

HANDBOOK FOR CLERKS OF SESSION

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FROM ONE CLERK TO ANOTHER

Serving as a clerk of session is an honor. At times the work may seem overwhelming, but it can be an exciting job with many challenges and rewards. The intent of this publication is to make your work easier.

The clerk of session is a position of recording and preserving the ministry and history of a congregation. Historically, the clerk of session has been the person who maintains accurate records for the session and the congregation. As church records are read; they communicate the story and the history of the particular congregation, its formation, its life and growth, and its mission in the community, the presbytery, and the denomination.

Church records have many uses. Each year the General Assembly requires of the presbytery a summary in the form of an annual statistical report. Much of that report comes from good record keeping.

But - record keeping is only a small part of your job, even though it takes much space in this manual. The Clerk is also the parliamentarian, the moderator's right hand, "secretary" and resource person for the session and congregation, and in general, the Clerk helps to set the tone of all official meetings in the congregation's family.

On behalf of the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys, I would personally like to thank you for your diligence and your endeavors in God's work, the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys, the Synod of Lakes & Prairies, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

One final note, this handbook was created by former Stated Clerk Karen Houtman.

Pamela R. Prouty –Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys Stated Clerk

ON WHAT BASIS DO WE DO WHAT WE DO

(and just a little bit of why)

A word to sessions:

Although no church order is clearly set forth in scripture, the Bible does reveal the nature of God, our relationship to God, and our relationship to the fellowship of believers. It gives us the experience of the early church and the beginnings of some form of church order.

Out of the Reformation came a specific form of Protestant church government -Presbyterian- government by elders. In fact, the word “presbyter” is the Greek term for elder. Elders are considered to be chosen and are ordained to serve in their respective positions of leadership. Elders are called by God and by the congregation to this position.

Ruling elders are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather as a session collectively to seek, to find and to represent the will of Christ. Ruling elders are to be leaders and listeners to the congregation. Granted, ruling elders are responsible to the congregation, but ultimately Ruling Elders are responsible to Jesus Christ for the decisions you make. A further description of ruling elders can be found in the *Book of Order* G-2.0301.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

The *Book of Confessions* contains our historic Christian confessions basic to the theology of the Church. All those in ordered ministry (teaching elders, ruling elders and deacons) are 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 those in ordered ministry are not required to agree with everything in these Confessions, they are required to “receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed Faith as expressed in the Confessions of our Church as the authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do and be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God.” (W-4.4003c) 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* may be seen as the “how and when” we function within the beliefs of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The *Book of Order* explains thoroughly, and usually clearly, the polity and orderly workings of our Church. We turn to the *Book of Order* to find answers to our frequent questions, and it is one of the standards under which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) makes decisions.

The *Book of Order* might be considered our denomination’s bylaws as well as its standing rules. It is essential for the clerk of session to have a good working knowledge of the *Book of Order* and be familiar with its use because it contains the fundamentals for working within the Church.

The four sections of the *Book of Order* which specifically govern the life of the congregation include: Foundations of Presbyterian Polity (F), The Form of Government (G), The Directory for Worship of God (W), and The Rules of Church Discipline (D).

The *Book of Order* is revised every other year following the General Assembly meeting (usually in June or July of each year) and every clerk of session needs to have the most current copy. Copies are available at the presbytery office.

OTHER RESOURCES

Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised is mandated for use by the *Book of Order* (G-3.0105). Parliamentary law is common sense and politeness put into practice in meetings. It is a body of conventions and customs which aids decision making, models conflict resolution, and works for the protection of individual rights. In the church, it is always “out of order” to make parliamentary gamesmanship more important than the search for the truth. Many shortened versions of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised* are available. Keep one with your *Book of Order* for easy reference.

Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers (John Knox Press) by Joan Gray and Joyce Tucker

This detailed, comprehensive interpretation of the *Book of Order* and Presbyterian polity is the most complete resource of its kind since the church's reunion. It explains principles and procedures of church government and includes changes since reunion.

