



**SEATTLE PRESBYTERY**

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

**HANDBOOK**

**FOR**

**CLERKS OF SESSION**

*This handbook is dedicated to all of the Clerks of Session of the Presbytery of Seattle, both past and present. I am deeply indebted to the Rev. Dick Coffelt, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon, who has so generously given permission for us to adapt portions of their Manual for our use here in the Presbytery of Seattle. The format and significant portions of content have been copied directly.*

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January 2009

# HANDBOOK FOR CLERKS OF SESSION

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## FORWORD

The Handbook for Clerks of Session is written for clerks by clerks as a guide to the responsibilities of the clerk of session. It is written with the following assumptions:

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

A clerk of a governing body understands that our order is to be derived from Scripture, as it is expressed in the Confession of our church. Our order expresses the principle that we must live our lives together in accord with our faith and as witness to the demands of Scripture. A clerk of a governing body respects the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) as our covenant with one another about how we can, in our diversity, be such a witness. And a clerk knows that our rules are never an end in themselves, but rather an attempt to be faithful to our covenant. Our polity commits to a shared ministry among elders, deacons, members and ministers of Word and Sacrament: it commits to a representative form of government in which elders and ministers 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”, which 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
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. (G-1.0200)

## ARE YOU A NEW CLERK?

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

1. Locate the Minutes Book and Church Register. Locate all previous record books. Are they properly stored? *These records should never be taken from the church (except when being read by Presbytery's Committee on Session Records) and should be kept in a fire proof safe when not in use. You are the only person who can authorize entries into these books.*
2. Locate or obtain a current Book of Order. Chapter Ten tells about the duties of session. You will find most of the information you need immediately in this chapter.
3. Locate copy of your church bylaws and congregational charter. Where the Book of Order is silent, the congregation's bylaws will often tell you what needs to be done.
4. Locate or obtain a copy of the "Companion to the Constitution" published by the Presbyterian Church (USA). You will find a great deal of helpful information in this book. Copies are available from Presbyterian Distribution Service.
5. Plan to attend clerk's training events as they are offered. Here you will receive answers to your questions, and additional help. You will find the fellowship with other clerks of session invaluable.
6. Where to go for information and supplies:
  - **The Office of the Stated Clerk**, Presbytery of Seattle
  - **206-762-1991x12** or
  - [dennis@northminsterpres.org](mailto:dennis@northminsterpres.org)
  - **Information about processes**, forms, and other documents from Seattle Presbytery are available on Spirit-Net. Go to [www.presbytery.org](http://www.presbytery.org) and place your cursor on "Resources" at the top of the page. Slide the cursor down to "Sessions" and click. There is a section particularly for Clerks of Session, in addition to a wealth of other information that may be needed from time to time.
  - **Cokesbury Books** and Church Supplies, 12703 NE 124<sup>th</sup> St, Kirkland. Telephone # is 425-820-1213
    - Church Register, Minute Books pages**      **Certificates of Ordination and Installation**
    - Baptism Certificates**                              **Books of Order and Confession**
  - **Presbyterian Distribution Service**, 3906 Produce Road, Louisville, KY 40218, Telephone # 1-800-524-2612.
    - Publications ie The Companion to the Constitution, Planning Calendars, curriculum, etc**

## THE CLERK AND THE SESSION

### BEFORE THE MEETING

1. **Plan the docket with the Moderator:** It is the responsibility of the clerk of session and the moderator of session to prepare the docket so that all business is handled in the most efficient manner. The docket becomes the outline for the session minutes. (A sample docket appears at the end of this section).
2. **Meeting notices:** send or arrange to have sent, notices of the meeting. It is helpful to accompany these notices with reminders to committee chairs of reports due and docketed, business referred, previous assignments. Reasonable notice of all special meetings must be given when other than routine business is to be transacted (G-10.0201).
3. Most sessions have found that written reports enable the flow of business. In such reports historical and informational material always comes first in the report and recommendations come last. Only the recommendations appear in session minutes unless session orders the entire report spread on the minutes. Many sessions find it very helpful for committees to have their reports ready in time to be mailed with the call of the meeting.

### TAKE TO THE MEETING

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

\***current** Book of Order

\*congregational bylaws (contents of a notebook for all session members appear at the end of this section)

\*session committee membership lists;

\*current - year session minutes;

\*a list of all referred and unfinished business.

### DURING THE SESSION MEETING

Session **cannot** meet without its moderator, who normally is the pastor of the church. If the moderator is absent or ill, the moderator may appoint another minister of Presbytery to moderate the session, or with the approval of the pastor, may elect one of its own members to preside. If your pulpit is vacant, presbytery will have appointed a moderator for session.

A quorum of session must be present to have a legal meeting at which actions may be taken. The quorum of session is one - third of the total membership except for reception and dismissal of

members, in which case the moderator and two elders is sufficient. (G-10.0202)

Session meetings in most churches are informal. However, as clerk, **require** that **all** actions by session be voted upon. As clerk, you can **require** that all motions be in writing. Stop the meeting if you must until you are given the exact wording of the motion in writing.

Include the name of the maker of each motion made, i.e. an individual, a committee, department, etc.

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

**What** exactly is going to be done?

**Who** is going to do it?

**When** will it be completed or reported?

**How** much will it cost?

**Where** will the money come from?

**Is** the action compatible with the Book of Order? (*If it is not, the action is null and void.*)

**Do Not** include general discussion in your minutes -- only main motions made and subsidiary motions adopted are required. However, it may be wise upon occasion to include some brief background information for historical purposes.

**Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, Scott, Foresman**, editor ( latest edition) governs all the procedures of session in all cases not specifically provided for by the Book of Order. **(G-9.0302)**

## AFTER THE MEETING

Write up the minutes immediately, transcribe, and submit them to the Session for review and approval. Do not include attachments or place inserts in the Minutes Book. If necessary, photocopy whatever must be included onto sequentially numbered minutes paper (**Recommended for page 1 of the annual General Assembly Statistical Report or reports to be spread on the minutes.**)

Make all necessary entries into the rolls and registers. No entry should be made unless a session action which appears in the minutes directs the entry.

Complete or dictate all necessary correspondence related to the actions of session. Within the church, **all** communication is from **clerk to clerk** or from **clerk to stated clerk**. The clerk's signature (not the moderator's or the secretary's signature) authenticates any document coming from the session.

**The clerk of session supervises the church secretary in all matters related to the minutes and rolls and register.** The accuracy of these records is the clerk's responsibility, **not** the secretary's.

## SESSION DOCKET

*Here is a sample docket of the business which should take place at a session meeting. Use it to guide*

*you preparation of the session docket.*

1. Constitute meeting with prayer.
2. Roll (present, excused, absent)
3. Approve minutes of previous meeting
4. Report of Clerk
  - Correspondence received and referrals
  - Unfinished business to be completed
5. Report of Pastor
  - Baptisms requested / Baptisms performed
  - Communion Served
  - Weddings
  - Funerals
  - Other information such as people in hospital, people needing visits
6. Report of the Treasurer
7. Report of Commissioner to Presbytery and appointment of commissioner to next Presbytery meeting.
8. Reports of session committees
9. Reports of commissions or special committees
10. For churches with a unicameral board - at least annually, or in accordance with the congregation's By-Laws, recess the Session meeting and reconvene as the board of trustees to elect officers and conduct any other appropriate business. Adjourn as the Board of Trustees and reconvene the regular Session meeting with prayer.
11. At least annually, meet with the Board of Deacons
12. New Business
13. Adjournment with Prayer

**SESSION'S CONTINUING EDUCATION  
(G-10.0102)**

National studies show that very few elders understand their office, or the history, theology and polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The Book of Order requires the session plan for the continuing education of its elders.

**A NOTEBOOK FOR SESSION MEMBERS**

Some churches have developed notebooks, or manuals, for each session member that includes the necessary documents and information for intelligent decision making. Such a tool is particularly helpful in orienting new session members to their task. Here follows a suggestion for index tabs for such a notebook.

Introduction

Church History

Includes a list of programs and activities with contact people, telephone numbers, meetings times and places.

Church Officers and Staff

includes names, addresses and telephone numbers

Bylaws of the Congregation

Functions, Duties and Responsibilities

includes ordination vows

Session Committees - Objectives and Duties

includes list of committee membership

Other Committees

Deacons

Presbyterian Women

Presbyterian Men

Annual Budget

Special Purpose Funds

Special Rules and Regulations

Session Minutes

Church Members

Notes

## **SESSION AND ITS RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS**

The Session is responsible for the mission and government of the particular church. G-10.0102 lists specific responsibilities and powers. **All organizations of the congregation are accountable to session and should make a financial and programmatic report to session and the congregation annually.**

### **Board of Trustees ( G-7.0400; G-8.0000)**

The board of trustees is accountable to the session. Their powers as trustees are listed in G-7.0402 and shall not infringe on the powers of session.

G-7.0401 provides that active elders shall be the trustees of the corporation unless the by laws provide otherwise. Having such a unicameral board eliminates conflicts between the session and the board of trustees.

**(Recommendation for bi-cameral board:** It is possible for session to delegate powers to the trustees, although session is still responsible for the delegated powers.)

**(Recommendation for bi-cameral board :** the budget should be prepared by the board of trustees and the session together.)

### **The Board of Deacons (G-6.0400)**

The board of deacons is accountable to session; chooses its own officers; meets annually with the session; and must submit its plans to session for approval. The pastors are advisory members of the board of deacons.

### **Nominating Committee (G-14.0223)**

The church nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not of the session. It does not report to session, although the committee may wish to consult with session. The pastor is an ex-officio member of this committee. It is the Session's responsibility to examine officers-elect and to ordain and install them.

### **Pastor Nominating Committee (G-14.0531)**

The pastor nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not of session.

The committee has several points of contact with the session:

- \*the pastor nominating committee develops the church information form and the long-range plan.
- \*the session approves both documents
- \*the committee negotiates the salary of the new pastor in consultation with the session/board of trustees.
- \*the committee requests session to call a congregational meeting when it is ready to bring a candidate.

### **Session and Personnel (G-10.0102m)**

Session supervises all ordained and unordained personnel. Session recommends to the congregation the salaries of all ordained personnel. This recommendation must meet the

minimum guidelines set by presbytery.

**Outside Organizations using church property**

Session controls the use of all church property, even to granting permission for the sanctuary to be used for weddings. **A church shall not lease its real property used for purposes of worship, or lease for more than five years any of its other real property, without written permission of the presbytery. G-08.0502**

**If outside organizations use your building, review the Book of Order G-8.0000 and confer with the Finance Committee as directed.** Any organization using church facilities should provide evidence of proper insurance coverage for their organization and a rider naming your church as additionally insured for the activities they conduct on your premises.

The purpose of an organization using the church should not be contrary to the mission of the congregation or of the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is wise to have a written contract with all organizations using the church building, stipulating any rental fee, maintenance standards, and rooms of the church to be used.

**FINAL IMPORTANT NOTE: You are a non-profit organization. Your tax exempt status, as granted by the State of Washington, will be at risk if you allow for-profit organizations to use your facilities.**

## **THE CLERK AND THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING**

### **TIPS FOR CLERKING THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING**

The clerk of session is the secretary of meetings of the congregation. **G-7.0307**  
The congregation minutes are signed by the moderator and the clerk.

