

Presbytery of Southern Kansas

MANUAL FOR CLERKS OF SESSION



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Introduction

Welcome to the office of Clerk of Session! You have joined a unique and important group of people in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The *Book of Order* mandates that each governing body of the PC(USA) have a moderator and a clerk¹. Clerks of Presbyteries, Synods, and the General Assembly are called Stated Clerks. Those serving Sessions are called Clerks of Session.

As clerk, you will record a good deal of the history of your church as you write the session minutes. Future generations will learn what your church did to further Christ's mission in the world by reading the minutes you write. It follows then, that it is important that you keep accurate records of all the proceedings in session meetings and in congregational meetings.

This manual has been prepared to provide Clerks of Session with information and examples to assist them in their work and to insure that they have easily accessible information about what must be included in the session record books.

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

If you have any questions, or need assistance, please contact me at 316-946-9481.

Jim Anderson

Stated Clerk
Presbytery of Southern Kansas



¹ G-9-0201 (Book of Order, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Part II, 2007-2009

The Office of the Clerk of Session

The Clerk of Session shall be an elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine². The clerk may be a member of the session, or may be an elder not currently serving. If the clerk is not a member of session, general privilege of voice **may** be given by session but s/he may not make motions or vote. Session may ask the clerk to be its parliamentarian and in all cases **shall** give the clerk voice in matters pertaining to the minutes and the clerk's report.

The person chosen to be clerk of session needs to be knowledgeable about session responsibilities, to have an understanding of Presbyterian polity, and be willing to learn basic parliamentary procedure. S/he must be able to write a clear record of the proceedings at session and congregational meetings and make those minutes available promptly following the meeting.

When the pastor or elders need a strong lay leader, the clerk of session is the “first among equals.” This responsibility flows to the clerk not because of any explicit statement in the *Book of Order*, but because the officer who receives the correspondence, keeps the records, and routinely discusses the work of the session with the pastor and all of the committee chairpersons to form the agenda and refer business, is the officer to whom they would take a problem. Presbyterian polity does not provide for any other lay officer to carry out these responsibilities.

In spite of the fact that the core functions of the clerk are secretarial, the session, in electing a clerk should seriously consider the qualifications needed to carry out the very significant “silent” functions of being the primary administrative officer of the congregation.



² G-9.0203 b

Responsibilities at a Glance

1. Keep a full and accurate record of the proceedings of the session (G-10.0301).
2. Keep the roll of session membership and attendance (G-9.0203).
3. Arrange for the careful preservation of session records (G-9.0203), making recommendation to the session for the permanent safe-keeping of its records (G-9.0406).
4. Furnish extracts from the minutes when required by another governing body of the church (G-9.0203).
5. Maintain and preserve rolls and registers required of session (G-10.0302). (See Rolls and Registers, page 11.)
6. Be responsible for the preservation of the records of the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees (G-10.0301).
7. Be familiar with the responsibilities of the session as described in the *Book of Order* (G-10.0102).
8. Notify the session or congregation of special meetings, describing accurately the business that will be transacted. [Notification of annual and special meetings of the congregation shall be given on two successive Sundays (G-7.0302 and G-7.0303)].
9. Be sure that the annual statistical report (see Pages 13-15) requested by the General Assembly is completed accurately and reported to the PC(USA) by the deadline noted. Also, be sure to return other paperwork requested by the presbytery's stated clerk by the deadline noted.
10. Participate in the annual Session Records Review with your fellow clerks, choosing a date and time from those set by the stated clerk of the presbytery. Bring your minutes since your last review and the Church Register (G-11.0103x). (See Appendix)
11. Serve as secretary for meetings of the congregation (G-7.0307), seeing that the minutes are received by session and are inscribed in the permanent session minute book. (See Congregational Meetings, page 10.) It is helpful to have the congregation delegate to session the authority to approve minutes of the congregational meetings, but these minutes should be posted for the congregation to see.
12. Bring all official correspondence to the attention of session, and respond as directed by the session.
13. Keep a list of unfinished business, including all matters referred to a committee or a staff member for later report to session, and remind the appropriate persons(s) if not reported expeditiously.

14. Be prepared to respond to questions of parliamentary procedure in meetings if requested to be parliamentarian. (Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*, except in those cases where the *Book of Order* provides otherwise (G-9.0302). Copies of *Robert's Rules of Order* and the latest *Book of Order* should be available at meetings.)
15. Receive and submit communications from/to other governing bodies.
16. Notify the stated clerk of the presbytery of changes in the membership of session.
17. Assist the moderator in preparing the agenda for session meetings, as requested.
18. Assist in church officer training when requested.
19. In consultation with the moderator, prepare a statement of highlights of session actions and reports following the meeting for information for the congregation (may be included in the next issue of the congregation's newsletter). Note: confidential matters should not be included.
20. May moderate the congregational meeting, if requested by the moderator, during the pastor's salary review. If this occurs, a temporary clerk should be appointed.
21. Perform such other duties as may be assigned by the session or moderator.