Finally, when in doubt or when questions arise, do not hesitate to contact the presbytery office.

AUTHORITY OF THE SESSION

(G-3.0201) The session is the council for the congregation composed of ruling elders and the moderator who is typically a teaching elder or commissioned ruling elder. All members of the session are entitled to vote.

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. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the session shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have identified themselves throughout history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

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

OFFICERS

Moderator (G-3.0104)

The pastoral leader of the congregation shall be the moderator of the session. When a different moderator is needed, please be in contact with the Commission on Leadership.

Clerk of Session

Each council shall elect a clerk who shall record the transactions of the council, keep its rolls of membership and attendance. The clerk of session shall be a ruling elder (not necessarily active) elected by the session for such term as it may determine. (G-3.0104)

The clerk of each council (session) shall make recommendation to that body for the permanent safekeeping of the body's records. (G-3.0107)

ADMINISTRATION OF MISSION (G-3.0106)

Mission determines the forms and structures needed for the church to do its work. Each council (session) shall:

1. Develop a manual of administrative operations that will specify the form and guide the work of mission in that council. Outlines for developing such a document are included. A copy of such a document should be shared with the presbytery to be placed in the church file.
2. Adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy and a child protection policy. Examples of such policies are available at the presbytery office. Also, a copy of your policy should be sent to the presbytery office to be placed in your church file.

SESSION DOCKETS

The docket for a session meeting can be the responsibility of either the clerk in consultation with the pastor, or the pastor in consultation with the clerk. The input and frequent contact with other session members is invaluable. In case of a pastoral vacancy, the moderator named by the presbytery often will rely on the clerk of session to formulate the docket.

Session dockets should be made available to session members prior to meetings so that the elders may be prepared to do the business of the church. Included with the docket should be the date, time, location of the meeting, financial data, and other pertinent information as needed and available.

The value of the docket is at least threefold:

1. Provides for an orderly process in the handling of session business.
2. Informs the members of issues to be discussed.
3. Serves as a reminder of the preparation necessary for a meeting. The clerk of session can take this opportunity to assist the pastor/moderator in handling administrative details and sharing in the ministry of the church.

A SAMPLE DOCKET FOR SESSION MEETINGS (Modify to suit specific needs)

NOTE: It may be helpful to specify time allotments for each item.

1. Opening prayer
2. Education time
3. Reading and approving minutes of previous meeting
4. Communications from presbytery, synod and General Assembly
5. Report of the pastor/moderator
6. Report of the clerk of session
7. Report of the treasurer
8. Report of permanent committees
9. Report of special committees or task forces
10. Examination and reception of members
11. Transfer of members
12. Arrangements for the Lord's Supper or baptisms, when necessary
13. Report to presbytery when in order
14. Report of commissioner to presbytery.
15. Unfinished business
16. New and miscellaneous business
17. Statement of adjournment to next meeting
18. Prayer concerns
19. Adjournment with prayer

ON THE KEEPING OF ACCURATE AND COMPLETE RECORDS (G-3.0107 and G-3.0204)

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. Records of actions by session and therefore, essential to its operation
2. History of the congregation and the session

In both instances it is important to have clear, concise documentation of the life of the congregation.

Minutes are to be kept in an acid-free (archival) quality book or file designated solely for that purpose. The paper also needs to be acid-free (archival) and numbered consecutively. This paper and other acid-free products are available through some good office supply outlets as well as through catalogs

Printing the minutes using a copier or computer printer, always being certain to use acid-free (archival) quality paper. IT IS NOT ACCEPTABLE TO USE "STICKY NOTES" ON MINUTES PAGES.

In the front of this permanent record, write the full name of the church and its location as well as the date the book was opened and closed. This makes for quick identification, especially when the book is brought to presbytery for review. Additionally, record where previous records can be found. If older records are removed in order to continue using a current heavy binder, bind and preserve them carefully making note of their location in front of the book.