The Book of Order requires “due notice” for the calling of a congregational meeting. At the very least, public notice must be given to the congregation the Sunday before and the Sunday of the meeting. **G-7.0303b.**

A congregational meeting may be called only by session, presbytery, or one-fourth of the members of the congregation on the active roll. **G-7.0303**

What business may be done at a congregational meeting? (Very little) **G-7.0304**

- Matters related to the election of elders, deacons and trustees
- Matters related to the calling of a pastor or pastors
- Matters related to the pastoral relationship such as changes in the terms of the call or requesting, consenting, or declining to consent to dissolution of a call
- Matters related to buying, mortgaging or selling real property
- Matters related to the permissive powers of the congregation

As clerk you should take particular care to alert the moderator of the congregational meeting when business is out of order. You will find a careful listing of such business in the Book of Order (“permissive powers” relates to adopting congregational bylaws, establishment of a unicameral board, waivers from election of officers, raising of the quorum, and buying, selling, and mortgaging of real property.) **The budget is adopted by session, not the congregation.** However, session must inform the congregation of the budget. If the congregation does not approve of the use of its gifts, the members will not give. (**Recommendation:** at an informal meeting of the congregation after worship or a church supper, session should present the budget, invite comment, and solicit suggestions. **No actions should be taken at this type of meeting.**)

**The pastor(s) salary must be approved by the congregation and reported to presbytery for its approval.** The Committee on Ministry will provide this form. The congregation :approves the pastor’s salary for recommendation to Presbytery.” **G7.0302; G-7.0304(3)**

Proxy voting is not permitted in church meetings, ecclesiastical or corporate.

Always be prepared for a ballot vote to elect officers. If there is more than one nominee for an office, the election must be by ballot. The election of a pastor is always by ballot. (The Presbytery of Seattle adopted the 2005-2007 Book of Order as our Advisory Handbook, and it requires pastoral election by paper ballot). **Recommendation to avoid trouble:** Since only

members on the active roll can vote, have your roll book current. Bring it with you to the meeting. If there is considerable tension about a particular vote, have active members of the congregation come to your desk to pick up a ballot.

Minutes of the congregational meeting may be approved before adjournment. However, the session may approve the minutes and report its action at the next congregational meeting. **G-7.0307.** Minutes of the congregational meeting must be signed by both the moderator and the clerk. Check the Book of Order and your bylaws for the quorum of the congregational meeting. **G-7.0305**

If your congregation does not have bylaws, please contact the stated clerk for information about how to establish them.

## **THE CORPORATION AND CORPORATE MEETINGS**

Churches in the State of Washington are required to cause a separate corporation to be formed and maintained. This occurs at the time of chartering of a new congregation. Active members of the congregation are members of the corporation and eligible for election as trustees. The session and the board of trustees may be one and the same. In that dual capacity, the session serves as an ecclesiastical governing body and the trustees serve as officers of a civil corporation. The State of Washington allows for another arrangement for trustees, so that a board of trustees separate from the session may be elected, provided that the nominating committee for the trustees is elected by the corporation and that terms for trustees are provided as they are provided for the elders.

The powers of the Corporation are listed in **G-7.0402. The trustees carry out their work subject to the authority of the Session.** In no case shall the powers of the trustees infringe on the powers of the session or the board of deacons (**G-7.0401**).

The Clerk of Session should be very familiar with his/her own church's constitutional charter and by-laws in order to understand his/her role, if any, in the corporation. It is appropriate for the trustees to review the by-laws periodically (five to ten years) to be sure they accurately reflect how the corporation functions.

## THE CLERK AND RECORDS

### HOW TO KEEP THE CHURCH ROLLS AND REGISTER

Church Rolls and Registers are Legal Documents

Presbytery checks your rolls and registers annually. The roll and registers are checked against session minutes. You will find your responsibilities related to the rolls and registers in the Book of Order (G-10.0300.) Read these pages carefully.

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

### ROLLS

The church rolls record every member who has ever belonged to your church. These rolls must be kept current. The official church rolls may **not** be kept in a card file or on a computer. There are five church rolls.

- a. Chronological roll: The chronological roll has numbers down the left side of a double page. Each member of the church is assigned a number at the time that person joins the church. Columns to the right offer space for necessary comments from time to time. A name is removed from the roll by action of session or because of death. The only ways a name can be removed are by a transfer to another church, transfer to the inactive roll, removal from the inactive roll, death, ordination to Ministry of Word and Sacrament, deletion or removal from membership.
- B. Alphabetical roll: The alphabetical roll groups church members according to the first letter of their last names. This roll is cross-indexed with the chronological roll by membership number.
- C. Baptized roll: For most churches, the baptized roll is the same as the register of baptisms. The baptized roll lists all infants, children and adults baptized in your church or transferred into your church with the name of the minister who baptized them. In the case of infant baptisms, the parents names must be listed. In the case of adult baptism, the name of the person baptized is always entered on the chronological and alphabetical rolls. Adult baptism is always accompanied by joining the church and joining the church is always accompanied by baptism if the person is unbaptized. The only ways a name can be removed from the baptized roll are by profession of faith, transfer, death.
- D. Inactive roll: The inactive roll lists the names of members of the church, who in the judgement of session, have willfully let their active membership in the church lapse. The person must have been inactive for at least one year and session must have diligently tried to discover the cause of the member's non-participation.

- E. Affiliate roll: The affiliate roll enable a member who is away from his/her home church to join temporarily another church while remaining on the active roll of the home church. It must be renewed every two years. It is a very helpful roll for college students and others who are here on a temporary basis.

