

# Handbook for Clerks of Session

[May 2016]



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## Acknowledgments

**This handbook for Albany Presbytery clerks has gone through several editions, beginning over ten years ago when acknowledgment was given to the members of the Association of Stated Clerks, especially Nancy Harper of the Presbytery of Ohio Valley and Richard Coffelt of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon, for their workshop and gift of their manuals for clerks from which this handbook was started. Further revisions made by Ken Hockenberry of the Mid-Kentucky Presbytery and past and present Stated Clerks of Albany Presbytery bring us to this version of the handbook. Thanks to all who have offered input in the past and who will offer questions and insights for future revisions.**

## CAVEAT

This is a handbook for your use. Where our Form of Government (generally thought of as the Book of Order) speaks to a topic, we have tried to list the reference. In the Book of Order:

- (1) "Shall" and "is to be/are to be" signify practice that is mandated,
- (2) "Should" signifies practice that is strongly recommended,
- (3) "Is appropriate" signifies practice that is commended as suitable,
- (4) "May" signifies practice that is permissible but not required.

We realize that practice and tradition are important in each congregation and Session. Some things work for you and your Session, some do not. If each of us did all of the required as well as suggested stuff, life would be pretty dull! Still, we seek to celebrate our diversity in the midst of a shared polity. **Enjoy being a Clerk as part of your life of ministry in Jesus Christ.**

## FORWARD

This Handbook for Clerks of Session is written for Clerks, by Clerks, as a guide to the responsibilities of the Clerk of Session. It is written with the following assumptions:

- the Clerk of Session plays a vital role within the Presbyterian Church (USA);
- the Clerk of Session maintains the history of the faithfulness of the church through careful minutes and records;
- the Clerk of Session is interested in and knowledgeable about Presbyterian polity;
- the Clerk of Session, along with the Moderator, is the liaison between Session and the presbytery;
- the Clerk of Session is always striving to be a servant to the Session, in the fullest New Testament sense, and is equipped spiritually to fulfill the servant role;
- the Clerk of Session is elected to be the continuing ecclesiastical officer of the congregation. In this capacity, the Clerk has the responsibility to see that worship takes place and that the pulpit is filled.

A clerk of a council (governing body) understands that our order is to be derived from Scripture, as it is expressed in the Confessions of our Church. Our order expresses the principle that we must live our lives together in accord with our faith and as witness to the demands of Scripture. A clerk of a council respects the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) as our covenant with one another about how we can, in our diversity, be such a witness. And a clerk knows that our rules are never an end in themselves, but rather an attempt to be faithful to our covenant. Our polity commits to a shared ministry among ruling elders, deacons, members, and teaching elders (ministers of Word and Sacrament); it commits to a representative form of government in which ruling and teaching elders have care of the congregation; and it commits to corporate governance in which decisions are always corporate, never singular. The Moderator and the Clerk of Session, together, are the guardians of this polity all to the goal of furthering the "Great Ends of the Church." *The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. (F-1.0304)*

## PRESBYTERIANS: WHO WE ARE

Although Scripture does not clearly set down any form of church order as such, the Bible does reveal the nature of God, our relationship to God, and our relationship to the fellowship of believers. It does give us the experience of the early church and the beginnings of some form of organization. Out of the Protestant Reformation came a specific form of Protestant church government: Presbyterian, that is, government (or rule) by elders. In fact, presbyter is the Greek term for elder. Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders are considered to be chosen and ordained to serve in their respective positions of leadership. You are called by God and by your congregation to this position of service and leadership.

As "presbyters" (ruling elders and teaching elders), you are called not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ. (F-3.0204). So the Session is called to collectively to seek and find and represent the will of Christ. As a ruling elder you are to be a leader and a listener to the congregation. You are responsible, not to the congregation, but to Jesus Christ for the decisions you make.

## PARLIAMENTARY LAW

Parliamentary law is not really law as such, but a body of conventions or customs used in decision making. It encompasses common sense and courtesy, is a model for effective conflict resolution, and - when used correctly - will provide accuracy, efficiency, impartiality, objectivity, and uniformity. It helps us transact our business decently and in order.

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

## SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Because in Christ the Church is one, it strives to be one. To be one with Christ is to be joined with all those whom Christ calls into relationship with him. To be thus joined with one another is to become priests for one another, praying for the world and for one another and sharing the various gifts God has given to each Christian for the benefit of the whole community. Division into different denominations obscures but does not destroy unity in Christ. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), affirming its historical continuity with the whole Church of Jesus Christ, is committed to the reduction of that obscurity, and is willing to seek and to deepen communion with all other churches within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. (F-I.0302 The Marks of the Church)

As Presbyterians, we covenant to work with one another as visible expressions of the Body of Christ and as representatives of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

As Presbyterians we also hold to several historic principles of church order, and the first two of these are held in tension: the right of “private judgment” and “corporate judgment.”

### **F-3.0101 God Is Lord of the Conscience**

a. *That “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men<sup>2</sup> which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.”<sup>3</sup>*

b. *Therefore we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: We do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and at the same time, be equal and common to all others.*

### **F-3.0102 Corporate Judgment**

*That, in perfect consistency with the above principle of common right, every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ hath appointed; that in the exercise of this right they may, notwithstanding, err, in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet, even in this case, they do not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only make an improper use of their own.*

Therefore a measure of “mutual forbearance” is in order. We are to seek unity, yet encourage diversity, and understand that through discussion and prayer we can more clearly discern God’s will and direction. So we are challenged to strive for a balance of expression of individual conscience and the will of the majority. As individuals, we have several rights, among them: the right to know what is going on and why; the right to speak and to be heard under the rules of debate; the right to vote; and the right to hold office.