According to *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, the record of the proceedings of a deliberative assembly is usually called the minutes. The minutes only need to contain a record of what was "done," not what was "said" by the members. Reporting who, what, where, when, how and why is suggested for accurate accountability.

The minutes provide enough information so that your grandchildren will know what happened. Additionally, the minutes of a meeting never reflect the clerk's opinion.

The *Book of Order* (G-3.0107) as well as *Robert's Rules of Order* specifies ownership of these records resides with the body which constitutes them—in other words, the session has ownership and the clerk of session has the responsibility of preserving these records on behalf of the session and congregation. No one individual has ownership of these documents.

When a congregation dissolves, its records shall become the property of the next highest council, which in this case, is the presbytery, who keeps them for permanent safekeeping with the Presbyterian Historical Society.

CONTENTS OF THE MINUTES

1. The first paragraph of the minutes contains:
 - A. The type of meeting (stated, called, adjourned)
 - i. Stated meeting: Regularly scheduled meeting
 - ii. Called meeting: Meeting called by moderator at a time not regularly scheduled
 - iii. Adjourned meeting: A stated meeting continued at another time for a particular purpose
 - B. The name of the assembly (session, congregation)
 - C. The date, time and location
 - D. Who was present, excused, absent (for session records only)

- E. Attest to a quorum
 - F. That the meeting was opened with prayer
 - G. Whether minutes of previous meeting were approved as read, amended and approved, etc.
2. The body of the minutes contains
 - a. A separate paragraph for each subject showing all actions.
 - b. Careful attention to exact wording of the action, make no assumptions, asking for it in written form to assure accuracy.
 - c. Documenting withdrawn actions is not required, may be stated in the minutes as “Motion made and withdrawn.” Such documentation may be helpful at a future time if this or a related subject is again brought before the body.
 - d. Whether an action was seconded and approved or otherwise disposed of, including if it were temporarily disposed of by being referred to a particular committee.
 - e. The name of the maker of the motion by name is not required, however, there could be historical value.
 - f. Points of order and appeals, whether sustained or lost, together with the reasons given by the moderator for the ruling.
 - g. Notation that reports were received from moderator, clerk, treasurer. Report only information for the permanent record.
 - h. Reports from permanent and special committees or task forces, briefly recording basic information.
 - i. Membership changes—new members, deaths, baptisms
 - j. Approval of annual statistical report to presbytery (include a copy, on acid-free paper, of that report as an addendum)
 - k. Reception of report from presbytery minutes review
 - l. Brief reports from commissioners to presbytery meetings
 - m. Record of financial audit (include a summary copy or letter auditor as an addendum)
 - n. Old or unfinished business and its disposition.
 - o. New business and its disposition.
 3. The final paragraph contains the date, time and place of next meeting.
 4. Meeting closed with prayer.
 5. Minutes need to be signed by the clerk of session or the moderator after being approved by the session. (Both signatures are not required.)

MEETINGS OF THE CONGREGATION

The minutes of the annual meeting and all other congregational meetings are printed in the Session Record Book. One of the duties of the clerk of session is to serve as secretary for all congregational meetings. (G-1.0505)

The congregation shall hold an annual meeting and may hold other meetings as necessary. Called (special) meetings are called by the session or presbytery, when requested.

All active members of the congregation present at either annual or special meetings are entitled to vote. Congregations shall provide by rule of the quorum necessary to conduct business. (G-1.0501) Adequate public notice of all congregational meetings shall be given. (G-1.0502)

Business to be transacted at meetings of a congregation may be of two kinds - ecclesiastical (relating to a church) or corporate (relating to a corporation). Whenever permitted by civil law, both kinds of business

may be conducted at the same congregational meeting. (G-1.0503) In other words, the annual meeting of the corporation and an annual congregational meeting may be held at the same time.

NOTE: Minnesota State Law does allow for the annual corporation and congregational meeting being one meeting- they do NOT need to be held separately.