\*NOTE: to fill out the question on the General Assembly statistical report on “number of persons on the baptized roll’, count the names listed on your baptized roll, or register of baptisms. This includes minor children of active members and/or ministers, and any other persons baptized in your church for whom the church feels a current pastoral responsibility. If your roll book does not have a baptized roll, it will be necessary for you to use the register of baptisms. In this event you will need to make note of the changes on the register related to the changes in membership. Do not obliterate any name from the baptized register. This is an historical document.

## TIPS ON MAINTAINING THE ROLLS

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

1. Session receives Mr. and Mrs. Adams into membership and that action is recorded in the session minute book.
2. Record “John Edward Adams” on the chronological roll opposite the first free membership number. Indicate the way Mr. Adams joined the church ( by certificate) and the date of the session action.
3. Record “Mary (maiden name) Adams (Mrs. John E)” on the chronological roll opposite the next free membership number exactly the same way you listed Mr. Adams.
4. List both new members on the alphabetical roll ( the “A” page) with their membership number.

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

1. List Bryan Lee Adams on the baptized member roll ( register if you do not have a roll) with the date and place of his baptism, and his parents’ names. His mother’s name is recorded as “Mary (maiden name) Adams.”

*Mr. and Mrs. Adam’s infant daughter, Sarah, is baptized after they join the church.*

1. List Sarah Jane Adams on the baptized members’ roll and the register in exactly the same way in which Bryan’s name was listed.

\*If Sarah is the daughter of a single mother who did not wish to state the father’s name, list only the mother’s name.

\*If Sarah is adopted or a legal ward of Mr. and Mrs. Adams, their names are listed as the parents of Sarah.

\*If Sarah is a ward of the court she cannot be baptized without permission of the parents or the court. Her legal parents’ names are listed.

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

1. List Richard Adams on the chronological roll, indicating that he was baptized when he joined the church. List him also on the alphabetical roll and the baptized register, noting the date he made a profession of faith and joined the church. Richard cannot be baptized as an adult without a profession of faith, which makes him a member of the church.

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

1. As clerk you must inform session that since her absence is involuntary she cannot be removed from the roll and session continues to be responsible for her nurture.

*Billy Willmer hasn't been to church for over five years. Session discovers he went straight to graduate school after college graduation.*

1. Write both Billy Willmer and a church located near his school suggesting that he affiliate with the church temporarily. Do not place him on the inactive roll unless you receive no response from him.

*Mable Frisch, who lives in town, has not been to church for over a year. Members of session have called upon her several times to no avail. Session votes to place her name on the inactive roll.*

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

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

1. Session votes to remove Mabel Frisch from the rolls.
2. You draw a thin ink line through her name on the inactive roll and on the chronological roll, noting the date of removal.

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

1. Session votes to transfer Mr. Parr.
2. You fill out the transfer certificate, noting on the back of the form the ordination Mr. Parr holds and the date of ordination and the dates of service.
3. You draw a thin ink line through his name on the chronological roll, noting the date of transfer after you receive his certificate of reception.

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

1. You note Jeffrey's name and date and place of baptism on the back of Mrs. Parr's transfer form.
2. You note on the baptized member's roll that Jeffrey's baptism was transferred to first Church, St. Louis.

*Mary Jones dies in the nursing home.*

1. Report her death at the next regular session meeting.
2. You draw a thin line through her name on the chronological roll, noting the date of death.
3. If you have a death register, list Mary Jones' name in the register along with date of death, place of death and place of burial.

## **TIPS ON KEEPING THE REGISTERS**

Detailed instructions for keeping the registers may be found in the Book of Order (G-10.0302c.)  
The registers are:

- a. Register of Baptized Persons
- b. Register of Marriages
- c. Register of Pastors
- d. Register of Elders
- e. Register of Deacons
- f. Register of Trustees

## **GUIDELINES FOR KEEPING MINUTES**

### **SESSION RECORDS BOOK**

#### **APPEARANCE**

1. Use the standard loose-leaf minute book. (See page 4 for information about ordering supplies from Cokesbury)
2. The leaves should be:
  - a. Of uniform size and style
  - b. Numbered consecutively and uniformly ( a mechanical numbering machine is preferable. One is available in the Presbytery office for use.
  - c. held in place in an automatically locking binder.
  - d. ultimately bound in permanent book form of not more than 400 pages.
3. All minutes and records should be typewritten, not handwritten.
4. Do not leave blank pages or blank space of more than two inches on any page. If space is left, cross it out with pen and ink.
5. Do not insert into records any written or printed matter on separate sheets of paper.
6. Minutes should be typed into the official record book only after review, correction and approval. If, however, a later revision becomes necessary, an entry in ink can be made in the margin, indicating the entry changed, the type of change, and reference forward to the new page where the change is authorized. The Clerk should initial the marginal note.
7. Take care to prevent loss of the minute book. While the cost of the minute book may be recoverable by insurance, the loss of the minutes may be non-recoverable unless you have arranged to keep photocopies in a separate location; and/or make regular backups of computer minutes; and/or arranged for microfilming of these records. The Book of Order now explicitly recommends that the official records of the church be microfilmed. See page 25 of this manual for more information.