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

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

Even though there is no battle, our polity carries the right of the minority further, with the right to dissent and protest.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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

The *Book of Confessions (Part I)* contains our historic Christian confessions that are basic to the theology of the church. Individuals called to ordered ministry as Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, and Deacons are asked to affirm that they will be instructed by these confessions; therefore it is essential that this book be available for individual and group study as well as to be

used at times of ordination and installation of officers. While not required to agree with everything in these confessions, those called to ordered ministry are required to "sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and [to] be instructed and led by those confessions as [they] lead the people of God." (W-4.4003) Through the Book of Confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) declares to its members and to the world the who, what, and why of our beliefs.

The Book of Order (Part II) contains summary theological materials as well as polity of our church (system of government). It is essential for the clerk of session to study the Book of Order because it contains the fundamentals for working within the church.

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

The **Foundations of Presbyterian Polity** gives a theological and biblical of what we believe as Presbyterians, upon which we build our system of government for the church. It is focused on mission. (sections are designated by the prefix "F")

The **Form of Government** may be seen as the particular applications of our foundations. It explains the polity of orderly workings of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), along with the use of "advisory handbooks." We turn to the Form of Government to find answers to our frequent questions, and it is one of the standards under which the church makes decisions. (sections are designated by the prefix "G")

The **Directory for Worship** "reflects the conviction that the life of the Church is one, and that its worship, witness, and service are inseparable," as its Preface declares. (sections are designated by the prefix "W")

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

**Companion to the Constitution: Polity for the Local Church (Revised)**, by Frank A. Beattie (Geneva Press, 1999), is an effective, simply written book that is a how, what, and why to-do book.

**2015-2016 (and subsequent years) Presbyterian Planning Calendar.** This program calendar for the whole church contains useful information, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of the national staff, maps and other useful information.

**Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers**, 3rd Edition, by Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker (Geneva Press, 1999), is considered exceptional reading. This is the Book of Order in simple terms.

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

The most recent edition of **Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised** is mandated for use by the Book of Order for all "councils of the church." Parliamentary law is common sense and politeness put into practice in meetings. It is a body of conventions and customs that aids decision making, a model for conflict resolution, and it seeks the protection of individual rights in the church. [Robert's Rules of Order: Newly Revised, Licensed by the Robert heirs, previously published by Scott Foresman, now Da Capo Press, a division of Perseus Press, 2011].

A very good new resource for rules of order is **Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised In Brief**. It is an authorized concise guide, and contains most of the rules of parliamentary procedures that would be used in a Session or Congregational meeting: also Da Capo Press, 2004, and updated for 2011.

**Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers**, by one of our General Assembly Moderators, Joan Gray and Joyce Tucker (1999 Geneva Press) This is a most helpful overview and guide to our particular form of church Polity, with practical suggestions for many aspects of church life and mission.

**The PCUSA website** – <http://www.pcusa.org/>

**The Albany Presbytery website** – <http://www.albanypresbytery.org/>

**The Thoughtful Christian** - <https://www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/>

## **AUTHORITY OF THE SESSION**

### **G-3.02 THE SESSION**

### **G-3.0201 Composition and Responsibilities**

*The session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service as ruling elders, together with all installed pastors and associate pastors. All members of the session are entitled to vote. The pastor shall be the moderator of the session, and the session shall not meet without the pastor or designated moderator. . . .*

*The session shall have responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. . . .*

Specific responsibilities are listed in Chapter 3 of the Form of Government, using three summary responsibilities (the same for all councils of the church):

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

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

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

Open or closed meetings: Frequently the question is asked, “Are session meetings opened or closed to the congregation?” The answer is “open” – unless there is a vote to meet in “executive session” according to Roberts Rules. Visitors may be granted “the privilege of the floor,” that is, voice at a meeting, but not a vote.

#### **By-laws**

If your congregation does not have by-laws, please contact the stated clerk of the presbytery for information about how to establish them.

#### **Incorporation**

The Book of Order (G-4.0101) states, “Where permitted by civil law, each congregation shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained...” This language is not considered permissive as the word “shall” is used. [“Shall” and “is to be/are to be” signify practice that is mandated: Preface]. Albany Presbytery continues to urge congregations to be incorporated. If your congregation has not done so, please contact the stated clerk of the presbytery for suggestions on how to begin.

#### **Insurance**

The Book of Order (G-3.0112 Insurance) states, “Each council shall obtain property and liability insurance coverage to protect its facilities, programs, staff, and elected and appointed officers.” Churches should consider registering with their insurance company the names of people in the congregation who will be driving for church events. This is particularly true for retreats or youth events.

## **MODERATOR OF THE SESSION**

The pastor of a congregation shall be the moderator of the session of that congregation. In congregations where there are co-pastors, they shall both be considered moderators and have provisions for designating who presides at a particular meeting. If it is impractical for the pastor to moderate, he or she shall invite another teaching elder who is a member of the presbytery or a person authorized by the presbytery to serve as moderator. If there is no installed pastor, or if the installed pastor is unable to invite another moderator, the presbytery shall make provision for a moderator. The moderator possesses the authority necessary for preserving order and for conducting efficiently the business of the body. He or she shall convene and adjourn the body in accordance with its own action. (G-3.0104 Officers)

## **YOUR ROLE AS CLERK OF SESSION**

The official role as found in our Book of Order:

G-3.0104      *Each council (session) shall elect a clerk who shall record the transactions of the council, keep its rolls of membership and attendance, preserve its records carefully, and furnish extracts from them when required by another council of the church. Such extracts, verified by the clerk, shall be evidence in any council of the church. The clerk of the session shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine. The clerk of a presbytery, a synod, and the General Assembly shall be called stated clerk, shall be elected by the council body for a definite term as it may determine, and must be a ruling elder or a teaching elder.*

Other roles which may or may not have been listed above:

- Assistant/Helper for Pastor/Moderator
- Adviser/Confidant to Pastor/Moderator
- Agenda Maker, often with the Moderator
- Historian for Congregation
- Parliamentarian
- Prompter and Reminder
- Neutral and Trusted Presence
- Denominational “Loyalist”
- Interpreter of Presbyterian System (vs. congregational/democratic or bishop/monarchic)
- First and Foremost An Elder (see Biblical references to elders on next page)

A good thought:

**“The clerk of session’s principal official care is to keep the history of the local congregation through carefully and accurately maintained minutes and records and to be the official correspondent between the local congregation and other governing bodies of the church.”**

On the power of the clerk:

**“The role of the Clerk has much to do with leadership, something to do with authority and little if anything to do with power.”**

## **BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO ELDERS**

**(New Revised Standard Version)**

**Acts 20:28-35** *Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified. I coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothing. You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”*

**1 Timothy 5:17ff** *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves to be paid.” Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest also may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality. Do not ordain † anyone hastily, and do not participate in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.*

**1 Peter 5:1-3** *Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.*

**Titus 1:5-9** *I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. For a bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.*

**James 5:13-15** *Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.*

## **ARE YOU A NEW CLERK?**

A successful Clerk is not made overnight. Knowledge of your resources and diligence in using them will help you to become proficient in your task of clerking. Here follows a list of priorities for you to pursue from the day of your election.

- Locate the minutes book and church register. Locate all previous record books. Are they properly stored? These records should never be taken from the church (except for the annual review of minutes by the presbytery) and should be kept in a fire proof safe when not in use. You are the only person who can authorize entries into these books.
- Locate a current *Book of Order 2015-2017*. Online versions are found [on the pcusa.org website](http://onthe.pcusa.org/website). You will find most of the information you need in Chapters G-3.01 and G-3.02 which tells about the duties of the Session, describes the rolls and registers of the church and gives instructions on how to maintain them. Note that changes in the Book of Order typically become effective in the July one year after a meeting of the General Assembly and after approval by at least a majority of presbyteries.
- **Locate a copy of your Manual of Administrative Operations, church bylaws, congregational charter, Sexual Misconduct Policy, and Child Protection Policy (G-3.0106).** Where the *Book of Order* is silent, the congregation's bylaws will often tell you what needs to be done. In rare situations, the Presbytery office may have copies of old bylaws of congregations, so call and check but at times you may need to create them. Sample by-laws are available from the Presbytery office.
- Locate copies of architectural drawings, mortgage papers, incorporation documents, and church histories. This search is not always fruitful. If you are successful, be sure to keep them in the safe with your minutes. If you can't locate them on file at your church, copies of incorporation documents should be available from the Clerk of the county where your church is located.
- Plan to attend the annual clerk's Orientation and Peer Review which is held at various locations within the Presbytery. Fellowship with other Clerks of Session is invaluable.
- Throughout the year, many of your questions can be answered by first going directly to the [Albany Presbytery website](http://AlbanyPresbytery.org/website). **Items of particular interest to clerks may be found under "Resources" and "For Clerks of Session."** You may also click on the [Contact](#) tab the very top of our website. The directory for additional contact information is secured. [Contact us for access](#). If the website does not help you, do not hesitate to contact the Stated Clerk's Office or the Main Office of Presbytery by phone. We are here to assist you!

## SOURCES FOR SUPPLIES YOU MAY NEED

Cokesbury (1-800-672-1789 or [cokesbury.com](http://cokesbury.com)) has a partnership with PC(USA) so you will be able to order most of the supplies you need from them, such as the correct minutes paper, register fillers, minute and register binders, membership and transfer certificates and Companion to the Constitution. **Use of acid-free paper with numbered pages bound into a binder is an acceptable alternative.**

Supplies might also be available from the Presbyterian Distribution Center (1-800-524-2612)

Presbyterian Planning Calendars, Books of Order and Mission Yearbooks may be purchased individually at any time throughout the year or you may place an order seasonally with the Main Office of Albany Presbytery (watch the e-news!) to receive a bulk discount rate.

## TIMELINE FOR CLERKS AND THE PRESBYTERY

### Reports the Clerk Sends to Presbytery Annually

1. At the end of December or the first week of January, the Clerk is requested to send a "Necrology Report" to the Stated Clerk's Office, reporting the death of any ordained Ruling Elder(s) or Deacon(s) from your congregation and the date of death for the previous year. The names are read during worship at the first Presbytery meeting of the following year, normally late January or early February, and then included in the permanent records of the Presbytery.
2. The request for the Necrology Report (above) usually comes with the request to complete the annual **General Assembly Statistical Report**. In some congregations, the Clerk is responsible for making this report. In some, the minister makes the report. In most, the treasurer is involved, and in many it is a combined effort. **Instructions are distributed along with the date due (sometime in mid-February). The annual General Assembly**



**Statistical Report must be filed online by a deadline near the end of February. The information contained in this report will affect the per capita that is assessed to your congregation in future years, so it is critical that the report is completed each year.** Check with your pastor/moderator early to be clear about who is responsible. (G-3.0104)

3. With the above mailing, we will also have a “local” request for you to send to the Stated Clerk’s Office other supplemental reports which will include updated lists of Session Members, Clerk and Church Officers as soon as elections are held. **It is critically important that the Stated Clerk’s office has the name and contact information for the current Clerk of Session of your church at all times.**
4. **Each spring, the Clerk will be requested to bring the Minute Book of Session and Congregational meeting minutes to a presbytery sponsored meeting for “Peer review.” (G-3.0108)**

## **THE CLERK AND THE SESSION**

The church secretary/administrative assistant aids many Clerks. Still, the Clerk (in coordination with the Moderator and secretary/assistant) may be accountable for the following responsibilities. (Timelines are adjustable to your church’s norms.)

### **Two weeks before a Session Meeting**

- Meeting notices: send, or arrange to have sent, notices of the meeting.
- The call for a special meeting must include the exact purpose for which the meeting is called and no business other than that named may be transacted.
- It is helpful to accompany these notices with reminders to committee chairs of reports due and docketed, business referred, and previous assignments. Some Sessions require that reports be in writing.