Guidelines for Session Minutes

Minutes of each session meeting shall (i.e., must include:

1. Whether the meeting is a regular or special meeting.
2. The name of the church, the place, date and time of the meeting.
3. The name of the moderator of the meeting.
4. The opening and closing of each meeting with prayer.
5. The roll, listing elders present, elders absent and any who are excused; the clerk, moderator and other staff present or excused; others present and their identity. (Please use first and last names.)
6. The affirmation of a quorum (G-10.0202). A quorum of the session shall be the pastor or other presiding officer and one third of the elders but no fewer than two, except for receiving and dismissing members, when the quorum shall be the moderator and two members of the session. The session may fix its own quorum at any higher number.
7. The approval of the agenda. (In case of a special meeting, the call to the meeting stating the purpose becomes the agenda.)
8. The approval of the minutes of the previous meeting. (Any corrections of previous meeting minutes shall be listed, and then corrected in the prior meeting's minutes.)
9. Clerk's report: may include correspondence, announcements, and report of the serving of the Lord's Supper, in addition to listing of baptisms, marriages, changes in membership rolls.
10. Reports of pastor, other staff, the treasurer and committee chairpersons should be summarized in the minutes.
11. All motions and amendments, if any, and whether they passed or failed. (Details of discussion should not be recorded, except when needed to give a sense of the action.)
12. When a previous action of the session is referred to, the page on which it is recorded, or the date of the meeting at which it occurred, should be designated.



Minutes shall include the following, when applicable:

13. Requests for marriage, baptism or funerals to occur in the church.
14. The administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper must be reported at the next succeeding regular meeting. When the sacrament has been administered to those unable to attend public worship, the name of the minister officiating and the name of the elder

- or elders assisting should be noted. (This may be part of the clerk's report, the pastor's report or that of the worship committee.)
15. The administration of the Sacrament of Baptism must be reported at the next succeeding regular meeting, giving the full name of adults baptized including the maiden name of married women; the record of infants baptized, noting the name of the child, date of birth, and the names of the parents or the one rightly exercising parental responsibility (W-2.3014), and including the mother's maiden name. (This may be part of the clerk's report, the pastor's report or that of the appropriate committee.)
 16. The full name of applicants for church membership (in the case of married women, include maiden name) and the manner of their reception:
 1. by profession of faith, previously baptized
 2. by profession of faith and baptism
 3. by re-affirmation of faith
 4. by letter of transfer, giving the name of the church from which received
 17. The name of the church to which a certificate of transfer is granted and the full name of the person transferred with the date of transfer, together with names of baptized children, if applicable.
 18. Record (attach to minutes) the job descriptions for employed personnel, both clergy and non-clergy, as they are approved.
 19. Name of elders elected to be commissioners to meetings of the Presbytery, and the exact period for which elected (G-10.0102p(1)).
 20. Record that commissioner(s) to presbytery reported to session. The report may be summarized.
 21. When the session finds it necessary to exercise discipline, the "Form of Government" and the "Rules of Discipline" should be carefully studied by a committee of the session and if discipline be administered, the minutes of the session must contain such a record of the proceedings which will enable the Presbytery to know who was disciplined, why and how. It is often advisable for session to ask the presbytery to take jurisdiction of any matter of church discipline.
 22. In case of a sale, mortgage, gift or lease of property, the session records must show:
 1. Name, address and legal description of the property
 2. Name of buyer/lessee
 3. Sale price
 4. Loan amount purpose and terms, including the name of the lender
 5. Lease terms and liability insurance
 6. Concurrence of Presbytery

Be sure the following is included each year:

1. Approval of the annual budget.
2. Approval of the distribution of the church's benevolences.
3. Record the annual review with each pastor of the adequacy of compensation.
4. Record the recommendation to be made to the congregation for changes in the terms of call for each pastor.
5. Note the annual review by the personnel committee (or other responsible body appointed by the session) of the adequacy of compensation of all paid staff.
6. Note whether new officers have received training and been examined (G-14.0205).
7. Report the ordination and/or installation of elders and deacons at the next succeeding meeting.
8. Report the recognition of trustees (if any) at the next succeeding meeting.
9. Report that property and liability insurance has been obtained (G-10.01020). (Insert photocopy of the church's certificate of insurance.
10. Record report of annual financial review or audit.
11. Record marriages, births, deaths.
12. Record election of clerk and treasurer.
13. Record annual review of church rolls and if anyone is moved to inactive or removed.
14. Report reception of new members; dismissal/transfer of members to other churches.
15. Record approval of curricula, teachers for the educational program.
16. Attach copy of Annual Statistical Report (to OGA) to minutes.



