

PRESBYTERY OF FLORIDA
CLERK OF SESSION
HANDBOOK



Prepared by Jeannie Dixon for 2020 Disciplefest; updated March 2022

Welcome to the office of Clerk of Session! You have joined a unique and important group of people within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The *Book of Order* mandates that each governing body of the PCUSA have a moderator and a clerk. (G-3.0104) Clerks of Presbyteries, Synods, and the General Assembly are called Stated Clerks. Those serving sessions are called Clerks of Session.

The Handbook for Clerks of Session is written with the following assumptions, that the Clerk of Session:

- plays a vital role within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
- maintains the history of the faithfulness of the Church through careful minutes and records;
- is interested in and knowledgeable about Presbyterian polity;
- along with the moderator, is the liaison between session and presbytery;
- is always striving to be a servant to session, in the fullest New Testament sense, and is equipped spiritually to fulfill the servant role;
- 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 Confessions of our Church. Our order expresses the principle that we must live our lives together in accord with our faith and as a witness to the demands of Scripture. A clerk of a governing body respects the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as our covenant with one another about how we can, in our diversity, be such a witness. A clerk knows that our rules are never an end in themselves, but rather an attempt to be faithful to our covenant. Our polity commits to a shared ministry among ruling elders, deacons, members, and ministers of word and sacrament; it commits to a representative form of government in which both ruling elders and ministers of word and sacrament have care of the congregation; and it commits to corporate governance in which decisions are always corporate, never singular. The Moderator and the Clerk of Session, together, are the guardians of this polity, all to the goal of furthering the "Great Ends of the Church."

The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. (F-1.0304)

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

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

The primary duties of the clerk are to

- record the minutes of the session
- keep rolls of membership and attendance of the session
- preserve the records of the session
- furnish extracts to other governing bodies when required
- assist the pastor by keeping the pastor informed and providing information to the pastor as requested

Other responsibilities are given to the clerk by the *Book of Order*.

- The clerk is responsible for the preservation of the minutes of both the session and the congregation. (G-3.0204)

This means not only recording the minutes but also seeing that they are approved, signed, and placed into the official minutes book. Once each year, the minutes are to be submitted to presbytery for their review. The stated clerk of presbytery will notify the clerk of the arrangements.

- The session is responsible for maintaining rolls and in practical terms this usually means the clerk is responsible. When a new member is received by letter of transfer, the clerk should write to the transferring church requesting the letter. When a member transfers to another church, the clerk should verify the membership, obtain session approval, and issue the letter of transfer. Forms are available from Cokesbury.
- The clerk of session serves as secretary of congregational meetings.

There are other responsibilities that show up in the *Book of Order* indirectly or by inference. Additional duties can be assigned or negotiated. Each year the presbytery is required to file a statistical report with the General Assembly. This is now done online but the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery can enter the information you provide if you cannot complete it online. Using the workbook to compile the statistics before going online makes the process much easier.

As a new Clerk of Session, your priorities should be to:

1. Locate the minute book and church register. Locate all previous record books. Are they properly stored? These records should never be taken from the church and should be kept in a locked, fireproof safe or cabinet when not in use. You are the only person who can authorize entries into these books.

2. Locate a current *Book of Order*. Section G-3.02 of the *Book of Order* discusses the duties of

session. You will find most of the information you need immediately in that chapter. That chapter also describes the rolls and registers of the church and gives instructions on how to maintain them. The *Book of Order* may be downloaded free of charge from the Presbytery of Florida's website at <http://www.presbyteryofflorida.net/app/download/7126469379/2019-23-Book+of+Order.pdf> Note that the Book of Order is usually updated and reissued early summer following a General Assembly meeting. The 2019-2021 has been extended to 2023 due to the General Assembly not fully meeting in 2020.

3. Locate a copy of your church bylaws and congregational charter. Where the *Book of Order* is silent, the congregation's by-laws often will tell you what needs to be done.

4. Locate copies of church architectural drawings, mortgage papers, and church histories and make sure that they are stored properly.

5. Keep the presbytery address, telephone number, and website address, www.presbyteryofflorida.net, close at hand. You will find help on almost every problem at presbytery.