## **A. ENTRIES TO BE RECORDED AT EVERY MEETING**

1. **RECORD DATE, TIME, AND THE TYPE OF MEETING.** The type of meeting should be identified: session, congregation, regular, special, annual.
2. **INDICATE THAT THE MEETING OPENED WITH PRAYER**
3. **IDENTIFY MODERATOR OF MEETING** Ordinarily the Pastor, Interim or Stated Supply, is the moderator. In cases where another moderator is present the reason and name of person should be given.
4. **RECORD ELDERS PRESENT, ABSENT AND EXCUSED.**
5. **INDICATE THAT A QUORUM IS PRESENT.** The Book of Order defines a quorum for the session (G-10.0202), but gives the session authority to establish a higher quorum for its own meetings.
6. **RECORD APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES.** Ordinarily, minutes shall be approved at the next regular meeting of the session. They should be identified by date and type of meeting, and any corrections noted. While not required, it is expedient for the congregation to authorize approval of its minutes by the session. To avoid the need for confusing corrections, it is suggested that minutes not be entered in the Record Book until after their approval.
7. **ENTER MINUTES OF CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS IN THE RECORD BOOK.** Minutes from the annual congregational meeting and any specially called congregational meeting shall be entered in the session's minute book, and signed by both the Moderator and the Clerk (G-7.0307)
8. **RECORD ALL ADOPTED MOTIONS.**  
 Defeated motions need not appear in the minutes except by actions of the session. Record motions with all pertinent information included, reference to other documents, which do not appear in the minutes, should be avoided whenever possible. Record presentation of committee reports **without** including the content of the report unless directed to do so by the session. Record only that which is vital to the transactions of the meeting or of historical value.
9. **INDICATE THAT THE MEETING CLOSED WITH PRAYER.**
10. **SIGN THE MINUTES.**  
 When the minutes have been entered in the Record Book, Session minutes must be signed by the clerk or the moderator. Congregational meeting minutes must be

signed by the clerk and the moderator (G7.0307). Minutes entered in the Record Book should appear without erasures and inter-lineation. If corrections must be made, corrected section appear in the minutes following discovery of the error, with a handwritten signed or initialed note in the margin by the error indicating the page where the correction has been made. Under no circumstances may a page be permanently removed from the Record Book.

**B. ENTRIES TO BE RECORDED AS NEEDED OR INDICATED.**

1. **RECORD THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**  
Observance of the Lord's Supper should be authorized by session. All regular and special celebrations of the Lord's Supper should be recorded in the minutes of the next regular session meeting. While it is required to report only that the Supper was served, it may be advantageous for the church's historical record or worship attendance, to record how many people partook.
2. **RECORD THE PRIVATE ADMINISTRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**  
When the Lord's Supper is administered privately with the sick the minutes should record it, and who was present. (W-2.4010)
3. **RECORD THE CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM.**  
All celebrations of Baptism should be recorded in the minutes of the next regular meeting of the session, indicating who was baptized and when. Note that ordinarily, the session shall authorize baptisms.
4. **RECORD PERSONS WHO ARE BAPTIZED.**  
When an infant is baptized, the minutes shall record the infant's full name, the name of parents, and date of birth. The information is then recorded on the Roll of Baptized Members. The Baptized member Roll includes the children baptized in your church and names of children of members who were baptized in other congregations. When an adult is baptized, the minutes include the full name of person and is recorded on roll of adult baptisms.
5. **RECORD NEW MEMBERS RECEIVED.**  
When new members are received by the session, the minutes shall record the individual's full name; the name of their baptized children, if any; the date and place of previous ordination as elder or deacon, if any, how they were received (profession or reaffirmation of faith or letter of transfer), and name of dismissing church. This information shall then be entered in the Roll and Records.

6. **RECORD MEMBERS DISMISSED**

When church members are dismissed, the minutes shall record the individual's full name; names of their baptized children, if any; the record of their ordination as elder or deacon if any; how they were dismissed (transfer, removal of inactive roll, dropped from rolls); and in the case of person dismissed by letter of transfer, the name and location of the church receiving them ( the number assigned to each member in the Chronological roll should be recorded with the name.) This information shall then be entered in the Rolls and Records. The Book of Order G 10.0302b outlines the grounds and process for dismissal of church members.

7. **RECORD THE DEATH OF CHURCH MEMBERS**

When a member dies, that death should be reported to the session, and the minutes should note the individual's full name, date of death, and if he or she was an elder. This information shall then be entered in the chronological Roll. A special roll of those who died is no longer required.

8. **RECORD TRANSFER OF MEMBERS ON THE CHURCH ROLLS.**

When church members are transferred from one membership to another ( e.g. Active to Inactive, Baptized Members to Active Members, etc.), the minutes should record the individual's full name ( the number assigned to each members in the Chronological roll should be recorded with the name) and the session's actions.

9. **RECORD MARRIAGES**

All marriage of church members, all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the church, and all marriages performed on church property shall be reported to the session and included in its minutes. This information shall then be entered in the Register of Marriages (G10.0303c).

10. **RECORD ELDERS AND DEACONS ELECTED TO SERVICE**

When new elders and deacons are elected to be ordained and installed, the minutes shall record the individual's full name, completion of period of study, and session examination (G14.0205), the date of ordination and installation. This information shall then be entered in the appropriate Register of Elders or Deacons. The installation of pastors should also be noted, with the dates of their service in the present church.

11. **RECORD COMMISSIONERS TO OTHER GOVERNING BODIES OF THE CHURCH**

When elders are elected by session as commissioners to Presbytery, or nominated as commissioners to Synod or General Assembly, the minutes shall record the individual's name and how long they have been elected to serve. It may also be

advantageous, upon completion of the term of service, to record the individual's attendance and fidelity to the task.

12. **RECORD DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS.**

When the session finds it necessary to exercise discipline, the Book of Order, "Rules of Discipline" should be carefully studied. If discipline be administered, the minutes must contain such a record of the proceedings so the Presbytery will know who was disciplined, why and how. Check with Stated Clerk for any questions on procedure.

13. **REPORT TO SESSION ON PRESBYTERY'S REVIEW OF SESSION RECORDS**

When the session's records have been reviewed by the Presbytery, that report should be received by the session and appropriate actions taken to adjust or correct the records as indicated.