Clerk's Annual Report

At the last meeting of each calendar year, please include the following in the Clerk's Report:

1. Record that job descriptions have been approved for all employed personnel, both clergy and non-clergy, and indicate by page number where the latest job description for each staff person is located in the minute book.
2. Record changes during the year in the Session, the Board of Deacons and the Trustees through death, resignation, or removal.
3. State the composition of the session with regard to racial ethnic members, women, men and age groups, and how this corresponds to the composition of the congregation. (This requirement may be fulfilled by photocopying the annual statistical report required by the General Assembly into the session records.)
4. If congregation has a Board of Deacons and/or Trustees, report in the minutes where their records are kept, and that they have been reviewed by session.
5. Include an Annual Narrative Report. (Moderator's annual report, or periodic reports to the session of ongoing church life will satisfy this request.)

Nuts & Bolts of Session Minutes



The method of recording session minutes is somewhat dependent on local circumstances. The following is the suggested procedure used by the majority of churches:

1. Clerk takes notes for the minutes at meeting.
2. Clerk writes the minutes and types or arranges for them to be typed.
3. Clerk makes copies and distributes before the next meeting;
4. At the next meeting, the minutes are either approved as distributed or corrections are made and the corrections are noted in that meeting's minutes (as well as originals);
5. Clerk types or arranges for someone to type approved minutes in the session permanent minute book (these may be photocopied as long as archival quality paper is used);
6. If using a computer for minutes in the permanent minute book, a laser printer and archival quality paper must be used;
7. If you wish, 200-250 pages may be professionally bound into volumes. This can be done by the Presbyterian Department of History at a reasonable cost (215) 627-1852.
8. Do not use erasures, whiteout, strikethroughs or footnotes; or insert in the records separate sheets of paper with written or printed matter on them.
9. The records of each session meeting are to be duly attested (signed in ink) by the clerk. The records of congregational meetings are to be attested by the clerk AND the moderator.
10. The minutes of congregational meetings, the annual report of the church treasurer or treasurers, and the annual statistical report required by General Assembly are to be included with session minutes. These are to be typed or photocopied into the permanent record book.

SESSION MEETING MINUTES MUST BE ATTESTED (SIGNED IN INK) BY THE CLERK.

Congregational Meetings

Minutes of all congregational meetings shall be included in the session record book along with session minutes in chronological order.

Minutes of these meetings shall include:

1. Indication of whether the meeting is “regular” or “special.”
2. If it is a “special meeting,” the minutes shall include the call to the meeting, which will serve as the agenda.
3. Name of the church.
4. Date, time, and place of the meeting.
5. Name of the moderator or presiding officer.
6. Presence of a quorum.
7. Opening and closing of the meeting with prayer.
8. Record of all actions, whether adopted or lost.
9. When applicable, action by the congregation on any change in each pastor’s compensation, with terms of call specified.
10. Minutes of the meeting of the congregation and corporation at which the annual financial reports are made should indicate, at least:
 - a. report of a full financial review of the financial records (G-10.0400d) (formerly referred to as “audit”) (See Appendix)
 - b. a complete, itemized report of income and expenditures for the year
 - c. provide the complete, itemized proposed budget adopted by the session for the coming year
 - d. details of the status of loans from General Assembly, Synod, or Presbytery, if any are outstanding
11. If the congregation does not approve the minutes before adjournment, session may approve the minutes at its next scheduled meeting.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING MINUTES MUST BE ATTESTED (SIGNED IN INK) BY THE MODERATOR AND THE CLERK.

Rolls and Registers

Rolls

The Rolls of the church should contain information about those who are members of the local church. It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to maintain, or to oversee the maintenance of the Rolls as required in G-10.0302.

1. Names of members shall be placed upon, removed, or deleted from the rolls of the church only by order of the Session (G-10.0302a)
2. Session shall maintain the following membership rolls (G-5.0200 and G-10.0302a):

Baptized Members

A **Baptized Member** is one who has received the Sacrament of Baptism but has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In light of [G-10.0302a(1)], the 217th General Assembly issued a “clarification of meaning” that baptized members are children who have been baptized in a Christian church (Trinity baptism) but who have not been received as Active Members.

Record the name, date of baptism (if known), church where Sacrament of Baptism occurred. Names should be removed from this roll when profession of faith is made, or when the person moves from the community.

Active Members

An **Active Member** is one who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into membership of the Church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of the particular church, and participates in the church’s work and worship.

Record name, date received into membership, and method of reception. Record date of removal from the particular role and whether by death, transfer to another church, placed on inactive roll, or removed.

Inactive Members

An **Inactive Member** is one who no longer participates in the church’s work and worship.

Record name, date; indicate if inactive member is subsequently removed or reinstated with date of action. (See Appendix for additional information on roll review.)

Affiliate Members

An **Affiliate Member** is one who is an active member of another church of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the church of active membership is located. Affiliate membership must be renewed every two years. An example of an affiliate member would be a college student living in your community while attending school.

Record name, date of affiliation, name of home church, date of renewal, date of return to home church.

