected to represent the church. Representatives are not simply to reflect the will of the people but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ for the Church. For this reason, the polity of the Church requires:
    - That representatives may not be instructed nor vote by proxy.
    - They must have the freedom to participate in debate.
    - Debate within the context of prayer is properly open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.
    - Representatives must be open to the possibility of having their minds changed and
    - The rules for the conduct of debate are designed so this may happen.

[G-1.0400, UPC, 1983, pp 141ff, Report of the Special Committee on Historic Principles, Conscience, and Church Government]
3. Any non-traditional form of meeting must provide an opportunity for simultaneous communication and deliberation.

4. Any non-traditional form of meeting must be described in the governing body's bylaws or standing rules.
5. Care must be taken that all qualified to participate in the meeting are included.
6. Care must be taken to provide opportunities for others to participate in the same manner that they might observe a regular meeting of the governing body.
7. Minutes of the meeting must be recorded and added to the minutes record of the governing body.

### **PRESBYTERY OF GENESEE VALLEY'S ELECTRONIC MEETING POLICY**

Approved 11/26/13, revised 4/25/2020, revised 10/24/21

An "Electronic Meeting" means a meeting at which some or all participants are joined electronically. It is preferred that each participant attend the meeting individually on a computer or device, rather than one being shared by multiple members.

- Effective August 2021, all stated and special meetings of the Presbytery will be held by virtual platform.
- Electronic meetings may be held by the Presbytery Big Picture Team, a committee or working group of the Presbytery when:
  - business is time-sensitive and in need of action before the next in-person meeting
  - the cost of an in-person meeting is not justified for the business at hand
  - time and distance are factors in members' accessibility to an in-person meeting
  - weather-related circumstances
- Electronic meetings are permissible when all active members have reasonable notice of the electronic meeting and the ability to discuss, deliberate, and discern the will of God and vote on business items
- Electronic meetings must provide for simultaneous aural communication among all participants to allow for discussion of the issue being considered; video access is preferred but not required; collaborative technologies, such as the web-based Zoom, GoToMeeting, or Skype, and interactive video teleconferences fit the necessary requirements for maintaining the deliberative character of meetings held in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order
- The moderator/convener/chair shall give attention to ensuring that all persons are included in the discussion and have the capability to hear, understand and participate fully in the proceedings
- Only the moderator of the Presbytery, the convener of the Big Picture Team, a chair of a committee, or a convener of a working group may call an electronic meeting
- Reasonable notice of an electronic meeting shall be given by the moderator, convener or chair before the meeting and shall include the purpose or the agenda for the meeting; instructions on how to participate shall accompany the call for the meeting; reasonable care shall be taken to ensure participation in the selection of the date and time for the meeting
- Established quorums will be upheld for electronic meetings and shall be declared at the beginning of the meeting
- Just as in an in-person meeting, electronic meetings shall open and close with prayer
- The same rules regarding participation apply in electronic meetings as in in-person ones: the body may but is not obligated to grant the privilege of the floor to a guest who may not vote or speak to an issue once debate closes; a guest in an electronic meeting is someone who is not a member of the named committee, working group or Presbytery
- Minutes of the proceedings shall be recorded and added to the minutes record
- Motions shall be processed in the same manner as in an in-person meeting; each attendee is responsible for their connection to the internet and the meeting; no action shall be invalidated on the grounds that the loss of, or poor quality of, a member's individual connection prevented them from participating in the meeting, provided that at least a quorum of members was connected and adequately able to participate

#### **Rationale**

When the COVID pandemic forced all meetings to be held virtually, the attendance at virtual meetings surged by 30%. Recognizing the Zoom platform provided greater accessibility to its members, the Presbytery voted to

hold all stated and special meetings by virtual platform. This policy clarifies that an electronic meeting does not include decisions made through a series of email communications which does not provide for simultaneous discussion of a motion. Moderators/chairs/conveners may contact the Communications Coordinator at [communications@pbygenval.org](mailto:communications@pbygenval.org) to schedule a Zoom meeting.

### REFLECTIONS FROM YOUR STATED CLERK (2015)

Both *Robert's Rules* and the Constitutional Musing lift up the importance of what it means to be a "deliberative assembly." Both assume the same conditions or parameters:

- The **face-to-face** nature of deliberation.
- The crucial importance of **being able to hear one another simultaneously**.
- The importance of interacting with one another directly in deliberating as a body.