### **One week before a Session Meeting**

- Plan the docket: it is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session and the Moderator of Session to prepare the docket so that all business is handled in the most efficient manner. The minutes of the last meeting will guide you in terms of “unfinished” business about which you don’t want to forget. The docket becomes the outline for the Session minutes.
- To honor elders’ stewardship of time, it is often helpful to have materials for the meeting, including the docket, minutes, and reports/motions requiring action, sent or distributed prior to the meeting, to enable the elders to have a chance to read the materials in order to make informed decisions.
- Many Sessions have found that written reports from committees help the flow of business. In such reports, historical and informational material usually comes first in the report and the recommendations come last. Only the recommendations appear in Session minutes unless Session orders the entire report spread upon the minutes. Many Sessions find it helpful for committees to have their reports ready in time to be mailed with the call of the meeting.

### **Take to the Session Meeting**

You are responsible for all papers and documents that aid the Session in reaching its decision. It will be helpful to have at each meeting for reference:

- Current Book of Order
- Manual of Administrative Operations
- Congregational by-laws
- Session committee membership lists
- Current year Session minutes
- List of all referred and unfinished business (may be in docket)

### **Session meeting**

Session may not meet without its Moderator, who normally is the pastor of the church. If the Moderator is absent or ill, the Moderator may appoint another minister of Presbytery to moderate, or the Session may (with the approval of the pastor) elect one of its own members to preside. If your pulpit is vacant, Presbytery will appoint a Moderator for Session. The Committee on Ministry should be consulted if it becomes necessary/wise for arrangements to be made for a moderator to be appointed by the Presbytery.

A quorum of Session must be present to have a legal meeting at which actions may be taken. **A Session shall provide by rule for a quorum for meetings (G-3.0203); such quorum shall include the moderator and either a specific number of**

### **ruling elders or a specific percentage of those ruling elders in current service on the session.**

According to Robert's Rules of Order, the record of the proceedings of a deliberative assembly is usually called the Minutes. In ordinary society, unless the minutes are to be published, they should contain mainly a record of what was done, not what was said, by the members. Using a modified journalistic approach of reporting who, what, where, when, how, and why is suggested for accurate accountability. However you do not need to "name" the person who makes a motion or seconds a motion.

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

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

The moderator and all active elders should receive and approve the minutes of all session meetings. The Book of Order as well as Robert's Rules of Order, specify that ownership of these records resides with the body that constituted them. In other words, the session has ownership and the clerk has responsibility for preserving these records.

Should a situation arise in the congregation where a member other than a session member asks for permission to read session minutes, you are encouraged to make these minutes available to any member who asks. Also be prepared to discuss and explain any questions about actions. In the church, we have no room for mistrust. Session meetings in most churches are informal. However, as Clerk, you request that actions by Session be voted upon. (One alternative is that the Moderator asks if there are any objections.) As Clerk, you can require that all motions be in writing so there are no questions later about "what we decided." Stop the meeting if you must until you are given exact wording of the motion in writing.

You may find it necessary to help members of Session word their motions. Helpful questions to ask about every Session action are:

- What exactly is going to be done?
- Who is going to do it?
- When will it be completed or reported?
- How much will it cost?
- From where will the money come?
- Is the action compatible with the Book of Order?

According to *Robert's Rules of Order*, discussion does not need to be included in your minutes – only motions made, seconded, and adopted. Likewise it is not necessary to state the name of the elder who makes or seconds a motion. Yet, it is wise to note discussions of matters important to the life and ministry of the congregation. For example, if there is a discussion on changing the style or order of worship, even without a formal motion, it is good to note that the discussion took place as a reference for the future when someone asks, "Didn't we discuss that before?" If the tradition in your church (or perhaps just a former clerk of session) has been to include detailed discussion - that's all right, but minutes which are too wordy make them harder to search through later.

*Roberts Rules of Order*, most recent edition (currently the 11<sup>th</sup> Edition), governs all the procedures of Session in all cases not specifically provided for by the *Book of Order*. (G-3.0105)

Seek approval of the minutes of the previous meeting.

Be aware of all membership changes that need to be recorded in the rolls and register book.

### **After the Session Meeting**

- Write the minutes. In reality, particularly if you are using a computer, you can write much of the minutes prior to the session meeting! Using the docket, you can type what you know will be done, and "amend" it as the meeting progresses and decisions on motions are made.
- Minutes may be e-mailed or mailed to all Session members. If the minutes are not mailed, send excerpts from the minutes to each chair of all motions related to the particular committee, or to individuals who have committed to a particular assignment.
- Complete all correspondence directed by the minutes, including letters of transfer.
- Remember that all correspondence between the governing bodies of the church is "Clerk to Clerk"
- Record in the rolls and registers all membership changes ordered by Session. **A good rule: nothing is recorded in**

**the roll and register book until it has first appeared in the minutes.** Some churches have secretaries who have the primary responsibility for the minutes and the rolls and register. The Clerk of Session supervises the church secretary in all matters related to the minutes and rolls and registers. The accuracy of these records is the Clerk's responsibility.

- After minutes have been approved, transcribe or have them transcribed into the Minute Book. Do not place inserts in the minute book. Use a laser printer, or photocopy whatever must be included onto numbered minutes paper. **DO NOT USE AN INKJET PRINTER.**
- Use the annual checklist for the peer review of minutes to check to be sure the necessary information is included in the minutes. For example, the annual General Assembly statistical report (done in January and February) can be copied into the minutes following the meeting at which the session approves the report.

**NOTE: The above is manageable if it is done regularly. If a Clerk falls behind, memory fades and the task becomes very difficult. Set a regular schedule for yourself.**

## **SESSION'S CONTINUING EDUCATION**

G-3.0201. National studies show that very few ruling 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 its ruling elders. This can be done during the year at Session meetings.