Roll books usually provide double pages for a chronological roll by date of reception into membership with columns for name, how received, name of church from which member transferred if that is the manner of reception, date of deletion from the active roll and reason—by death, inactivity, or transfer, in which case the name of the church to which the member is transferring is listed.

Pages may be provided in the same binder for an alphabetical listing of members along with the membership number that is assigned in the chronological roll.

Pages also may be provided for Baptized, Affiliate and Inactive member rolls in the same binder.

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

Registers

Registers are historical records and need to be carefully maintained. It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to maintain or oversee the maintenance of Registers as required in G-10.0302 c. All information in the Register should be able to be cross-referenced to the minutes.

Session shall maintain the following registers:

Marriages

Register of Marriages shall include marriages of members of the church, all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the church, and all marriages performed on church property.

Baptisms

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

Elders

Register of Elders shall include each elder's name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.

Deacons

Register of Deacons shall include each deacon's name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.

Pastors

Register of Pastors shall include the names of pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, assistant pastors, interim pastors, stated supplies, and parish associates serving the church, with dates of service.

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

Annual Statistical Report

Introduction

The presbytery must make an annual report to the General Assembly,³ which specifies the type of information it needs. Much of the information is gathered from local congregations by means of the "Session Annual Statistical Report."

The data entered need not be perfect. The information is used to keep track of trends and much is expected to be subjective. Both the total active membership and the financial data for recent years are available on the General Assembly's web site (www.pcusa.org) for all churches that complete the Report.

Some of the information requested can be difficult to obtain accurately (such as ages of members) and some information related to the budget may be requested in different categories than your bookkeeper has used. The report form comes with a workbook, which provides explanations of each item and provides a place to do a draft before transferring the figures to an online form.

Suggestions are made here to try to make the process easier. As with most jobs, keeping up on a monthly basis rather than waiting until the end of the year makes it easier. In addition, keeping up makes the total time spent less.

The form is divided into two main parts: Membership and Finances. For this discussion, Membership will be considered in two parts: active members and other data.

In order to collect the data, it is suggested that it be done regularly (each month) rather than waiting until the end of the year.

One way is to keep a notebook with pages labeled for various categories and enter the information after each Session meeting. This could also be done using Excel or setting up a table in MSWord.

Those pages were:

New members received by profession or reaffirmation of faith: 17 & Under

New members received by profession or reaffirmation of faith: 18 & Over

New members received by certificate (letter of transfer)

Other additions: Restoration from Inactive Roll; Correction to make Total correct; etc.

Active Members transferred to other churches (certificate)

Active Members lost due to death

Other losses: Active Members transferred to Inactive Roll; Correction to make Total correct; etc.

Baptisms: children (17 & Under) Baptisms: adult

³ G-11.0305

Reporting Active Members

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

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

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

Reporting Other Membership Data

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

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

If you are using some sort of computer membership system such as PowerChurch Plus or Ease, it is possible to keep track of some of these items through the proper use of the system. Years of birth of all members may not be known so you will need to make educated guesses in order to determine age distribution.

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

Look at the workbook for the definition of a person with a disability. This is not the usual definition. The definition is that the disability "substantially limits participation" but the application of the definition is left to you. Just as in age distribution, use of personal knowledge is expected to be applied rather than a formal survey. Data collected

with such a vague definition cannot be worth very much so don't worry about this too much; just do your best. A person in a wheel chair may not be "substantially limited". That person can't help set up tables for a church dinner but neither can the 95-year-old who lives alone and drives to church each week and serves on a church committee. Both of these describe persons in one church who would not consider themselves "substantially limited".

Reporting Finances

The financial reporting is broken down into broad categories. Note that the values to be reported are for the whole congregation. If there are several accounts in the main finances, all must be included. If groups within the church maintain their own accounts (such as Presbyterian Women, Building Fund, and so forth), all of these should be included if their finances are substantial. If these group's monies are small, they can be ignored as long as you do this consistently over the years. The financial reporting is really looking for trends. The workbook is reasonably understandable and gives some specific examples to help.

Appendix

I. A Full Financial Review Defined

The “Form of Government” of the Presbyterian Church requires the following:

“A full financial review of all books and records relating to finances once each year by a public accountant or public accounting firm or a committee of members versed in accounting procedures. Such auditors should not be related to the treasurer (or treasurers). Terminology in this section is meant to provide general guidance and is not intended to require or not require specific audit procedures or practices as understood within the professional accounting community.” (G-10.0401d)

Therefore, a financial review is required for every church organization or group which has a treasury, and which receives and disburses funds. Groups within the local church whose financial transactions must be reviewed might include the General Operating Fund, Benevolence Fund, Memorial Fund, Wills and Endowments, Board of Deacons, Board of Trustees, Building/Maintenance Fund, Choir, Youth, Church School, Presbyterian Women etc. This review benefits the treasurers, the contributors and those who benefit from expenditures ... giving assurance that donations are used as the donor intended, for the benefit of the specific group, and as a witness to the Lordship of Christ.