These are, for lack of a better phrase, the *bottom-line* requirements for deliberating. Any form of meeting which eliminates one of these requirements is inappropriate, from both a parliamentary and an ecclesiastical standpoint.

Many clerks and session members have asked about "electronic voting" (read: "e-mail voting"). "*May we conduct a vote by e-mail?*"

- The Constitutional Musing answer is "Yes, **as long as provision has been made for everyone to participate in debate on the issue prior to taking the e-mail vote.**"
- Your stated clerk's opinion is: "Don't vote via e-mail" **unless** it is a routine issue that relates to the ability to conduct business (e.g. establishing the date of a special meeting). Still, face-to-face discussion should occur prior to such a vote . . . always.
- What is clear in the above documents is that **it is not appropriate to conduct deliberation via e-mail**. Why? Because there is no opportunity for "simultaneous aural communication."
- **Any action taken at an electronic meeting must be confirmed at the next scheduled meeting and be recorded in the minutes.**

It is clear from both *Robert's* and the Office of the General Assembly that **e-mail meetings are not appropriate and are never allowed**. While a *vote* may be conducted by e-mail (see above) a *meeting* may not be conducted by e-mail (or text, or twitter, or Facebook, or other such media)

### FURTHER GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF E-MAIL

- Use e-mail **ONLY** for routine business, such as:
  - Establishing the date/time of a meeting
  - Providing preparatory materials to all participants prior to a meeting
  - Sending an agenda for a meeting
  - Inviting participants to provide preparatory materials or reports (with a deadline for submitting)
  - Working on a document to which several people are contributing (see below)
- Make sure that every member of the group has a complete and accurate list of the e-mail addresses of all members of the group.
- If one or more group members do not have e-mail, either (1) do **NOT** use e-mail communication (recommended as a best practice), or (2) make sure that those non-electronically-connected members have a copy of what is sent by e-mail.
- In all cases **require** that if group members reply to an e-mail related to the work of the group, they **always** "reply all."
- **Never . . . ever . . .** use e-mail to discuss an issue. E-mail is an ineffective, inappropriate way of conducting dialogue. Dialogue must **always** be face-to-face.
- **Never . . . ever . . .** broadcast any group related e-mail beyond the group **UNLESS** the group has granted permission to do so at a face-to-face meeting, and **ONLY** with respect to a particular document.

## **A WORD (or few) ABOUT BY-LAWS & MANUALS of OPERATION**

### **An important first word . . .**

Contrary to common assumptions, **New York State Religious Corporation Law does not require Presbyterian congregations to have by-laws.** Congregations may have by-laws if they wish, but they are not required to do so.

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!!!

## **A very important word 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 be 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)

## **Mandated NYS Sexual Harassment – Policy & Training (2018)**

Beginning in October 2018, Employers must adopt a sexual harassment prevention policy and provide training, or use a similar policy and training that meet or exceeds the law’s minimum standards. All employees must be **annually** trained by **October 9, 2019**, one year from the effective date of the law.

Model policies are available at <https://www.ny.gov/programs/combating-sexual-harassment-workplace>

### **Training Requirements**

Every employer in New York State is required to provide employees with sexual harassment prevention training. An employer that does not use the model training developed by the Department of Labor and Division of Human Rights must ensure that the training that they use meets or exceeds the following minimum standards.

The training must:

- be interactive
- include an explanation of sexual harassment consistent with guidance issued by the Department of Labor in consultation with the Division of Human Rights
- include examples of conduct that would constitute unlawful sexual harassment
- include information concerning the federal and state statutory provisions concerning sexual harassment and remedies available to victims of sexual harassment
- include information concerning employees’ rights of redress and all available forums for adjudicating complaints
- include information addressing conduct by supervisors and any additional responsibilities for such supervisors

**Each employee must receive training on an annual basis**, starting October 9, 2019.

[NOTE: Sexual harassment prevention training is **not** the same as the Boundaries Awareness Training required of all pastoral leaders by Presbytery.]

### **From the NYS website’s FAQ:**

#### **Q2. What type of records must employers maintain to verify compliance?**

A2. No signed acknowledgement of having read the policy is required, but employers are encouraged to keep a signed acknowledgement and to keep a copy of training records. These records may be helpful in addressing any future complaints or lawsuits.