Business of a congregational meeting shall include the following (G-1.0503):

1. Matters related to the electing of elders, deacons;
2. Matters related to the calling of pastoral leaders;
3. Matters related to the pastoral relationship, such as changing the call, or requesting or consenting or declining to consent to dissolution;
4. Matters related to buying, mortgaging, or selling real property;
5. Requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption as permitted in this constitution. (G-2.0404)

IF CORRECTIONS TO THE SESSION RECORD BOOK ARE NECESSARY

No erasures, footnotes, or insertions of papers are allowed. Blank pages or portions thereof between sections of the minutes should be avoided or X'd out. Corrections/additions to the minutes may be made by a majority vote of the session (or congregation) and must be recorded.

PRESERVATION OF RECORDS

Proper care of congregational records is essential. When books are no longer in use, they could be sent to the Presbyterian Historical Society for microfilming and/or storage. The clerk is responsible to make recommendation to the session for the permanent safekeeping of the records. (G-3.0107) There is a small fee for microfilming. REMEMBER - Your minutes are the history book of the life of your church. Do not let them disappear.

PRESERVATION OF CHURCH RECORDS (from Presbyterian Historical Society)

The Problem: Church Records at Risk: Church records are in jeopardy. Embrittled paper, deteriorating bindings, fire, and flood all pose substantial threats. Most paper produced since the time of the Civil War has been made from wood pulp. Wood pulp contains substances which break down into acid, which causes rapid deterioration of paper. A major portion of our intellectual heritage is at risk because of acidic, embrittled paper. This is especially true of manuscript records, which by their nature, are unique and irreplaceable. Even if records are created on acid-free paper and properly bound, keeping single copies at only one location presents a substantial risk from fire, flood, and other natural disasters. If the information contained in church records is not properly preserved, it will be lost forever.

Whenever possible, records of permanent value should be created and preserved on paper that resists deterioration, and stored under conditions where temperature and humidity remain fairly constant. (Basements and attics are among the worst places for storage.) For maximum protection against disaster, it is desirable to make security copies of permanent records. (Ways to *temporarily* secure permanent records locally include keeping off-site backups disks of records produced on computer, or storing acid-free copies of originals in safe deposit boxes or fire proof safes.) The archivists at the Presbyterian Historical Society welcome inquiries regarding conservation of your original records.

Storage of records under archival conditions and standards is a temporary expedient. It only slows the process of deterioration; it does not prevent or reverse deterioration. A different method is required for the long-term protection of information contained in unique manuscript records.

The Solution: Preservation Microfilming: At the present time, the preferred technique for the long-term preservation of records is archival quality 35mm microfilm. When preserved under proper conditions, archival quality master negatives have an expected life of five hundred years. The Presbyterian Historical Society's microfilming program was established to address the problems associated with preservation of manuscript and published records and other materials. In contrast to most commercial microfilming firms, the Presbyterian Historical Society produces archival quality microfilm. The microfilm photographer is trained to handle rare and fragile documents.

When records are filmed for councils (including sessions), archival master negatives are stored in Philadelphia; and a positive copy is retained in the library at Philadelphia for researchers to use. A positive copy is provided to the council whose records are filmed. This positive copy can be used on microfilm readers that are available in almost every public and college library. Most libraries have microfilm reader-printers that can make paper copies from the microfilm.

In addition to dealing with the problem of deterioration of paper records, microfilm further safeguards records through the production of multiple copies. In the event of a disaster that destroys one set of film, additional copies can be made from another set.

Besides preserving and safeguarding the information contained in records, microfilming provides several other advantages. The most important of these is making information more widely accessible. Additional positive copies can be made from master negatives relatively inexpensively, and researchers do not have to travel to the location where original records are stored. The compact size of the film makes shipment easy.

The Cost: The Presbyterian Historical Society makes every effort to keep costs as low as possible, contact the Reference Librarian in Philadelphia about estimates of the cost of filming your records.