The persons making the full financial review do not need to be C.P.A.'s, but there should be some understanding of accounting procedures. Look for persons who have been Trustees or who have some experience in business accounting. Remember that those doing the financial review must not be related to the Treasurer(s).

To be available for review are financial ledgers, records of all forms of income, deposit slips and bank account records, withdrawal slips and canceled checks, authorization of payments, copies of invoices and expense vouchers, and a balance sheet. Financial records from relatively small groups would require less validation; but it is important that each report a *Beginning Balance, Income, Expenses, and a Closing Balance*.

Unless a congregation and its income/expenses are very large, it is not necessary to have a professional audit made. A full financial review implies that the financial review committee has checked through the records, has spot-checked those records and (hopefully) has approved them, and (if helpful) has made suggestions for improvement to the Treasurer or Finance Committee. **The report of the financial review committee must be approved by the Session, Trustees or whichever body has created the committee, and this approval must be recorded in the official minutes of that body.**

This report may be a simple statement such as: *“We have reviewed the financial statements of the various Funds of _____ Church and affiliated organizations for the year ending December 31, _____, as set forth in the _____ Annual Report of _____ Church. During the course of our review, nothing came to our attention that would require modification of these financial statements.”*

II **Review the Active and Inactive Rolls of the Church** **(G-5.0502 & G-10.0102s)** **A Resource for Clerks of Session in the Presbytery of Southern Kansas** **2009-2010**

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

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

Ordinarily, a person is considered potentially “inactive” if there is no evident support of the church (time, talent, treasure) for a period of one calendar year.

Here are some helpful hints:

1. In a large church the rolls might be divided so that a portion is reviewed each quarter, or month.
2. Active Members who do not meet the session’s definition of participating in the work and worship of the congregation **MUST** be contacted and encouraged to resume active participation. A visit or phone call by an elder (not the pastor) is the best way of doing this. Alternately, the clerk may write a letter to such persons. This contact should
 - a. offer to discuss any difficulties;
 - b. invite resumed participation in the work and worship of the congregation;
 - c. offer to assist them in finding a new church home, and
 - d. be sure they realize that failing to respond to this contact within a specifically set period of time (set by session) will result in transfer to the Inactive Roll (loss of voting privilege or right to hold office).
 - e. assure them that at any future date they can be restored to the Active Roll by making that request to Session.
3. After two years on the Inactive Roll, a member may be removed from the rolls of the church for purposes of the Annual Statistical Report to the denomination and of receiving communications from the church. It is recommended that names never be physically deleted, rather applicable notations be made next to names.
4. At all times, anyone, regardless of membership status, should be welcome at worship and communion.
5. A member does not have to be returned to the Active Roll in order to transfer the membership to another church. A transfer may be made directly from the Inactive Roll. It is a courtesy to the requesting church to indicate that the transfer is from the Inactive Roll, but not necessary.

Following are two sample letters to potentially inactive members – one for those still living in town; one for those who have relocated.

Letter to those who have relocated:

CHURCH LETTERHEAD

Date

(inside address)

The Session of [name] Presbyterian Church is in the process of fulfilling its responsibilities as defined in the **BOOK OF ORDER**, Paragraph G 5.0500, which states: *“The Session shall review the roll of members at least annually.”* Since your move to _____, we hope that you have found a new community of faith near home. If, in fact, you have become members of another church, please advise us of the name of that church, so that we might note it in our Church Register.

If you have not yet sought a local church, the Session would like to encourage you to seek the fellowship, support, and spiritual nurture of a faith community. We would be glad help find another church if that is your desire.

Please let me hear from you. You may e-mail me at _____, or return the bottom portion of this letter to me in care of the church, marked appropriately. If I have not heard from you by December 31 (concerning your wishes), your name(s) will be placed on our Inactive Roll. At a later date, should you desire to be restored to the Active Roll or transfer your membership to another church, we will be delighted to facilitate your active membership.

Please know that you will continue to be in our thoughts and prayers, and we particularly wish you a blessed Christmas and a joy-filled New Year.

Sincerely yours,

[your name]
Clerk of Session

Please complete as appropriate, and return to [name of church] at the above address.

_____ has/have joined another church.

Name of Member(s)

Church name: _____

Church address: _____

I wish to speak to **the Pastor**, or **an Elder** concerning this matter. (Circle one, if applicable)

Letter to those still living locally.

CHURCH LETTERHEAD

Date _____

(inside address) _____

Dear _____,

The Session of [name of your] Presbyterian Church is in the process of fulfilling its responsibilities as defined in the BOOK OF ORDER, Paragraph G-5.0500, which states: *“The Session shall review the roll of members at least annually.”* We have missed you during the past year and wonder if you have become involved in another community of faith. If so, we can transfer your membership to that church.

