

**PLEASE PASS THIS TO YOUR
SUCCESSOR**

HANDBOOK

for

CLERKS OF SESSION

PEACE RIVER PRESBYTERY

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FORWARD

The Handbook is a guide to the responsibilities and duties of the Clerk of Session. It is written with the assumption that the Clerk:

- a. Plays a vital role within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
- b. Maintains the history of the faithfulness of the church through careful minutes and records;
- c. Is interested in and knowledgeable about Presbyterian polity;
- d. Is the liaison along with the moderator between session and Presbytery;
- e. Always strives to be a servant to session, in the fullest New Testament sense, and is equipped spiritually to fulfill the servant role.
- f. 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 governing body understands that our order is to be derived from Scripture. Our order expresses the principle that we must live our lives together in accord with our faith and as witnesses to the demands of Scripture. A clerk of a council respects the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as our covenant with one another about how we can, in our diversity, be such witnesses. 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; it commits to a representative form of government in which ruling elders 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)

Without any intention to do so, a communicator can become a roadblock. A good clerk will receive all mail, keep a record of what has been received, and distribute it to the appropriate person or committee. It is of utmost importance that the communicator communicates!

The teaching elder/pastor looks to the clerk for knowledge about who is who and what is what in the local church. The session looks to the clerk not only to keep the records accurately, but also to assist the session in keeping its business meetings orderly, often serving as parliamentarian. As parliamentarian, even informally, the clerk will want to be familiar with **the current edition of Robert’s Rules of Order** and with A Guide to Parliamentary Procedure in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) by Gregory A. Goodwiller, P.R.P. (available from Presbyterian Distribution Service, (800) 524-2612 – please specify PDS #OGA 14-070), which is a brief summary of parliamentary procedures for the Presbyterian Church.

Your primary reference resources will be:

- 1) The Bible,
- 2) The Book of Confessions,
- 3) The Book of Order,
- 4) By Laws of Local Congregation.

ON THE KEEPING OF ACCURATE AND COMPLETE RECORDS

The completing and preserving of all church records, including session minutes, is a vital responsibility of the Clerk of Session. This is more than a secretarial skill; it is the preserving of your church’s history.

Minutes serve at least two functions:

1. To record current actions by session,
2. To provide a history of the congregation and the session.

For both purposes, it is important to have clear, concise documentation of the life of the congregation. Minutes *are not* to record the details of ‘who said what’ during the discussion of a motion. The minutes are a record of what was ‘decided and done’ in the meeting.

Minutes should be prepared and distributed as quickly as possible after each session meeting as they list actions to be taken by others.

Session minutes are to be kept in a book designated solely for church meeting minutes. This book should be a loose-leaf binder of good, heavy quality with acid free paper with numbered pages. Although this sounds and is expensive, when you consider the alternative of your history’s crumbling on lightweight paper, it is well worth the investment. Records must be on paper and are not to be destroyed but may be digitized also. Once approved and digitized the paper records can be sent to the Presbyterian Historical Society for safekeeping.

On the cover and on the first page of this permanent record, write the full name of the church and the location as well as the date opened and closed. This makes for quick identification. Additionally, in the front of this currently used permanent record, record where previous records can be found.

According to Robert’s Rules of Order, the record of the proceedings of a deliberative assembly is usually called the minutes. The minutes should contain mainly a record of actions taken. Relevant historical information may also be recorded for future reference.

Additionally, the minutes of a meeting should never reflect the Clerk’s opinion, favorable or otherwise, on anything said or done.

Who receives the minutes? All teaching and active ruling 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 constitutes them. In other

words, the session has ownership, and Clerk of Session has the responsibility of preserving these records.

It may be a good idea to prepare a summary of the minutes to share with the congregation either through a newsletter or as a bulletin insert. This summary can improve the connectedness or sense of ownership of individual members in their church and its activities. Informed people make better decisions. Informed connected people feel comfortable asking questions and volunteering to help.

CONTENT OF THE MINUTES

The first paragraph of the minutes should contain the following information:

1. The type of meeting: regular, special (called), adjourned regular, or adjourned special (called),
2. The name of the body-session of a particular church,
3. The date, time and location,
4. Who was present, excused, absent,
5. Who opened and closed with prayer,
6. Approval of minutes of previous meeting, including amendments and corrections.

The body of the minutes should contain a separate paragraph for each subject and should show the following:

1. All motions to bring a main question before the meeting, except those which were withdrawn. Careful attention to the exact wording of the maker of motion is required. Make no assumptions. By name, who made the motion, whether the motion was approved or otherwise disposed of, including if it was temporarily disposed of by being referred to a particular committee.
2. All points of order and appeals, whether sustained or lost, together with the reasons given by the chair for the ruling.
3. Record all items that have been agreed to by consensus.
4. It is helpful to record any items assigned for follow-up.