## **SAMPLE SESSION DOCKET**

(adjustable, particularly to put important matters near beginning of meeting)

1. Call to order and opening worship/prayer/devotion
2. Roll (present, excused, absent) and declaration of a quorum
3. Session continuing education (monthly or from time to time)
4. Report of Clerk
  - Approval of minutes of previous meeting
  - Correspondence received and referrals
  - (not required but reported in some sessions) Worship attendance
  - Date and officiant when communion served
  - Baptisms performed
  - Deaths and other changes to the Roll (e.g., marriages)
5. Report of the Pastor and Other Staff where appropriate.
6. Report of the Treasurer
7. Report of Commissioner to last Presbytery meeting and appointment of commissioner to next Presbytery meeting. Where possible it is helpful for a session to send the same elder commissioner to all Presbytery meetings for a set length of time (perhaps 1 year).
8. Reports of committees/commissions
9. Unfinished business
10. New business
11. Adjourn with prayer

# NOTEBOOK FOR SESSION MEMBERS

**All churches are required to have a Manual of Administrative Operations (G-3.0106), and each Session member should have a copy of this manual which should include the necessary documents and information for intelligent decision making. The following is a list of suggested items to be included in the manual:**

- Church history
- Bylaws of the congregation
- Functions, duties and responsibilities - include ordination vows
- Session committees; commissions
- Objective, duties, committee membership
- Other committees of the church
- Annual budget
- Special purpose funds
- Special rules and regulations
- Session minutes
- Church members

## SESSION AND ITS RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Session supervises **all** organizations of the congregation. **This includes the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees if the church has one or both of these.** All organizations of the congregation are accountable to Session. All organizations should make a financial and programmatic report to Session and the congregation annually.

### **Board of Trustees (G-4.01; G-4.02)**

The Board of Trustees is accountable to the Session. Their powers as trustees are listed in G-4.01 and shall not infringe on the powers of Session. A church need not have a separate Board of Trustees. G-4.01 provides that active ruling elders shall be the trustees of the corporation unless the bylaws provide otherwise. Please consult the Book of Order for additional duties for Session if there is not a separate board.

### **The Board of Deacons (G-2.02)**

The Board of Deacons is accountable to the Session; chooses its own officers; meets annually with the Session; and submits its plans to Session for approval. The pastors are advisory members of the Board of Deacons.

### **Nominating Committee (G-2.04)**

The church nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not of the Session. It does not "report to Session" although the committee may wish to consult with Session. The pastor is an ex-officio member of this committee.

### **Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) (G-2.08)**

The Pastor Nominating Committee is a committee of the congregation, not the Session. The committee has several points of contact with the Session:

- the PNC develops the church information form and the long-range plan, in accordance with the guidance provided by the presbytery's Committee on Ministry.
- the Session approves both documents.
- the committee negotiates the "terms of call" of the new pastor in consultation with the Session as overseer of the church budget.
- the committee requests Session to call a congregational meeting when it is ready to present a candidate.

### **Session and Personnel (G-3.0201)**

Session supervises all ordained and unordained personnel. Session recommends to the congregation the salaries of all ordained personnel. This recommendation must meet the minimum guidelines set by presbytery. Salaries for unordained

personnel are approved by Session through the budget setting process.

### **Outside organizations**

Session controls the use of all church property, even to granting permission for the sanctuary to be used for weddings. If outside organizations use your building, please see the cautions under Legal Questions. The purpose of an organization using the church should not be contrary to the mission of the congregation or the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is wise to have a written contract with all organizations using the church building, stipulating any rental fee, maintenance standards, and rooms of the church to be used. See G-4.0206 and consult with Committee on Ministry, especially with respect to leasing real property to be used for the purpose of worship.

## **LEGAL QUESTIONS**

In recent years, litigation against the churches has become more and more frequent. The following are some of the areas of potential legal problems.

- **Worker's Compensation**
- **Accident claims on Church Property:** Be sure your insurance policy covers the liability you have in relation to the program that you have at the church. **Each session is required by the Book of Order to provide adequate insurance for the church (G-3.0201)**

- **Nursery or Child Care Programs**

The church must meet state safety codes for day care centers. This is not true of Sunday School programs. Do not start a day care or child care program without talking to your insurance agent. Child harassment has become an important area of concern. Churches are advised to screen all people employed by the church or who serve as volunteers. The two person rule also provides protection, that is, two adults are present in every child care situation.

- **Transportation**

Churches are advised to register with their insurance company the names of people in the congregation who will be driving other people to church events. Special considerations are necessary for churches owning vans. Consult your insurance carrier.

- **Non Profit Organization Privileges**

Recently some churches' nonprofit status has been challenged. Non profit bulk mailing privileges have been denied by some post offices. Guard this status carefully.

An excellent resource for session is Church Law and Tax Report, published by Ministry Resources, P.O. Box 1098, Matthew, NC 28106. This organization also publishes a monthly Church Treasurers Alert and Clergy Tax Guide. Copies of these publications are available in the presbytery office for you to consult to see if they would be helpful additions to the local church office. Ministry Resources also has begun an interactive WEB site.

- **Sexual Misconduct and Abuse**

**G- 3.0106: All councils (sessions) shall adopt and implement a formal written policy that makes clear the church's position on sexual misconduct and abuse and child protection and establishes the procedures to be followed in investigating and resolving instances where misconduct is alleged to have occurred. Albany Presbytery can provide a template that may be used to create such a policy.**

## **ACTIONS THAT MUST BE APPROVED BY MORE THAN ONE COUNCIL**

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

- Application to presbytery to take an "inquirer" under care of presbytery: session, Committee on Preparation for Ministry, and presbytery.
- Loans that use the church or its property as collateral for a mortgage, and all sales of property: session and trustees, trustees of presbytery, and presbytery (ecclesiastical and corporate). These also require the initial approval of the congregation. (G-4.0206)

- All leases of church property for a period of more than five years: session, Committee on Ministry of presbytery, and the presbytery. (G-4.0206)
- All changes of church location or church name: session, congregation (ecclesiastical and corporate), Committee on Ministry of presbytery, and presbytery (ecclesiastical and corporate).
- All changes in the annual terms of call for the pastor: session recommendation, congregation approval, the Committee on Ministry, and presbytery.
- Dissolutions of pastoral calls and calls for new pastors: congregation, Committee on Ministry, and presbytery.
- Appointment of moderator of session, stated supply, or interim pastor in the case of a vacant pulpit: session, Committee on Ministry, and presbytery.
- Call for special session meeting when requested by two members of the session, in writing. (G-3.0203)
- Call for a special congregational meeting: session, or presbytery, or session when requested in writing by one-fourth of the active members of the congregation (G-I.0502)
- Session meeting when pastor is ill or is out-of-town: pastor grants permission and appoints a member of presbytery as moderator pro tem, or Session can elect own ruling elder member to serve. (G-3.0201)
- All waivers from the Book of Order terms of election (G-2.0404): congregation, Committee on Ministry, and presbytery.