It may be possible, however, that you have not become active in another church. The Session would like to encourage you to return to active participation in the ministry of our church, or to seek the fellowship, support, and spiritual nurture of another community of faith. If there is something I, or another member of Session, or our Pastor can do to facilitate your active participation in a Christian ministry, whether at [name of church] or another church, please do not hesitate to let us know. You can reach me by e-mail _____ or at home (_____). The Pastor may be reached at the church office.

Please let me hear from you, either by e-mail, phone call or returning the bottom portion of this letter, marked appropriately. If, however, we have not heard from you by December 31, your name will be moved to the Inactive Roll. At a later date, should you desire to be restored to the Active Roll, or to transfer your membership to another church, we will be delighted to see that your request is honored.

Please know that you and your family will continue to be in our thoughts and prayers, and we pray that you and yours have a blessed Christmas holiday season and joy-filled new Year.

Sincerely yours,

[your name]
Clerk of Session

Please complete as appropriately, and return to [your] Church at the address above.

_____ has/have joined another church.
Name of Member(s)

Church
Name: _____

Church Address: _____

I wish to speak to **the Pastor** or **an Elder** concerning this matter. (Circle one, if applicable.)

III HOW WELL DO WE KNOW OUR *CONSTITUTION?*

Fill in the blank, or circle the letter for the correct answer.

1. The *Constitution* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) consists of two parts; they are:
Part I: _____ Part II: _____
2. "...The church is a community of people known by its ...
 - a. membership size.
 - b. building and grounds.
 - c. historical documents.
 - d. convictions and actions. (G-2.0100b)
3. The elected leaders who govern the Presbyterian Church are called
 - a. Bishops.
 - b. Priests.
 - c. Clergy.
 - d. Presbyters.
 - e. None of the above. (G-4.0301b)
4. (T) or (F) When session, presbytery, synod or the General Assembly votes, those voting must reflect the will of their constituencies. (G-4.0301d)
5. Session must meet
 - a. at least quarterly.
 - b. at least monthly.
 - c. at least twice a year.
 - d. at least once a year. (G-10.0201)
6. According to the Book of Order, when does the moderator vote in a congregational meeting?
 - a. to break a tie.
 - b. to dissolve the terms of call.
 - c. to decide matters of special importance.
 - d. never. (G-7.0308)
7. (T) or (F) An person who is not baptized may join the church in a private ceremony with friends and family present. (G-5.0101d)
8. Meetings of the congregation shall include approval of
 - a. the annual budget.
 - b. matters related to changes in the sanctuary.
 - c. matters related to fund raising.
 - d. matters related to the calling of a pastor or pastors. [G-7.0304a(2)]
9. The two officers required of a governing body are
 - a. an executive and a treasurer.
 - b. an executive and a clerk.
 - c. a moderator and a vice-moderator.
 - d. a clerk and a moderator.
 - e. none of the above. (G-9.0201)
10. An associate pastor is related to the session
 - a. strictly as an observer, without voice or vote.
 - b. an observer with voice.
 - c. a member with voice.
 - d. a member with voice and vote. (G-10.0101)
11. A candidate for ministry is ordinarily ordained
 - a. by the presbytery of care.

- b. by the calling presbytery.
 - c. by the calling presbytery jointly with a commission of the presbytery of care.
 - d. by the presbytery selected by the candidate. (G-14.0481)
12. The permanent pastoral relations to which candidates may now be called are
- a. pastor, associate pastor.
 - b. pastor, associate pastor, assistant pastor.
 - c. co-pastor, pastor, associate pastor.
 - d. co-pastor, pastor, associate pastor, assistant pastor. (G-14.0511)
13. The pastoral relationship between a pastor and a church is dissolved by
- a. the congregation.
 - b. the session.
 - c. the presbytery.
 - d. the chairperson of the Committee on Ministry. (G-14.0610)
14. (T) or (F) Ordained ministers serving churches are members of those churches. (G-6.0201)
15. (T) or (F) Pastors in local churches serve on session and the privilege of voice and vote.
(G-10.0101)
16. The session has the responsibility and power to
- a. develop and supervise the church school and the educational program of the church.
 - b. to challenge the people of God with the privilege of responsible Christian stewardship.
 - c. to lead the congregation continually to discover what God is doing in the world and to plan for change, renewal, and reformation under the Word of God.
 - d. to serve in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.
 - e. none of the above.
 - f. all of the above. (G-10.0102)
17. The session shall
- a. hold stated meetings at least monthly.
 - b. review and approve the nominees for officers of the particular church.
 - c. review the pastor's sermons.
 - d. keep a complete register of marriages. [G-10.0302c(1)]
18. The congregation shall
- a. approve the annual budget.
 - b. review the adequacy of the pastor's compensation.
 - c. determine the mission of the particular church.
 - d. elect an assistant pastor. (G-7.0302a)
19. A quorum for a regular (stated) session meeting is
- a. set by the presbytery.
 - b. set by the pastor.
 - c. a simple majority of the members (plus moderator).
 - d. one third of the members (plus moderator). (G-10.0202)
20. All property held by or for a particular church is held in trust for the use and benefit of
- a. the presbytery.
 - b. the synod.
 - c. the General Assembly.
 - d. the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). (G-8.0201)

IV. Elders as spiritual leaders

(originally published in 2007 in [Presbyterians Today](#))

By Stephany Jackson and Tammy Wiens



Illustration by Pat Hilliard

Patti Kauffman said “yes” to the call to serve as an elder because she thought her skills in administration would be an asset to her church — Beth Salem Presbyterian in Columbus, Ga.