Presbyterian Historical Society Recommendation: The Presbyterian Historical Society strongly urges you to consider having the permanent records of your council microfilmed. Permanent records include session registers, congregational meeting minutes, council minutes, minutes of organizations officially related to councils, and trustee and property records such as charters, deeds and articles of incorporation. If you have questions regarding the permanence of your materials, please contact the archivists at the Historical Society.

Shipping Records: Records should be securely wrapped and a dated inventory on the council's letterhead included in the package. The inventory should describe the type of records, the dates, and the number of volumes (e.g. session minutes, 1900-1980, 5 vols.) A copy of the inventory should be sent under separate cover. This inventory will be used to acknowledge receipt of the records. For further information about microfilming or your vital records, contact Microfilming Services or the Archives: Presbyterian Historical Society, 425 Lombard St, Philadelphia PA 19147-1516 ◦ 215-627-1852 or refdesk@history.pcusa.org

THE CHURCH ROLLS AND REGISTER

The counterpart of the Session Minute Book is the Church Register which contains all vital information on the life of the congregation. The clerk of session's responsibility is to keep it up to date.

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 fulfill details of birth, marriage and family data. Other congregations occasionally make requests for recorded information. When these records are accurately 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 (G-1.0401)
2. Active Member Roll (G-1.0402)
3. Affiliate Member Roll (G-1.0403)

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-3.0204a). In the case of a member moving to a different locality, it is appropriate to attempt to notify a congregation in their new location.

The session shall also keep a complete register of: (G-3.0204b)

1. Baptisms authorized by the session
2. Ruling elders and deacons
3. Installed pastors with dates of service
4. Other registers as the session deems necessary

The session can decide what details about each register are important.

MEMBERSHIP

Categories of Membership (G-1.04)

Baptized members (G-1.0401)

Active members (G-1.0402)

Affiliate members (G-1.0403)

Other participants (G-1.0404)

Entry into Membership (G-1.0303)

Public profession of faith

Certificate of transfer

Reaffirmation of faith

Deletion from Rolls(G-3.0204a)

The session shall delete names from the roll of the congregation upon the member's death, admission to membership in another congregation or renunciation of jurisdiction.

HOMEBOUND COMMUNION (W-3.3616e)

The Sacrament may be served by "two or more persons in ordered ministry (teaching elders, ruling elders, deacons) of the church, to those isolated from the community's worship provided:

- The elements are served following worship on the same calendar day...
- Care is taken...the reading of Scripture and the offering of prayers...
- Those serving have been instructed by the session...

CERTIFICATES USED IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Certificates may be used, but are not required, to denote Baptism, Church Membership, Ordination of Elders and Deacons, Dismissal (transfer of membership), and Marriage. The information on the certificates should agree with the records in the Session Record Book and the Church Register.

INSURANCE (G-3.0112)

Each council shall obtain property and liability coverage to protect its facilities, programs, staff, and elected and appointed officers.

INCORPORATION

“Whenever permitted by civil law, each particular church shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained.” (G-4.0101)

The members of an unincorporated church are liable for any debts or law suits against the church. In the case of an incorporated church, the corporation is liable. Congregations can be incorporated either with the State of Minnesota or with the county in which they are located. If a congregation is incorporated with the State of Minnesota, this status must be renewed annually through the Minnesota Secretary of State (www.sos.state.mn.us). If a church is incorporated with their county, it is a lifetime incorporation, broken only upon your request and does not require annual affirmation. The presbytery office appreciates a copy of your incorporation papers to be placed in your church’s file.

CHURCH PROPERTY (G-4.02)

According to the *Book of Order* (G-4.0203), “All property held by or for a particular church, a presbytery, synod, the General Assembly, or the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)...is held in trust nevertheless for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)”

When the congregation is buying, selling, leasing or encumbering church property (building, manse, assorted buildings or cemetery), communication with the presbytery is required. The Commission on Presbytery Operations is aware of finances through the presbytery, synod and General Assembly that can save many dollars and lower interest rates. When you seek synod or General Assembly loans, the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys is financially liable if the loan is in default.