## THE CLERK AND THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The Clerk of Session is secretary to the congregational meeting, both ecclesiastical and corporate. (G-I.0505) The Clerk shall attest to and sign the congregational minutes, both ecclesiastical and corporate.

Check both the Book of Order and your bylaws for what constitutes "due notice" for the congregational meeting. At the very least, public notice should be given to the congregation the Sunday before and the Sunday of the meeting. While such notice could also apply to calling pastors, sessions are strongly advised to give greater notice for meetings at which a Pastor Nominating Committee is to report its candidate for Pastor.

Only Session, presbytery, or one-fourth of the members of the congregation on the active roll may call a congregational meeting. (G-I.0502)

What business may be done at a congregational meeting? Check G-I.0503 for the powers of the Congregation, which are specific and limited. However, at the Annual Congregational Meeting, *anything* can be brought up for *discussion*.

As Clerk you should take particular care to alert the Moderator of the congregational meeting when business is out of order. You will find a careful listing of such business in the Book of Order. "Permissive powers" (G-I.0503 and G-2.0404) relate to adopting congregational bylaws, establishment of a unicameral board, waivers from election of officers, raising of the quorum, and buying, selling, and mortgaging of real property. Some of these items also need consultation with the presbytery. **The budget is adopted by Session, not the congregation.** However Session must inform the congregation of the budget. If the congregation does not approve of the use of its gifts, the members will not give. (Recommendation: at an informal meeting of the congregation after worship or at a church supper, Session should present the budget, invite comment, and solicit suggestions). No actions would be taken at such a meeting.

An installed pastor's terms of call **must** be reviewed annually by the session, approved annually by the congregation, and reported to the presbytery. The Committee on Ministry will provide a form for this purpose. The congregation approves the pastor's "terms of call" for review by Presbytery. G-2.0804.

**Proxy voting is not permitted in church meetings. Members are to be open to the Spirit as may be present during discussion and debate.**

Always be prepared for a paper ballot vote to elect officers. If there is more than one nominee for an office, the election must be by ballot. The election of a pastor is always by ballot. Recommendation: If there is considerable tension about a particular vote, have your active roll current and have active members of the congregation come to your desk to pick up a ballot.

Minutes of a congregational meeting may be approved before adjournment. However, practically, your church by-laws can give the Session the power to approve the minutes and report its action at the next congregational meeting.

Check the Book of Order and your bylaws for the quorum of the congregational meeting. If your congregation does not have bylaws, please contact the Stated Clerk for information about how to establish them.

# THE CLERK AND RECORDS AND ROLLS

## HOW TO KEEP THE CHURCH ROLLS AND REGISTER

### Church Rolls and Registers are Legal Documents

Presbytery may check your rolls and registers annually. You will find your responsibilities related to the rolls and registers in the Book of Order (G-3.0204)

There are only three ways a person can join the Presbyterian Church: profession of faith, transfer, or reaffirmation of faith. All three ways require formal Session action.

## ROLLS

The church rolls record every member who has ever belonged to your church. These rolls must be kept current. The official church rolls may not be kept solely in a card file or on a computer. There are five possible church rolls - probably dictated by the register books sold in the stores. Practically, with new technologies, these records can be reconstructed through church minutes, old church directories, computer lists, etc., but it is useful to have the record in a permanent form in one place. The following includes the roll titles and useful information to include.

1. **Chronological roll of Active Members (G-I.0402):** The chronological roll has numbers down the left side of a double page. Each member of the church is assigned a number at the time that person joins the church. Columns to the right offer space for necessary comments from time to time. A name is removed from the roll by action of Session or because of death. The only ways a name can be removed are by transfer to another church, transfer to the inactive roll, removal from the inactive roll, death, ordination to Ministry of Word and Sacrament, deletion or removal from membership.
2. **Alphabetical roll:** The alphabetical roll groups church members according to the first letter of their last names. This roll is cross-indexed with the chronological roll by membership number.
3. **Baptized roll (G-I.0401):** For most churches, the baptized roll is the same as the register of baptism. The baptized roll lists all infants, children and adults baptized in your church or transferred into your church. It may be helpful to include the minister's name. The parents' names must be listed. Adult baptism is accompanied by joining the church, and joining the church is always accompanied by baptism if the person has not been previously baptized as an infant or an adult. A name can be removed from the baptized roll only by profession of faith, transfer, or death. (However, a question on the annual Statistical Report that asks for the number of "Baptized Members" has been interpreted to refer not to the entire "baptized roll" but only to those with whom the congregation has continuing contact.)
4. **Other Participants (once called the Inactive roll):** This roll lists the names of members of the church, who, in the judgment of Session have willfully let their active membership in the church lapse. The person must have been inactive for a period of time determined by the session year and the session must have diligently tried to discover the cause of the member's non-participation. **While maintenance of an Other Participants or Inactive Roll is not required by the Book of Order, it is permitted if a session wishes.**
5. **Affiliate roll (G-I.0403):** The affiliate roll enables a member who is away from his/her home church to join temporarily another church while remaining on the active roll of the home church. It should be renewed every two years or so. It is a very helpful roll for college students and "snowbirds."

## TIPS ON MAINTAINING THE ROLLS

*Mr. and Mrs. John Adams are received by Session on letters of transfer.*

1. Session receives Mr. and Mrs. Adams into membership. Do not make any entry into the roll book unless there is a report of this Session action in the Session minute book.
2. Record "John Edward Adams" in the chronological roll opposite the first free membership number. Indicate the way Mr. Adams joined the church (by certificate) and the date of Session action. It is appropriate to include the name of the former church.
3. Record Mary Frances Adams on the chronological roll opposite the next free membership number exactly the way you listed Mr. Adams.