Physical Address: 3320 Harmony Road., Chipley, FL 32428

Mailing Address: P. O. Box 7, Chipley, FL 32428-0007

Telephone: (850) 535-2335

Fax: (844) 361-9448

Office Email: office@presbyteryofflorida.com

The Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Florida is the person to whom you directly relate. For help on your questions and knowledge of whom to call, contact:

Jeannie Dixon

Email: statedclerk@presbyteryofflorida.com

Cell phone: 850-591-6284

Other websites that you may need are:

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), www.pcusa.org

The Synod of South Atlantic, synodofsouthatlantic.org

The Board of Pensions, www.pensions.org

7. Make sure that you have the proper supplies.

Cokesbury Books & Church Supplies, www.cokesbury.com, has many of the supplies and resources you will need. Look under 'Supplies' and then 'church record-keeping'.

For minutes, you will need paper of at least 25% rag content (we recommend that you buy unnumbered paper); register fillers; minute and register binders. In addition to Cokesbury, Staples has paper with 25% rag content and register binders available online

at www.Staples.com. **The brand of paper preferred by the Presbyterian Historical Society is Mowhawk Superfine.**

Because register binders are very expensive, we recommend that when your minute book is filled, you have the pages bound and reuse your present binder.

Responsibilities of Clerk of Session at a Glance

1. Keep a full and accurate record of the proceedings of the session (G-3.0204).
2. Keep the roll of session membership and attendance (G-3.0104).
3. Arrange for the careful preservation of session records (G-3.0104), making recommendation to the session for the permanent safe keeping of its records (G-3.0107).
4. Furnish extracts from the minutes when required by another council (governing body) of the church (G-3.0104 and G-3.0108a).
5. Maintain and preserve rolls and registers required of session (G-3.0204a, b).
6. Be responsible for the preservation of the records of the joint meetings with the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees (G-3.0204).
7. Be familiar with the responsibilities of the session as described in the *Book of Order* (G-3.0201).
8. Notify the session or congregation of special meetings, describing accurately the business that will be transacted. [Notification of annual and special meetings of the congregation usually is given on two successive Sundays (G-1.0501 and G-1.0502) “Adequate notice” is the time specified in the Book of Order but it should be clearly specified in the manual of operations].
9. Be sure that the annual statistical form requested by the General Assembly is completed accurately and reported to the PCUSA by the deadline noted in an email from the presbytery Stated Clerk in December or January. Note that the deadline for entry of statistical information is set by the PC(USA) and the presbytery staff cannot extend it. That email will contain the login and password information for your church. Clerks of Session are expected to enter this information themselves. If you are experiencing any difficulty with the on-line statistical entry system, please contact the presbytery office or the Stated Clerk.

Also, be sure to return other paperwork requested by the Stated Clerk by the deadlines noted.

10. Bring the session minute book and the rolls and registers to one of the Minutes Reading meetings of the presbytery for annual review.
11. Serve as secretary for meetings of the congregation (G-1.0505), making sure that the minutes are received by session and are inscribed in the permanent session minute book.
12. Bring all official correspondence to the attention of the pastor/moderator and the session, and respond as directed by the session.
13. Keep a list of unfinished business, including all matters referred to a committee or a staff member for later report to session, and remind the appropriate persons(s) if not reported expeditiously.
14. Be prepared to respond to questions of parliamentary procedure in meetings if requested. (Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of Robert's Rules of Order (12th edition, 2020) except in those cases where the Book of Order provides otherwise (G-3.0105). Copies of *Robert's Rules of Order* and the latest *Book of Order* should be available at meetings.)
15. Receive and submit communications from/to other governing bodies.
16. Notify the office of the presbytery of essential staff member/volunteers (<http://www.presbyteryofflorida.net/app/download/7126502631/Church+leaders+update+form+fillable.pdf>)
17. Assist the moderator in preparing the agenda for session meetings, as requested.
18. Assist the moderator in church officer training when requested.
19. Remind moderator of required annual actions. The minutes review form is a great help in this.
20. In consultation with the moderator, prepare a statement of highlights of session actions and reports following the meeting for information for the congregation (may be included in the next issue of the congregation's newsletter). Note: Confidential matters should not be included.
21. May moderate the congregational meeting, if requested by the pastor or session vote with pastor's concurrence, during the pastor's salary review. If this occurs, a temporary clerk should be appointed.
22. File the FL Annual Non- Profit Corporation Report if you have had a change in your

corporate officers during the preceding calendar year. The by-laws will specify who the officers are. (Usually the treasurer does this, but you should make sure it is done).