Refer to Commission on Presbytery Operations Handbook for other financial information and policies.

PRESBYTERY MINUTES REVIEW (G-3.0108)

According to the *Book of Order*, the congregation’s minutes are to be reviewed by the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys annually or biannually. This is a constitutional responsibility of the presbytery. The presbytery’s minutes are reviewed by the Synod of Lakes and Prairies and the synod’s minutes are reviewed by the General Assembly. Thus, review of minutes is a vital part of the connectional Presbyterian system.

The session and all committees and organizations within the church must report all proceedings and actions to the congregation. The session will review and summarize these reports and incorporate them into the Session Minutes book.

The presbytery through the Session Records Task Force is ascertaining the following:

1. That proceedings have been correctly recorded;
2. That proceedings have been in accordance with the Constitution;
3. That proceedings have been prudent and equitable;
4. That proceedings have been faithful to the mission of the whole church;
5. That lawful injunctions of presbytery, synod and General Assembly have been followed.

ROBERT'S RULES, THE GOLDEN RULE & COMMON SENSE

What is 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 to transact our business, decently and in order.

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

Some Basic Assumptions to Consider

“The unity of the Church is a gift of its Lord and finds expression in its faithfulness to the mission to which Christ calls it.” (F-1.0302) 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.)

One of the historic principles of our Church is that we are to seek to know the will of God for our lives, yet we should exercise forbearance toward each other, understanding that “God alone is the Lord of the conscience...” (F-3.0101) 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.

As a presbytery and as a denomination, we believe “That the several different congregations of believers, taken collectively, constitute one Church of Christ, called emphatically the Church; that a larger part of the Church or a representation of it, should govern a smaller or determine matters of controversy...that the majority shall govern...” (F-3.02)

In other words, in all assemblies we must strive for a balance of expression of individual conscience and the will of the majority. As individuals, we have several rights: the right to know what is going on and why; the right to speak and 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 member’s 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, but there will be open debate.

Similarly, a vocal minority cannot bring back the same issue upon which the assembly has spoken, except through the rules of motions to reconsider or rescind. It is always out of order for an assembly at the same session to renew debate and to vote again on an issue, unless a person who voted with the majority moves to reconsider the issue.

Even though there is no battle, our polity carries the rights of the minority further with the right to dissent and protest as outlined in G-3.0105.

On Making Motions at a Meeting of Presbytery

Elder or clergy commissioners to the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys, have the right to make motions. To make a motion, rise from your seat, wait until the moderator recognizes you, state your name and affiliation, then simply and clearly state: “Mr./Ms. Moderator, I move the following motion and if seconded will speak to it.” State your motion. It is not discussion time until the motion has been seconded and the moderator invites you to speak to the motion. All motions of any length must be given in writing to the stated clerk. This is imperative if debate is lengthy. Only one motion will be considered at a time.

A motion, whether at a presbytery or a session meeting should clearly state: what is the motion, who is affected, when it is to be done, how it will be done and why it will be done.

Motions

Main Motion: Any motion which proposes an action to be taken by the council. Main motions are debatable.

To Amend: A motion to amend is to perfect the main motion; therefore an amendment contrary to the intent of the main motion is out of order. A motion to amend a motion takes precedence over the main motion. It must be adopted or rejected before the main motion is considered. If adopted, it becomes a part of the main motion. It is debatable.

To Substitute: A motion to substitute is the form of amendment. It takes precedence over a main motion. If approved, it replaces the main motion.

To Postpone Indefinitely: This is a motion to kill consideration. It is debatable.

To Postpone Definitely: This motion includes a specific time and/or date on which this motion will be presented to the deliberative body. It is debatable and may be amended.

To Commit or Refer: A motion to refer must include the body to which this action is referred. The desirability or the details of the referral are debatable, but the matter being referred is not under debate.

To Reconsider: Once a question has been decided, it must not be reconsidered again at the same assembly, unless a motion to reconsider is made by a person who voted with the majority. It is debatable.