4. List both new members on the alphabetical roll (the "A" page) with their membership number.

*Mr. and Mrs. Adams have a son Bryan, three years old, who was baptized in the former church.*

- I. List Bryan Lee Adams on the baptized members' roll with the date of birth, date and place of his baptism, and his parents' names.

*Mr. and Mrs. Adams' infant daughter, Sara, is baptized after they join the church.*

- I. List Sarah Jane Adams on the baptized member's roll and the register in exactly the same way in which Bryan's name was listed.

If the child is the child of a single mother who does not wish to state the father's name, list only the mother's name. If the child is adopted or is a legal ward of Mr. and Mrs. Adams, their names are listed as parents of the child.

If the child is a ward of the court, she cannot be baptized without permission of the parents or the court. Her legal parents' names are listed.

*Mr. and Mrs. Adams have a son, Richard, sixteen, who has never been baptized. Session authorized the baptism and receives him as a new member.*

List Richard Adams on the chronological roll, indicating that he was baptized when he joined the church. List him also on the alphabetical roll and the baptized register, noting the date he made a profession of faith and joined the church.

*Mary Jones has been in a nursing home for one year. She cannot attend worship services and does not contribute to the offering.*

As Clerk, inform Session that since her absence is involuntary, she should not be removed from the roll and Session continues to be responsible for her nurture.

*Bill Wilmer hasn't been to church for over 5 years. Session discovers he went straight to graduate school after college graduation.*

Write both Billy Wilmer and a church located near his school suggesting that he affiliate with the church temporarily. It would be sensible not to place him on the Inactive Roll unless you receive no response from him.

*Mary Jones dies in the nursing home.*

You draw a line through her name on the roll, noting the date of death. Note date of funeral and place of burial if available.

If you have a death register, list Mary Jones' name in the register along with dated of death, place of death and place of burial. Include her name in the Necrology Report if applicable.

*Mabel Frisch lives in Town, and has not been to church for over a year. Members of Session have called upon her several times to no avail. Session votes to inform her that they intend to place her name on the inactive roll, with a date for response. Subsequently, Session votes to place her name on the inactive roll.*

Write Mabel Frisch's name on the inactive roll with her membership number, the date of the Session action, and the date of notifying her of the action. Note on the chronological roll, under "remarks" "inactive roll" and the date of Session action. Write Mabel Frisch that she has been placed on the inactive roll, the date, and the reason. Urge her to become active in the church again. Keep a copy of the letter.

*Session continues to contact Mabel Frisch for two years. She still does not reply or come to church.*

Session votes to remove Mabel Frisch from the rolls.

You draw a thin line through her name on the inactive roll, the chronological roll, and the alphabetical roll, noting the date of removal.

*James Parr requests that Session transfer his membership to First Church St. Louis.*

Session votes to transfer Mr. Parr. You fill out the transfer certificate noting on the back of the form the ordinations Mr. Parr holds and the date of ordination and dates of service.

You draw a line through his name on the roll, noting the date of transfer after you receive his certificate of reception.

*Mr. Parr's son, Jeffrey, ten years old, is on the baptized roll.*

You note Jeffrey's name, date and place of baptism on the back of Mr. Parr's transfer form.

You note on the baptized member's roll that Jeffrey's record was transferred to First Church, St. Louis.



## TIPS ON KEEPING THE REGISTERS

Detailed instructions for keeping the registers may be found in the Book of Order (G-3.0204b)

### **Registers of Marriages, Baptisms, Officers**

*Registers. The Session shall keep complete registers of:*

*Marriages, including marriages of all members of the church, all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the church, and all marriages performed on church property;*

*Baptisms*

*Infant Baptisms. Include name, parents' names, and date of birth of those being baptized and the names of persons presenting the children for Baptism.*

*Adult Baptisms. Include name, parents' names, and date of birth of those being baptized.*

*Ruling Elders, with the name of the church in which each was ordained, the date of ordination, terms of active service, and the record of removals;*

*Deacons, with the name of the church in which each was ordained, the date of ordination, terms of active service, and the record of removals;*

*Pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, interim pastors, stated supplies temporary supplies, and parish associates serving the church, with dates of service.*

## CHECKLIST FOR ANNUAL REVIEW OF SESSION RECORDS

	ITEM AND CITATION	Yes, or N/A	No	Page Numbers
	<b>SESSION MEETINGS - RESPONSIBILITIES</b>			
1.	Date, hour, place and type of meeting (stated or special) is recorded. (Robert's Rules of Order §47)			each meeting*
2.	Full name of person presiding is recorded.			each meeting*
3.	Attestation of a quorum is recorded.			each meeting*
4.	Each meeting is opened and closed with prayer. (G-3.0105)			each meeting*
5.	The record of each meeting is duly attested (signed) by the Clerk of Session or Moderator.			each meeting*
6.	Process for education and mutual growth of Session members is recorded. (W-1.4007)			
7.	Name of elder(s) elected commissioner(s) to Presbytery meetings and any term of appointment are recorded. Reports to the Session are recorded. (G-3.0202)			
8.	Annual review of membership rolls is recorded (G-3.0204)			
9.	General administrative review summary noted – in many churches, this is done in the form of an annual report, often presented to the congregation, but technically made to the session. (G-3.0108)			
10.	Session's establishing budget/s is included. (G-3.0113)			
11.	Statement of composition of Session is included.			
12.	Annual review of all Treasurers' Reports is recorded.			
13.	Annual financial review is recorded.			
14.	Instruction, examination, ordination and installation are recorded for new church officers. (G-2.0402)			
	<b>SACRAMENT OF LORD'S SUPPER</b>			
15.	Dates for celebration of the Lord's Supper are established in advance. (W-2.4012)			
16.	Celebrations of the Lord's Supper are recorded in minutes of next regular meeting after celebration. (W-2.4012)			
17.	For home or hospital communions, the name of church officer or member approved by Session to accompany minister at celebration of the Lord's Supper is recorded. (W-2.4010).			
	<b>SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM</b>			
18.	Counseling and authorization by Session prior to baptism are recorded. (W-2.3012)			
19.	<u>Infant baptisms</u> : Record name, parents' names, date of birth, person/s presenting for baptism (G-3.0204, W-2.3012) <u>Adult baptisms</u> : Record name (including full maiden name if applicable), parents' names, date of birth. (G-3.0204, W-2.3012)			
20.	Facts (date and place) of a baptism having taken place is recorded at next regular meeting of Session.			