SAMPLE MEETING MINUTES

Because session minutes are unique to various churches and Clerks of Session, the following is to be used only as a sample or guideline.

The Session of the (name of church) Presbyterian Church of (location) held a (stated or called) meeting on (month, day, year) at (time) a.m./p.m. The meeting was opened with prayer by (name).

The following were present:

Excused were: _____ Absent were: _____

The minutes of the meeting of (month, date and year) were (approved or approved with the following corrections):

The report of the treasurer was received and filed for financial review.

The following report was presented by the moderator, the Reverend (name). (This information may include the clergy ministry work between session meetings: weddings, baptisms, funerals, communion, visitations, upcoming events, etc.)

The Clerk of Session reported that since our last meeting the following information was received: correspondence, letters of transfer request, the Synopsis of Presbytery meetings, etc.

Committee Reports

Reports of Boards

Reports of Special Committees and Task Forces

Unfinished Business

New Business

Announcements, including time and place of next meeting.

Adjournment with prayer (name)

_____ Clerk of Session.

All minutes are signed by the Clerk of Session after being approved by the session at the next meeting. Having the Moderator sign the Session minutes is not necessary, but acceptable.

ELECTRONIC MEETINGS

As the use of technology increases, meetings employ electronic elements, including either joining one or more people to meetings electronically, or holding meetings entirely by phone or the internet. The latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order has a significantly expanded section on electronic meetings. The two most important guiding principles for electronic meetings are that they must be authorized in an organization's governing documents, and the technology employed must allow for "the opportunity for simultaneous aural communication." Otherwise, the decisions made have not met the requirements for a deliberative assembly. This affirms the Presbyterian polity foundations that are built on decision making by a deliberative assembly.

Technology allows the church new options to include teleconference or video conference deliberations. The Presbytery uses <https://zoom.us/> (video conference) when appropriate.

It is understood that church Sessions and committees may use email to communicate, share ideas, even build consensus, but official votes shall be taken only after the deliberative assembly has had "the opportunity for simultaneous aural communication." Email exchange of ideas and information does *not* meet the definition of a deliberative assembly, in other words, there is no provision for an "email meeting" in Presbyterian polity. Also, regular email does not meet the standards in Robert's Rules of Order for electronic voting.

MEETINGS OF THE CONGREGATION

In addition to the minutes of the session, the minutes of the annual meeting of the congregation and all other congregational meetings are printed in the Session Minutes Book. One of the duties of the Clerk of Session is to serve as secretary for all congregational meetings; therefore, all your minutes are to be recorded in one book.

The congregation shall hold an annual meeting and may hold other meetings as necessary. At the annual meeting, the congregation must receive and act on the session's recommendation for adjustments to the terms of call for the installed pastor(s) based upon the session's prior review. (G-2.0804) Special meetings may be called by the session or presbytery, when requested. (G-1.0503)

The session of a church and all committees and organizations within the church must report annually to the congregation at the annual meeting, including a full financial report (G-3.0205). These reports should be summarized and included in the minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting.

The business to be transacted at a special meeting shall be limited to items specifically listed in the publicly announced call for the meeting. No other business may be transacted at this meeting.

Business to be transacted at meetings of a congregation may be of two kinds – ecclesiastical and corporate. Whenever permitted by civil law, both kinds of business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting. In other words, the annual meeting of the corporation and a regular annual meeting of the congregation can be held on the same day.

Business of the annual meeting of the congregation shall be limited to the following (G-1.0503)

1. Matters related to the election of elders, deacons and trustees,
2. Matters related to the calling of a pastor or pastors,
3. Matters related to the pastoral relationship, by such means as reviewing the adequacy of and approving changes to the terms of call of the pastor or pastors, or requesting, consenting to, or declining to consent to dissolution (prior notice required for dissolution of call),
4. Matters related to buying, mortgaging or selling real property.
5. Matters related to the permissive powers of a congregation, such as, to request of presbytery an exemption from one or more requirements because of limited size.
6. Receiving a disciplinary decision against a member of the congregation as required by D-9.0102.

Remember that minutes of each meeting of the congregation must be attested by signature of the Moderator and Clerk of Session and must be entered after approval by the session in the session's minute book.

Keeping a neat, well-organized permanent minute book is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session. Minutes are a ready reference of the ongoing work of the session and serve as an historical record of the congregation's mission and ministry.