14. **FURTHER SUGGESTIONS:** It would be helpful, when referring to church members in the minutes, to identify them by the number where they may be found on the Membership Roll. In addition, it is advantageous when actions are taken in specific compliance with the Book of Order (e.g. disciplinary action, removal of members, etc.) for the appropriate paragraph number to be identified.

C. **ENTRIES TO BE RECORDED ANNUALLY**

1. **RECORD ANNUAL REVIEW OF PASTOR'S COMPENSATION**

It is the responsibility of the session to review annually the adequacy of compensation which the church provides its pastor(s). (G10.0102m & 7.0302). It should be reported to the session when this review has taken place, and the session minutes should note it.

2. **RECORD ANNUAL FINANCIAL AUDIT OR FULL FINANCIAL REVIEW**

The church's financial records shall be audited annually (G10.0401d). An audit is defined to be "an examination of review of financial statements and records to determine that they present fairly the financial position and results of operation fro the period then ended". It should be reported to the session when this has been done, and the minutes should note it. The audit itself does not need to be in the minutes.

3. **RECORD ANNUAL JOINT MEETING WITH BOARD OF DEACONS**  
The Book of Order now requires “that a joint meeting of the session and board of deacons be held at least annually to confer on matters of common interest” (G6.0405). Since no binding decision may be reached at such a meeting, minutes do not need to be recorded. But it should be reported at the next regular session meeting, when the joint meeting was held, and the minutes should note it.
  4. **RECORD ANNUAL REPORTS RECEIVED FROM OTHER BOARDS AND ORGANIZATIONS**  
It is the session’s responsibility to supervise the work of all other boards and organizations within the church - deacons, trustees, men’s and women’s groups, etc. (G10.02011 & 10.0401c). The minutes should show at least annually, when these other groups have reported to the session on their work and their finances. The reports themselves need not appear in the minutes.
  5. **RECORD THE COMPOSITION OF THE SESSION**  
The Book of Order now requires that the minutes state annually “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” (G10.0301). This may be done in a variety of forms, and should ordinarily appear in the minutes for the first meeting after the beginning of a new year. The church’s failure, over several years time, to elect a session representative of the congregation may be called into question according to G4.0403 & G9.0104.
  6. **INCLUDE THE ANNUAL STATISTICAL REPORT**  
It is a requirement of the Presbytery that a summary of the statistical and financial information reported to the General Assembly each year be entered in the minutes. This summary should include at least the following: # baptisms (adult and infant), # members received ( by profession or reaffirmation of faith or letter of transfer), #members removed ( by letter of transfer, death or other cause), The total number of active church members as of December 31; the beginning and ending balance of church finances, total receipts and total expenditures (broken down as appropriate), total mission giving, and the value of all investments.
  7. **INCLUDE THE CHURCH’S MISSION STATEMENT, EVERY 3 YEARS**  
At least every three years, the session ought to review the congregation’s mission goals in order to reflect on a regular basis on their overall program, goals and mission. Whenever a new or revised Mission Statement is adopted, it should be entered in full in the minutes.
- \* **FURTHER SUGGESTION:** For entries recorded annually in the session minutes, it is suggested that the Clerk keep an index or table of contents, so that

these items may be easily located when needed, either by the church or the Presbytery.

## CLERK AS HISTORIAN

### WHEN AND HOW TO PRESERVE YOUR RECORDS

The Clerk, as he or she is keeping records, is creating the history of the church for posterity. Please see suggestions below for preserving your records. There are other documents which you, or a person you appoint, may wish to collect and preserve:

- tapes of anniversary sermons
- bulletins from major worship services
- photographs of the church and church property
- photograph albums video of important events
- interview with your oldest members
- old church artifacts (communion services, bibles...)
- formal and informal photographs of former pastors

Most churches publish a church history at each important anniversary date. Add these to your collection and each time you publish such a history, **please send two copies of the history to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Seattle**. If you find gaps in your history, please check with the Elder Robert Welsh, our Presbytery Historian. He may be able to help.

**A frequent question clerks ask** is how to manage records; which records to keep and for how long. A management chart may be found at the end of the section.

**The Department of History of the General Assembly  
425 Lombard Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19147  
215/627-1852**

The Department of History is a nationally recognized archives for the Presbyterian Church (USA) . It is an exciting place to visit and is *the* place to visit to do research. The records of many of our churches are held in the archives, either in original form or on microfilm. The Department will do ecclesiastical research for you on any original books stored with the Department. The Department will not do genealogical research under any circumstances; however, you may send people directly to the Department to do their own research.

### **FACTS ABOUT MICROFILMING YOUR RECORDS**

The cost of microfilming varies as to who does it and what is chosen for microfilming. Microfiche is not appropriate for old records. It is appropriate for ledgers and financial records.

The Presbyterian Historical Society (The Department of History of the General Assembly) microfilms records at a competitive cost.

Not all microfilming firms are equipped to deal with old books or bound books which take special care and special equipment. (**The Department of History is recommended.**)

At the present time, records can be microfilmed free of charge (except of a minimal cost for your copy of the microfilm) under an arrangement between the Presbyterian Historical Society and the Society of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons). However, acceptance of this agreement releases the church records to the Society. Session would need to make a decision about such a release and acceptance of the agreement.

### **RECORDS AND COMPUTERS**

Many churches keep their current membership on computers for mailing convenience. This is entirely appropriate but computer membership records **do not** replace the rolls, registers and the minute book and computer print-outs are not acceptable at the annual administrative review of church records.

Financial records can be kept on the computer but always have a hard copy of each new record.

## SESSION'S VITAL RECORDS

### **Records of Permanent Value**

Below is a list of records possessing administrative, legal or historical value. It is recommended that these records be stored in a fireproof, waterproof safe **at the church**. They should **never** be removed from the church or stored in members' homes.