“I thought that all I had to do was take notes, type up the minutes and send them to the presbytery office,” she says. “I knew that we had some challenges before us, but I had no idea that the presbytery was considering closing the church.”

The truth of the matter was, the church had no lights, the men’s bathroom was inoperative and the roof was in need of repair. Members of Beth Salem had said goodbye to their pastor because they could no longer afford his salary, and they were six months behind on mortgage payments. The situation looked hopeless, but the members of Beth Salem refused to give up. They looked to the session for direction.

Kauffman soon realized that administrative skills alone were not going to be enough. As clerk of session, she began calling the other elders together for regular prayer and Bible study.

“We all knew that we would have to do more than we felt capable of doing,” she says, “and the only way we were going to survive was to rely totally on God.

“We asked God to give us a mission and God answered our prayers,” she continues. “The presbytery has reinvested in our ministry. We have formed mission partnerships throughout the community. A new sense of energy has been generated in the congregation. The lights are back on, the roof is fixed and the bathroom has been repaired.”

With God’s help, Kauffman says, she has even preached twice — “something I never thought I would do.”

More than budgets, buildings

Like Kauffman, many Presbyterians say “yes” to becoming an elder, thinking it means hammering out a budget once a year, attending a few meetings, counting the offering and making sure the church gets locked up after everyone leaves. The call to serve as elder, however, is a call to serve the spiritual as well as administrative needs of God’s people.

It’s a call to build up the body of Christ, which means much more than planning for building repairs or making budget adjustments. It means ensuring that the members of the body have the opportunity to be engaged in the type of ministry and mission that will help them achieve spiritual maturity.

Elders are called to be spiritual leaders, strengthening and nurturing the faith and life of the congregation committed to their charge. In the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) elders are instructed to engage members in the mission of the church and to provide opportunities for evangelism, pastoral care, worship, education and stewardship (*Book of Order*, G-10.0100). Consider the spiritual vitality that might blossom within congregations if elders would give as much time and attention to providing models for discipleship and evangelism as they give to governance and discipline.

Today the PC(USA) and other mainline congregations stand at a crossroads. Throughout the church and society there is a desire for radically committed and faithful leadership. People are searching for congregations with leaders who both instruct and inspire, and who are willing to lead by example.

Elders lead by example as they regularly attend Bible study, Sunday school or weekly prayer services. They should be equipped to interpret and support the church’s vision. When the need for additional training arises, the elders should be the first to receive it in order to provide new leadership.

Elders in the Bible

The Bible portrays various forms of church government, or polity, among the earliest Christians. There are virtues as well as limitations to every human form of government. While Presbyterian polity is not the only one suggested by biblical patterns, it does have strong biblical roots.

In the first five books of the Bible elders are always mentioned in connection with Moses. In Exodus 3:16–18 God directs Moses to “assemble the elders” and lay out a plan that would free the Israelites after years of bondage. Numbers 11 says elders were chosen after Moses complained to God that he needed help leading the people. The role of the elder takes various forms throughout the Old Testament. Elders are responsible for carrying out legislative and administrative functions. They also are responsible for leading the community by teaching and living out models of obedience to the law (see Exodus 19:7–8; Deuteronomy 27:1, 31:9, 32:7).

In the New Testament, God calls to leadership wise, dedicated and mature persons of faith. All members of Christ’s body, the church, are endowed with unique gifts for the purpose of service. “Elder” can refer to one who shares in corporate leadership for a cluster of Christian assemblies or churches (see Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1–2), or to one who has leadership over a particular congregation (see Titus 1:5–7). The term does not so much confer a title as describe a function or role in the community.

Ephesians 4:11–13 lists some of the ministries to which church leaders are called: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (see also 1 Corinthians 12:27–31). All of these ministries exist for the purpose of equipping the saints, members of the congregation, for Christ’s mission. When people joyfully engage in the work of ministry, the body of Christ is strengthened and the church matures to take on the character of Christ.

A Presbyterian asset

Elders are called to exercise leadership, government and discipline (*Book of Order*, G-60302). In the Presbyterian Church congregations share a common polity that ensures due process when disputes arise, and promotes equality for all persons. It provides a way of living together in which the concerns and suggestions of all members are taken seriously. It also helps assure members that finances are managed responsibly and mission is carried out faithfully.

This form of government is one of our denomination’s assets. It can even serve as an evangelistic strength, attracting people who have become discouraged by poorly managed religious institutions or independent congregations.