#### **Q5. If an employer already has established investigative procedures which are similar, but not identical to those provided in the model, can the employer deviate from these specific requirements and remain compliant with the law?**

A5. Yes. But the investigative procedures that the employer will be using should be outlined in the employer’s policy.

#### **Q6. Does the complaint form need to be included, in full, in the policy?**

A6. No. Employers should, however, be clear about where the form may be found, for example, on a company’s internal website.

### **Training**

#### **Q1. Who is considered an Employee for the training requirement? And when does the training need to be completed?**

A1. “Employee” includes all workers, regardless of immigration status. Employee also includes exempt or non-exempt employees, part-time workers, seasonal workers, and temporary workers. All employees must complete the model training or a comparable training that meets the minimum standards by Oct. 9, 2019.

#### **Q2. How often must employees receive sexual harassment training?**

A2. Employees must be trained at least once per year. In subsequent years, this may be based on the calendar year, anniversary of each employee’s start date, or any other date the employer chooses.

#### **Q3. How soon do new employees need to be trained?**

A3. As employers may be liable for the actions of employees immediately upon hire, the State encourages training as soon as possible. Employers should distribute the policy to employees prior to commencing work and should have it posted.

#### **Q4. If an employer has previously provided training that meets or exceeds the requirements, must employees be retrained?**

A4. **Employees must receive training on an annual basis.** If employees have already received training this year, but it did NOT meet all new requirements, employers need only provide supplemental training to ensure all requirements are met.

**Q9. What does “interactive training” mean?**

A9. New York State law requires all sexual harassment training to be interactive. Training may be online, so long as it is interactive. Examples of employee participation include:

- If the training is web-based, it has questions at the end of a section and the employee must select the right answer;
- If the training is web-based, the employees have an option to submit a question online and receive an answer immediately or in a timely manner;
- In an in-person or live training, the presenter asks the employees questions or gives them time throughout the presentation to ask questions;
- Web-based or in-person trainings that provide a Feedback Survey for employees to turn in after they have completed the training

An individual watching a training video or reading a document only, with no feedback mechanism or interaction, would NOT be considered interactive.

**Q10. Is a live trainer required and does a trainer need to have a certification?**

A10. While a best practice for effective and engaging trainings, a live trainer is not specifically required. Live trainers may appear in person or via phone, video conference, etc. No certification is required and the State does not currently certify or license training providers.

**Q12. What happens if some employees fail to take the training despite an employer’s best efforts to make it available, and to require everyone to take it?**

A12. Employers are required to ensure that all employees receive training on an annual basis. Employers may take appropriate administrative remedies to ensure compliance.

## **OTHER RESOURCES**

### **SESSION MINUTES REVIEW CHECKLIST 2021 ~ pages 37-39**

**NOTE:** *This version of the Checklist was utilized in Fall 2021. The Checklist will be reviewed and revised for the 2022 Session Minutes Review being conducted in Fall 2022. The updated Checklist will be distributed to all the clerks well in advance.*

You are encouraged to copy the checklist and keep it with your materials for recording the minutes. As actions are taken, simply mark down the date. That way, when the minutes are entered into the Minutes Book, you can easily find the page numbers to enter on the checklist. The Stated Clerk does this with the Presbytery Minutes, and it makes preparation for the Presbytery Minutes Annual Review by Synod much, much easier.

## 2021 SESSION MINUTES REVIEW FORM

CONGREGATION \_\_\_\_\_ CLERK \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been clerk? \_\_\_\_\_

LAST REVIEW STAMP Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Page # \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF MOST RECENTLY APPROVED MINUTES \_\_\_\_\_

**Clerk of Session:** *Please answer the following questions. Answer "Yes" or "No"; if you answer "No", indicate the page number(s) of that exception. Submit this completed form with your minutes.*

**A. General Form of Minutes YES or NO If "NO," Pg # of Exception**

1. Are all pages numbered consecutively? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Page # \_\_\_\_\_
2. Are blank spaces of more than two inches crossed out? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Page # \_\_\_\_\_
3. Is the page with the last approval stamp included? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Page # \_\_\_\_\_