To Move the Previous Question: This is a motion to close debate and to bring the issue to vote. The motion must say, "I move the previous question." A voice calling out, "Question" is not appropriate and should be ignored. This motion requires a 2/3 vote and should not be used to close off debate or opposition prematurely. The moderator can rule, prior to the vote, that in their judgment there has not been sufficient debate and that the motion is out of order. This motion requires a second and is not debatable

WHEN YOU HAVE PROBLEMS

Step 1: Try to find the answer in the *Book of Order*. This book has evolved over many years and is always your first guideline. The experience of familiarizing yourself with the *Book of Order* will aid in finding other answers ahead of time.

Step 2: If appropriate, discuss these problems or questions with the pastor or moderator.

Step 3: If you still have a question, call the stated clerk, who is well acquainted with polity and policies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys.

An important point is that clerks of sessions should seek help when a problem first arises, rather than wait for it to become a detriment to the life and work of the church. In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we are all a part of the connectional family.

Sample Bylaws of a Particular Congregation

I. Statement of Purpose or Mission

The Presbyterian Church of _____ has been called by God and organized to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, to minister to the needs of members of the congregation and residents of the community, and to promote peace and justice in the world.

II. Relation to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The _____ Presbyterian Church is a member church of the Presbytery of _____ in the Synod of _____ of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

III. Governance of the Church (G.1.0103)

This congregation shall be governed in accordance with the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*. Consistent with that *Constitution*, these bylaws shall provide specific guidance for this church. The members of the congregation put themselves under the leadership of the session and the higher councils (the Presbytery of MN Valleys, the Synod of Lakes and Prairies and the General Assembly) *Roberts Rules of Order (Newly Revised)* (G.3.0105) shall be used for parliamentary guidance.

IV. Meetings of the Church (G.1.0501)

There shall be an annual meeting of the congregation. *Own rule about when and what to include*. Special meetings may be called by the session. Such calls shall state clearly the purpose of such special meetings, and business shall be restricted to that which is specified in the call. (G-1.0501) The business proper for a congregational meeting (G-1.0503) shall be limited to: electing ruling elders, deacons, and trustees; calling a pastor, co-pastor or associate pastor; changing existing pastoral relationships (terms of call and/or dissolution of relationship), buying, mortgaging or selling real property and/or requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption as permitted in this Constitution (G-2.0404).

V. Notice of Meetings (G.1.0502)

Adequate public notice of all congregational meetings shall be given, including notice given at regular services of worship prior to the meeting. *Own rule of minimum notification specified*. (G-1.0502)

VI. Moderator (G.10504)

The installed pastor shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the congregation. If it is impractical for the pastor to preside, 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 the installed pastor is unable to moderate and/or to name another moderator, the presbytery shall make provision for a moderator.

VII. Secretary (G.1.0505)

The clerk of session shall serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If the clerk is not present or is unable to serve, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting.

VIII Minutes of the Meeting

The secretary shall record the actions of the congregation in minutes of the meeting. (G-1.0505) *own rule about attestation*.

IX. Quorum for the Meeting (G-1.0501)

The quorum of a meeting of the congregation shall be *own rule for quorum*. The clerk shall determine if a quorum is present. All active members of the congregation present at either annual or special meetings are entitled to vote. Voting by proxy is not allowed. Consistent with the laws of Minnesota, voting is restricted to active members age 18 and above on all corporate matters (i.e. changing by-laws or articles of incorporation).

X. Incorporation (G.4.0101)

In accordance with the laws of the state of Minnesota, the congregation shall cause a corporation to be formed. Consistent with the laws of this state, both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be conducted at the same meeting of the congregation. (G-1.0503).

(Note: Since the pastor or moderator is not a member of the corporation, consistent with Article VI, a member of the session shall be invited to moderate the meeting when corporate matters appear on the agenda. The elders serving on the session shall serve at the same time as trustees.)