One of the questions that elders are asked before they are ordained is, “Will you be a faithful elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture and service?” The mission that Christ has set before elders requires a constant process of dying to the old self and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Only when elders engage in transformation in their own lives, can they lead others through the process.

This is not something anyone can do on his or her own. All church leaders need the love and support received through regularly engaging in spiritual practices with others. When elders take care of their own spiritual well-being, they are better equipped to model the type of spiritual growth and maturity that will inspire and enable other members of the congregation.

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

It’s Greek to me *A glossary*

In the New Testament

Both of the following terms are used interchangeably to refer to “elders”:

- *presbuteros*—Greek word for elder, from which we derive the English word presbyter
- *episkopos*—Greek word for overseer, from which we derive the English word episcopal, meaning bishop-led

In the PC(USA)

The role of elder has its roots in the early church, but various church traditions have come to define the role in different ways. The following terms are used in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and some other churches in the Reformed tradition:

- elders—elected members who are ordained to serve as the governing body (session) of a particular congregation
- presbyters—both elders and ministers together
- presbytery—a group of congregations in one geographic region

- ruling elders—members of a church session
 - teaching elders—ministers
-

The Order of Elders

This program provided by the PC(USA)'s Theology Worship and Education ministry helps Presbyterian elders find mutual support and encouragement. Members of The Order of Elders receive resources to guide their Scripture reading, prayer and study. Elders benefit from engaging in these spiritual practices along with others across the church. The Order welcomes individual members, but encourages sessions to sign on collectively so that there is a built-in local community to support their discipline. The Order of Elders is open to anyone ordained to the office of elder, whether or not he or she is currently serving on session. Those participating in The Order say it helps them take seriously their intention to nurture a regular rhythm of personal study and prayer.

VI. OTHER Helpful Resources

Book of Confessions, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I

Book of Order, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, 2009-2011) (*Note: A new edition is published every two years to reflect any changes resulting from presbytery votes following General Assemblies. It is usually available by September.*)

Companion to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); by Frank A. Beattie, © 1999, updated by the Office of the General Assembly 2007

Parliamentary Procedures in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); by Marianne L. Wolfe, © 2000

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

Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 10th Edition; © 2000 (11th edition due 2010).

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

For Questions ABOUT:

Polity, the PCUSA Constitution and other Constitutional Services check out:

<http://www.pcusa.org/constitutionalservices/staff.htm>

VI. Books & Online Resources

from the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation

| | | |
|--|-------------------|---------|
| Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers | 978-0-664-23198-9 | \$19.95 |
| Faithful Disagreement by Frances Taylor Gench | 978-0-664-23338-9 | \$16.95 |
| The Presbyterian Elder by Paul Wright | 978-0-664-50252-2 | \$12.95 |
| The Presbyterian Deacon by Earl S. Johnson Jr. | 978-0-664-50237-9 | \$12.95 |
| The Presbyterian Trustee by Earl S. Johnson Jr. | 978-0-664-50255-3 | \$12.95 |
| Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers by J.Tucker & J.Gray | 978-0-664 50018-4 | \$19.95 |
| Selected to Serve by Earl S. Johnson Jr. | 978-0-664-50165-5 | \$16.95 |
| How to Spell Presbyterian by James Angell | 978-0-664-50196-9 | \$14.95 |
| Making Disciples, Making Leaders by Steve Eason | 978-0-664-50263-8 | \$19.95 |
| Searching for a Pastor the Presbyterian Way by Dean Foose | 978-0-664-50041-2 | \$16.95 |
| Ordination Questions by Howard Rice and Calvin Chinn | 978-0-664-50213-3 | \$9.95 |
| The Presbyterian Handbook | 978-0-664-50288-1 | \$14.95 |
| Companion to the Constitution by Frank Beattie | 978-0-664-50146-4 | \$19.95 |
| Book of Confessions: Study Edition | 978-0-664-50012-2 | \$19.95 |
| Presbyterian Creeds by Jack Rogers | 978-0-664-25496-4 | \$16.95 |

All items can be purchased by calling Cokesbury at 800-672-1789, shopping at the Cokesbury store nearest you, or by visiting www.cokesbury.com.

Online PC(USA) Resources for Elders

The PC(USA) Web site: www.pcusa.org has many helpful resources and articles. Here are some to enrich the service of elders:

Helpful articles on many topics

Interesting statistics about elder training from Research Services

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

A Listing of all articles about What Presbyterians Believe

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

What Presbyterians Believe: Elders As Spiritual Leaders

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

How Presbyterians Make Decisions along with some church history

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

What Presbyterians Believe: A Balancing Act

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

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

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

Information on The Order of Elders

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

PCUSA Structure and Governing Bodies

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

Light Our Way: A Guide for Spiritual Care in Times of Disaster

<http://www.pcusa.org/pda/pdf/light-our-way.pdf>

Peacemaking Resources

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

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

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