THE CHURCH ROLLS AND REGISTER

The counterpart of the Session Minute Book is the Church Register. This register contains all vital information on the life of the congregation. Although by some church traditions the pastor or church secretary may maintain the Church Register. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to ascertain that it is accurately kept up to date. For this reason, you should keep close supervision of the Register, even if someone else maintains it.

The importance of an accurate Church Register emerges when church members request information which has civil as well as ecclesiastical value. Civil officials will usually accept information recorded in the Church Register to confirm details of birth, marriage and family data. Church bodies occasionally make requests for recorded information. If these records are accurate and properly kept, such requests can be easily facilitated.

According to the Book of Order (G-3.0204), the following membership rolls are required:

1. Baptized Member Roll
2. Active Member Roll
3. Affiliate Member Roll

Names of members are to be removed or deleted from the rolls of the church only by the order of session, and in accordance with the provisions of the Book of Order (G-3.0204).

The session shall also keep a complete register of:

1. ordained elders and deacons, together with the names of churches in which they were ordained, the dates of their ordination, their terms of active service, and records of their death,
2. installed pastors serving the church, with dates of service,

The session may keep a register of:

1. marriages, including marriages of all members of the church, all marriages performed by the ministerial staff of the church, and all marriages performed on church property. In the event that a couple was married in a civil ceremony, followed by a Christian

Marriage Rite III or commitment ceremony, then it should be recorded in the rolls with both dates: [date Rite III performed] – Civil Ceremony on [date],

2. trustees and/or officers of the church corporation.

When Delete Does Not Mean Delete: If you are keeping records and rolls on computer,

DO NOT hit the delete key to remove a person from the roll.

Simply, write the word “delete” beside the person’s name.

BAPTIZED MEMBER ROLL

The Baptized Member Roll shall list the names of those persons baptized in a particular church, who have not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It shall also list the active members’ children, and children of active members or of Ministers of the Word and Sacrament related to the particular church, who have been baptized elsewhere. Be certain to record the date of birth, place, date and by whom they were baptized. Record the full names of persons presenting the child for baptism.

When parents transfer to another church, the names of their baptized children should be included in the letter of transfer and removed from this roll. Another time to note removal from this roll is when a person becomes an active member upon profession of faith.

ACTIVE MEMBER ROLL

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) there is a particular order of listing the names on the Roll. The full name is to be listed, with the last name first. In the case of a married person or widow(er), the pre-married name should appear after the first name, followed by the name of his/her spouse. For example: Harper (married name), Nancy Ann Karnes (pre-married name), (spouse: Lester Wayne Harper; for a widow/er, add “deceased”). At the time of marriage, the new married name should be added to the same line. Since some couples are now using both last names in hyphenated form, this notation should be used with both members in the Church Register. When a divorce occurs, the information should also be noted, including any name change.

Another important reason for keeping your rolls up to date is the Annual Statistical Report due at the end of the year. The number of members on the active members roll is to be reported to the Office of the General Assembly each year.

AFFILIATE MEMBER ROLL

The Affiliate Member Roll, (G-3.0204(a)), shall list the names of those who have been received into affiliate membership by the session and who are active in the church's work and worship. These persons are not listed on the Active Member Roll.

CERTIFICATES USED IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Certificates are ordinarily used to denote Baptism, Church Membership, Ordination of Ruling Elders and Deacons, Dismissal (transfer of membership), and Marriage. One task of the Clerk of Session is to see that all certificates are properly completed. Correct spelling, dating, etc. are important to the persons receiving them. The information on the certificates should agree with the records in the Session Minute Book and the Church Register.

PRESERVATION OF RECORDS

Proper care of church records is essential. If you do not know the location of previous minute books and registers, find out and write it in the front of your current session record!

When books are no longer in use, they may be sent to the Presbyterian Historical Society for permanent safekeeping. (G-3.0107)

REMEMBER - Your minutes are the history book of the life of your church. Do not let them disappear.

ANNUAL ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

According to the Book of Order, (G-3.0108(a)) each year Presbytery is to conduct a general administrative review to ensure proceedings have been correctly recorded, have been in

accordance with PCUSA Constitution, have been prudent and equitable and have been faithful to the mission of the whole church. The review also determines whether the congregation/session complies with all Book of Order requirements. This is a constitutional responsibility of the presbytery. You are not alone; the presbytery is subject to the same review by the synod, and the synod is reviewed by the General Assembly. Thus, review is a vital part of the connectional Presbyterian system. The review is conducted by your congregation's liaison from the Committee on Ministry.