**B. For Each Meeting**

1. Is the date, time and name of the congregation recorded? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Page # \_\_\_\_\_
2. Are the names of elders present, excused, & absent recorded? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Page # \_\_\_\_\_
3. Is the name of the moderator for the meeting recorded? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Page # \_\_\_\_\_
4. Was a quorum present at the session meeting? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Page # \_\_\_\_\_
5. Is the meeting opened and closed with prayer? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Page # \_\_\_\_\_
6. Were the minutes of the preceding meeting(s) approved? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Page # \_\_\_\_\_
7. Are the minutes signed by the clerk? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Page # \_\_\_\_\_

**Clerk of Session:** *Please answer the following questions. Enter the page number of your session minutes where the requested information can be found. **N/A is not an acceptable response unless the option is provided.** Submit this completed form with your minutes.*

**C. Required Minute Entries**

|   | <b>Page #</b> | <b>Comments</b> |
|---|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. Copy of the Session's one page annual report to General Assembly [Statistics Report] (G-3.0202f) | _____         | _____           |
| 2. Congregational meetings called by Session (G-1.0502)   | _____         | _____           |
| 3. Minutes of congregational meetings included (G-3.0204)   | _____         | _____           |
| 4. Quorum present at congregational meetings (G-1.0501)   | _____         | _____           |
| 5. Election of the clerk of Session for a specific term (G-3.0104)                                  | _____         | _____           |
| 6. Completion of a period of study and preparation for elders and deacons (G-2.0402)                | _____         | _____           |

| <u>Required Minute Entries</u> | <u>Page #</u> | <u>Comments</u> |
|--------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
|--------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|

- |  |   |       |
|--|---|-------|
| 1. Record of the election of elders and deacons (G-3.0204b)  | _____   | _____ |
| 2. Record of the ordination and/or installation of elders and deacons (G-3.0204b)                                  | _____   | _____ |
| 3. Election of commissioner(s) to presbytery (G-3.0202a)   | _____   | _____ |
| 4. Reports of Presbytery Commissioner(s) to session (G-3.0202a)  | _____   | _____ |
| 5. Election of the church Treasurer by the session for a specific term (G-3.0205)                                  | _____   | _____ |
| 6. Establishment of the annual budget by the session (G-3.0113)  | _____   | _____ |
| 7. Pastor's Terms of Call approved and submitted to Presbytery along with the Covenant Agreement(G-2.0804)         | _____   | _____ |
| 8. Annual financial review of the books (G-3.0113)   | _____   | _____ |
| 9. Prior authorization for the celebration of communion (W-3.0410)   | _____   | _____ |
| 10. Prior authorization for baptism (W-3.0410)   | _____   | _____ |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> No Baptisms during review period                     |       |
| 11. Session action to receive new members (W-4.0204))  | _____   | _____ |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> No New Members during review period                  |       |
| 12. Session action to remove, delete, or transfer members from the roll of the congregation (G-3.0201c, G-3.0204a) | _____   | _____ |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> No Removals/Deletions/Transfers during review period |       |
| 13. Session annual review of active members (G-3.0201c)  | _____   | _____ |
| 14. Prior authorization of marriages on church property including names, date and presiding pastor (W-4.0602)      | _____   | _____ |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> No Marriages on Church Property during review period |       |

| <u>B. Best Practices</u> | <u>Page #</u> | <u>Comments</u> |
|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------|

- |   |                                 |          |
|---|---------------------------------|----------|
| 21. Date of last Session review of sexual misconduct policy<br><i>*required every three years ***Please submit a copy of the policy with the Minutes Review Form</i>        | _____                           | _____    |
| 22. Date of last Session review of child & youth protection policy<br><i>*required every three years ***Please submit a copy of the policy with the Minutes Review Form</i> | _____                           | _____    |
| 23. Date of last Session review of NYS mandated Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy<br><i>***Please submit a copy of the policy with the Minutes Review Form</i>            | _____                           | _____    |
| 24. Mandated annual training of paid and unpaid employees regarding Sexual Harassment Prevention reported   | _____                           | _____    |
| 25. Date Electronic Meeting Policy was approved   | _____                           | _____    |
| 26. Date actions taken electronically were ratified   | _____                           | _____    |
| 27. Our Session has Personnel Policies  | _____ Yes, <i>copy attached</i> | _____ No |