XI. Nominating Committee (See G-2.0401)

The congregation shall form a nominating committee in the following manner:

(Congregation will need to determine process for election of a nominating committee)

- (1) There shall be _____ active members on the nominating committee. (at least three)
- (2) One of the members shall be ruling elder who is currently serving on the session.
- (3) The pastor shall be a member ex officio and without vote.
- (4) Full opportunity shall always be given to the congregation for nomination from the floor of the congregational meeting by any active member of the congregation.
- (5) A majority of all active members present and voting shall be required to elect.

XII. Ruling Elders (G.2.03)

Ruling elders shall be elected to serve terms of no more than three years on the session, and may be eligible for reelection according to congregational rule. However no ruling elder shall be eligible to serve more than six consecutive years; ruling elders who have served for six consecutive years shall be ineligible for election to the same board for at least one year.

The session shall elect a ruling elder to serve as clerk for such term as it may determine. (G-3.0104).

The session shall elect a treasurer for such term as the session shall decide (G-3.0205). A quorum (G-3.0203) for the session shall be the moderator and what the session decides either a specific number of ruling elders or a percentage.

XIII. Deacons (G-2.02)

Deacons are under the supervision and authority of the session (G-2.0202). Deacons shall be elected to serve terms of no more than three years on the session, and may be eligible for reelection according to congregational rule. However no deacon shall be eligible to serve more than six consecutive years; deacons who have served for six consecutive years shall be ineligible for election to the same board for at least one year.

The board of deacons shall elect a moderator and a secretary from among its members and shall form such committees as necessary to carry out its work. The pastor shall be an advisory member of the board of deacons. A quorum for the board of deacons shall be (number or percentage of members) including the moderator.

XIV. Vacancies

Vacancies on the session or the board of deacons may be filled at a special meeting of the congregation or at the annual meeting, as the session may determine.

XV. Amendments

These bylaws may be amended subject to the Articles of Incorporation, the laws of the state of Minnesota and the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* by a two-thirds vote of the voters present, providing that the proposed changes in printed form shall have been distributed at the same time as the call of the meeting at which the changes are voted upon.

Manual of Administrative Operation

In the presbytery, synod, and General Assembly, a manual of administrative operation is required (G-3.0106). Below is a partial listing of materials to include in the manual.

- (1) *Originating Documents*
 - (a) organizing covenant
 - (b) list of charter members
 - (c) articles of incorporation

- (d) bylaws
- (e) mission statement
- (2) *Nominating, Electing, and Ordaining/Installing*
 - (a) description of the work of the church officer nominating committee
 - (b) elements in the examination by the session of those elected
 - (c) procedure on the day for ordination/installation
- (3) *Membership (G-1.03)*
 - (a) procedures for contact and invitation for membership
 - (b) procedures for removing names from the roll
- (4) *Committees and Organizations*
 - (a) job description of the work of each committee and organization
 - (b) description of annual sequence of the work required for each committee and organization
 - (c) time, place, and frequency of meetings of each committee and organization
 - (d) expectations of persons serving on committees and organizations
- (5) *Contact with the Presbytery*
 - (a) list of presbytery commissioners
- (6) *Personnel*
 - (a) position description for each church staff position—paid or volunteer
 - (b) personnel policies
 - (c) forms used in hiring, including disclosure forms for prior charges or conviction in sexual misconduct and sexual abuse
 - (d) description of performance review and compensation review procedure
- (7) *Finances*
 - (a) church budget
 - (b) description of procedure for stewardship and pledging
 - (c) procedures for counting the offering
- (8) *Calendar*
 - church calendar of events during the year
- (9) *Annual Meeting*
 - description of preparation for the annual meeting with copy of last meeting
- (10) *Worship and Sacraments*
 - (a) instructions for ushers
 - (b) instructions for greeters
 - (c) instructions for those serving communion
 - (d) instructions for those preparing communion
 - (e) procedure for elder assisting in baptism
- (11) *Policies*
 - (a) Sexual Misconduct Policy (G-3.0106)
 - (b) Child Protection Policy (G-3.0106)

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