Session Minutes	Annual Audit
Congregational Minutes	Financial ledgers of final entry
Rolls and Register Books	Deacons' Minutes and Reports
Charter and/or incorporations papers	Church School Minutes and Reports
Congregational By Laws	Presbyterian Women's Minutes

### **Miscellaneous**

Property deeds	Blueprints, architectural drawings and sketches
Photographs – identified	Scrapbooks
Manuals and Directories	Worship bulletins
Newsletters	Histories
Anniversary publications	Ministers' biographies and photographs

### **Vital Records**

Example of records that document the legal and financial position of the local congregation and that are essential for the continuation or resumption of operations following a disaster. Such records seldom constitute more than approximately two percent of an office's total list of records. Vital protection records may be found in both the temporary and permanent categories of records.

Accounts payable	Accounts receivable
Annual reports	Audits
Bank Balances	By Laws
Canceled checks	Certificate of incorporation
Charter and amendments	Contractual agreements
Cash books	Deeds
Employees' Directory	Financial statements
Insurance policies and schedules	Invoices
Leases	Mailing lists
Minutes	Purchase orders
Suppliers' directories	Trial balance (monthly)
Wills, bequests	

### **Records of Temporary Value**

Any records not possessing permanent value would, of course, automatically fall into the “Temporary” category. The following list presents only a few examples of the many such records. Realistically evaluated, there should be many more records judged “temporary” than “permanent” in most offices.

Few temporary records should be retained beyond seven years: an example of an exception would be Workmen’s Compensation Reports which should be held ten years before destruction. When in doubt, check with your auditor regarding retention periods for financial records.

Account payable invoices	Accounts receivable ledger
Bank deposits slips	Budgets
Canceled checks	Cash Receipt records
Correspondence re: speaking engagements	Data for updating mailing lists
Employee withholding records	Excerpts from documents retained elsewhere
Expense reports	Invitation
Letters of acknowledgment	Payroll checks
Periodic financial statements	Petty cash records
Receipts of purchases	Requests for information and responses thereto
Routine notices of meetings	Travel plans and arrangements.

## THE SESSION AND PRESBYTERY

The Presbytery of Seattle is the governing body above the Session in the Presbyterian Church (USA). The Presbytery's mission is to participate in word and deed in God's transforming work through the Gospel of Jesus Christ by strengthening the witness and mission of our congregations and members, and by building strong partnerships with each other and the larger Christian community.

The Presbytery's Manual of Operations, including Standing Rules, policies, guidelines and organizational structure, is available on the presbytery web site ( [www.presbytery.org](http://www.presbytery.org)). The relationship of the session to Presbytery is contained in the Book of Order. A list of specific responsibilities of sessions to the Presbytery follows:

## COMMISSIONERS TO PRESBYTERY

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has a representative form of government. It works only when each church takes seriously its responsibility to elect elder commissioners to attend and participate in meetings and report back to the Session. There are six regular presbytery meetings each year: January, March, May, July, September, and November.

**The number of commissioners** to which a congregation is entitled depends upon the size of the congregation (G11.0101) and also varies according to equalization. "...When the number of ministers is larger, the stated clerk shall bring the imbalance to the attention of the presbytery at its first meeting of the year. The presbytery shall redress the imbalance by inviting sessions of particular churches to elect additional elder commissioners or on some other basis acceptable to the presbytery..." (G11.0101b). Because there is a large number of ministers in the Presbytery of Seattle, the imbalance is addressed by asking sessions to request additional elder commissioners and are encouraged to name these additional commissioners early in the year and send their names to the Stated Clerk.

**Churches are encouraged** to elect their commissioners for the entire year, even for two or three years. Some churches elect different commissioners for each meeting. **Recommendation:** electing commissioners for extended periods helps to assure continuity and understanding of presbytery business. Papers for each Presbytery meeting may be sent directly to those commissioners named on a yearly basis – let the presbytery office know the names of continuing commissioners. Commissioners who are named only for single meetings of Presbytery will receive the Presbytery through the Church Office.

Commissioners are required by the Book of Order to report to the session about the meeting (G-10.0102p.1).

## **SERVICE ON PRESBYTERY COMMITTEES AND MINISTRY TEAMS**

Presbytery is always looking for individuals willing to share their particular skills and interests among the members of our congregations. The Presbytery of Seattle is also committed to encouraging racial/ethnic minority members of our churches to service on a presbytery committee. Nomination forms are included at the end of this section. Please share the gifts of your congregation with your presbytery. Return the forms to the Office of the Stated Clerk.

## **THE ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY STATISTICAL REPORT**

The annual General Assembly Statistical Report is session's report to the General Assembly and **it is the specific responsibility of the session and the clerk of session.** Information on filing this report is sent by the stated clerk of the presbytery to the church early in December. **It is important for the clerk to locate this report. If it has not arrived by Christmas, please call the stated clerk's office immediately.**

The report is always due by mid February. Reports which are not filed directly with General Assembly electronically, or returned to the presbytery in time for electronic filing, cannot be included in annual denominational directories that provide important membership and financial information for the whole church. This can be a disservice to congregations in two ways: 1) per capita assessment apportionments will not be accurate if membership numbers are not accurate, and 2) membership data and financial data published in the denominational directories is very helpful to churches – whether they are in pastoral search processes or use in mission development.

**SESSION RECORDS REVIEW FORM**  
Presbytery of Seattle

**To the Clerk of Session:** This check list will be used while reading your church records. Please note the page numbers where appropriate and bring this list with your record books to the meeting as scheduled on the enclosed memo. This completed form will be returned to you. Please note the exceptions and comments adjust your record keeping accordingly. Thank you for making your records available at the scheduled time.