	ITEM AND CITATION	Yes, or N/A	No	Page Numbers
	<b>RECEPTION OR DISMISSAL OF MEMBERS</b>			
21.	Full names of new members are recorded, and whether they join by profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or letter of transfer. (G-3.0201)			
22.	The names of new members' minor children and dates of their baptisms are recorded. (G-3.0201)			
23.	Full names of people transferred to another church and the name of the church are recorded. (G-3.0201)			
	<b>CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS</b>			
24a.	Annual Congregational Meeting: properly called, with the purpose of the meeting stated. (G-I.0502 and G-I.0503)			
24b.	Annual Congregational Meeting: within proper limitations of business for a congregation. (G-I.0503)			
24c.	Annual Congregational Meeting: quorum present (G-I.0502)			
24d.	Annual Congregational Meeting: Elders and Deacons elected by congregation (nominations asked from floor; vote taken by voice, hands or ballot) (G-2.0404)			
24e.	Annual Congregational Meeting: terms of call for installed pastor/s are annually approved. (G-I.0503)			
25a.	Special Congregational Meeting: properly called, with the purpose of the meeting stated. (G-I.0502 and G-I.0503)			
25b.	Special Congregational Meeting: within proper limitations of business for a congregation. (G-I.0503)			
25c.	Special Congregational Meeting: quorum present (G-I.0502)			
26.	All Congregational Meeting Minutes are included in Session Minute book, with Secretary (Clerk) signing the minutes. (G-I.0505) Moderator does not need to sign.			
	<b>SPECIAL CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS</b>			
27.	Full record of disciplinary proceedings (See <i>Rules of Discipline</i> .)			
	<b>PRESBYTERY ANNUAL REQUIREMENTS</b>			
28.	Annual General Assembly membership and financial statistics are entered into the Session records. (can be copied into book from the printout after entering the statistics online)			
	<b>CONTINUING PRESBYTERY GUIDELINES</b>			
29.	Minutes should be in a secure, permanent binder such as post or pressure binder, and on acid-free or 25% rag content paper.			<i>all pages*</i>
30.	Pages should be numbered consecutively with printing on both sides of the page. <u>Leave no blank spaces.</u> or use note such as, "The remainder of this page is purposely blank.")			<i>all pages*</i>
31.	Records are typed or handwritten legibly.			<i>all pages*</i>
32.	Full names of elders present and absent are recorded.			<i>all meetings*</i>
33.	Actions of the Session are recorded; neither names of makers of motions, nor details of discussions need be included, except as seen as vital to the transaction of the meeting or church history, or to provide background for future discussions.			<i>all meetings*</i>
34.	Official communications to Session are recorded, along with the action taken or the referral made.			
35.	Presbytery's previous review of minutes is recorded and, in the case of any exceptions, correction is made when necessary.			
36.	Erasures, interlineations, footnotes and inserted material are avoided. Correction fluids, glues and pastes are not used (they contain acids)			<i>all pages *</i>



## ALBANY PRESBYTERY CHECKLIST FOR ANNUAL REVIEW OF SESSION RECORDS

Review of Session Records of the \_\_\_\_\_ Church, \_\_\_\_\_, NY/VT

Review completed by \_\_\_\_\_, clerk of session at \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Peer Review Session \_\_\_\_\_

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**Guidelines for reviewing minutes:** The reviewing of Session minutes is a presbytery responsibility that provides the opportunity for awareness and support of a congregation's ministry and witness, and guidance and support for the clerk of session as she or he seeks to fulfill the responsibility for accurate record (and history) keeping. While each clerk seeks to have minutes approved "without exception," there are times when exceptions can actually help the clerk in his or her work.

**Notes, exceptions and commendations:** In reviewing the minutes of another church, you are encouraged to read through the whole year of minutes to gain a feel for the ministry and witness of the congregation, as well as the style of the clerk of session in recording the minutes. Then, using the clerk's completed checklist, please review the minutes so that you can make a recommendation to the presbytery. The following "definitions" are offered to guide you:

- ⊕ **Notes:** If single items are lacking (e.g., forgetting to state time of one or two session meetings), then simply include that as a note for the clerk (and the Session.) "Notes" are items that are not deemed critical for the records or history of the church, but their correction will improve the record-keeping.
- ⊕ **Exceptions:** Recurrent omissions can be listed as exceptions; exceptions can also be items critical for record keeping such as not detailing officer elections, names of new members and baptismal information. There are times when an exception can help the clerk in her or his work. (e.g., if the congregation, rather than the session approves the church budget – and the clerk has been calling attention to this error.)
- ⊕ **Disapproval:** Disapproval may be for incomplete minutes, or such serious omissions that there would be due concern about the church's records, or comprehension of actions taken. (See stated clerk.)
- ⊕ **Commendations:** As you read the minutes the style of the clerk's reporting, or a practice or ministry in the life of the congregation may stand out for you. This offers you the opportunity to lift it up.

### **Recommendation:**

\_\_\_\_\_ that the minutes be approved without exception

\_\_\_\_\_ that the minutes be approved without exception, but with the following **Notes:**

\_\_\_\_\_ that the minutes be approved with the following **Exception/s:**

\_\_\_\_\_ that the minutes be **Disapproved** for the following reason/s:

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and that the Presbytery take the following action/s:

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**Commendations:**