SESSION RECORDS of the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church, to be examined by the Sub-committee on Session Records on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).

**Minutes to be reviewed are from:**

Page \_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ through Page \_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Clerks of Session are asked to please fill in Page numbers prior to Review

Columns for "Yes, No, Comments" are to be filled in by reviewers.

No.	Information Required	Yes	No	Comments
1.	Is time and place of each meeting reported?			
2.	Was each meeting opened and closed with prayer?			
3.	Are the names of elders present, absent and excused listed, and is a quorum indicated? (G-10.0202)			
4.	Is the composition of the session noted with regard to racial ethnic members, women, men, <b>age groups and persons with disabilities</b> , and how this corresponds to the composition of the congregation? (G-10.0301) (At least annually) <b>Page</b> ____			
5.	Were minutes always approved?			
6.	Did session meet at least once a quarter? (G-10.0201)			
7.	Is the annual election of the treasurer noted? (G-10.0401) <b>Page</b> ____			
8.	Were the various funds in the church reported at least annually to the session? (G-10-0401 and 10.0401c) <b>Page</b> ____			
9.	Was the clerk of session elected for a set term as determined			

	by session? (G-9.0203b) <b>Page</b> ____			
10.	Was a full financial review of all books and records reported? (At least annually) (G-10.0401d) <b>Page</b> ____			
11.	Did session approve an annual church budget? (G-10.0102i) <b>Page</b> ____			
12.	Did session approve the Annual Statistical Report? <b>Page</b> ____			
13.	Did session review, at least annually, the church membership roll? (G-5.0502, 10.0302) <b>Page</b> ____			
14.	Do minutes record the annual review of the adequacy of compensation for all staff (pastors and all employees)? (G-10.0102n) <b>Page</b> ____			
15.	Were commissioners elected to presbytery meetings? (G-10.0102p.1) Annually ? __ Meeting by meeting? __ list all appropriate pages <b>Page/s</b> _____			
16.	Did commissioners to Presbytery report to the session? <b>Pages</b> _____			
17.	Are minutes of annual congregational meeting(s) and special meeting(s) included, and are they signed by both the moderator and secretary? (G-7.0307) <b>Pages</b> _____			
18.	Do the congregational minutes record changes in the call(s) of the pastor(s)? (G-7.0304a.3) <b>Pages</b> _____			
19.	Did the minutes of special meetings specify the purpose for which the meeting was called? <b>Pages</b> _____			

20.	Were the records of the deacons examined, at least annually by session? (G-6.0404) Pages _____ (If the church has no deacons, check <input type="checkbox"/> )			
21.	Was a joint meeting held between the session and deacons? (G-6.0405) Page/s _____			
22.	Do the minutes record the completion of a period of study and preparation for elected elders and deacons, and their examination and approval for office by the session? (G-14.0205) Page/s _____			
23.	Do the minutes record the ordination/installation of deacons and elders? (G-14.0200) <b>Page/s</b> _____			
24.	Is the reception of new members recorded, giving full names, and noting the manner of reception? (W-4.2003, .2004)  Page/s _____ (If no receptions, check <input type="checkbox"/> )			
25.	Were all dismissals and other deletions from the church roll acted upon by session with full information recorded? (G-10.0302)  <b>Page/s</b> _____ (If no dismissals, check <input type="checkbox"/> )			
26.	Have details vital to understanding transactions been recorded?			
27.	Are erasures, footnotes, interlinear notes, other insertions, blank pages avoided? Are pre-numbered pages used?			
28.	Was <b>authorization</b> for sacraments recorded? (See W-2.300 for Baptism; and W-2.4000 for the Lord's Supper) <b>Page/s</b> _____			
29.	Was the <b>observance</b> of the sacraments properly recorded? In no case is the Lord's Supper to be celebrated less than quarterly.			

	<b>Page/s</b> _____			
30.	Are session minutes signed by the clerk or moderator?			
31.	Is the Church Register current? (G-10.0302)			
32.	Is there a Baptized Members' Roll? (G-10.0302a. (1) ) (Persons baptized in the church who have not made their own profession of faith and the children of active members and of ministers related to the church when the children have been baptized elsewhere.)			
33.	Is there an Active Members' Roll? (G-10.0302a.(2)[a])			
34.	Is there an Inactive Members' Roll? (G-10.0302a.(3)[a])			
35.	Is there an Affiliate Members' Roll? (G-10.0302a.(4) ) (Persons who have been received into Affiliate Membership are active in the church's work and worship for a period of time, but whose active membership is retained elsewhere.			
36.	Does the Register show Deletions from Rolls due to transfers, deaths, termination requests, etc.? (G-10.0302b)			
37.	Does the Register include the following (G-10.0302c): <b>Marriages</b> conducted by the ministerial staff of the church and all marriages performed on church property?			
38.	<b>Infant Baptisms</b> , including names of child and parents, date of birth of those being baptized and the names of those presenting the children for baptism?			
39.	<b>Adult Baptisms</b> , including name, parents names and the date of birth of those being baptized?			
40.	<b>Elders</b> including the name of the church in which each was ordained, the date of ordination, terms of active service and the record of removals?			
41.	<b>Deacons</b> , including the name of the church in which each was ordained, the date of ordination, terms of active service and the record of removals? (If there are no deacons, check __)			
42.	<b>Pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, assistant pastors, interim pastors, stated supplies, and parish associates</b> serving the church, with dates of service?			

THE REVIEWERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO MAKE ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

**The Clerk of Session is to note in the record books the exceptions and comments and adjust their record keeping accordingly for the years ahead.**

Reviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church Date

Reviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church Date