23. Perform such other duties as may be assigned by the moderator or the session.

Notes on Session Meetings

1. Session meetings may or may not be regarded as open meetings, depending on the bylaws, written policies, and common practice of the church. Keep in mind that the general preference is for open meetings.

If the meeting is closed, attendance is restricted to the members and any guests (such as staff) whom the session invites. Members of the congregation wishing to attend are to secure an invitation from the moderator or the clerk. The session should convene without those who asked to be invited; the moderator or clerk explains the reason for the request to be invited, and the session affirms the invitation – either by general consent or by a motion seconded and passed – or does not affirm it. It is the session's meeting, and only the session can render it open to invitees.

A session may, if it wishes, adopt an "open meeting policy" which in effect invites any or all members of the congregation to all meetings unless a decision is made to close a meeting or part of a meeting to consider sensitive, confidential matters.

In either an open, or a closed meeting, those who are not members of the body do not have "voice" or the right to address the body unless they are granted that privilege.

2. The pastor of the church is the moderator; where there are co-pastors, they alternate moderating the session meeting. When the pulpit is vacant, either the interim pastor or another pastor appointed by the presbytery is the moderator (G-3.0104). A session cannot meet in the absence of the pastor/moderator except:

a. If the pastor thinks it advisable, he/she with the session's concurrence invites another minister of the presbytery to moderate.

b. If the session is directed to meet by presbytery, the clerk and/or the moderator consult with representatives of the presbytery; depending on circumstances, it may be advisable for a representative of the presbytery to moderate the meeting.

c. If there is no installed pastor or if installed pastor is unable to moderate and cannot name another minister of word and sacrament as moderator, the presbytery will appoint a moderator (G-1.0504).

4. A quorum of session must be present to have a legal meeting at which actions may be taken. The session or the bylaws of the congregation set the quorum for the session. A

suggested quorum of the session might be the pastor or other presiding officer and one third of the elders or a specific percentage. For the reception and dismissing of members, your session's rule might even set the quorum as the moderator and two members of the session as it was in the in the *Book of Order* prior to 2011.

5. Session meetings in most churches are informal. As Clerk, however, 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.

6. 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.]

SESSION POLICY ON ELECTRONIC MEETINGS

In those cases where routine matters must be presented to the members of session for action before its next scheduled meeting, then session may conduct this routine business by conference call or electronic means which bring members together, or by polling, either by telephone or other electronic means. The requirements for such meetings are:

- A reasonable attempt shall be made to reach all members.
- There shall be a quorum of members responding.
- In the event that any two members object to the electronic or telephone procedure, then in that case the decision shall either be postponed until the next regular meeting or a special meeting must be convened.
- Any action resulting from a telephone or electronic meeting shall be confirmed at the next scheduled meeting, so that it can be included in the minutes of the session.

There should be a provision for voting in meetings conducted by telephone or internet, as contested voice votes can be very difficult to determine. If a matter is in controversy, perhaps a traditional meeting would be a better option? The session may wish to consider provisions for individuals to participate electronically in an otherwise traditional meeting if technology, including hardware, software and internet bandwidth, permit. Keep in mind that both the participant and the meeting site must have adequate, compatible technology.

Minutes of Session Meetings

The *Book of Order* requires that a session keep “full and accurate record of its proceedings”. No guidelines are given regarding the details for doing this. In the absence of parliamentary procedures in the *Book of Order*, the instructions from *Robert’s Rules of Order* are to be followed. The following is a summary of what has become the norm for session minutes. This is rooted both in the *Book of Order* and in *Robert’s Rules of Order* and is to ensure that the important information is included and that the proper procedures have been followed.

A. Essential Parts

Every set of minutes should contain the following information.

- The name of the church
- The date, time, and place of the meeting
- Whether the meeting is special or stated
- The names of the moderator, elders, and others who are present
- The opening with prayer
- Attesting that a quorum is present
- Approval of minutes of previous meetings
- All main motions, except those withdrawn, and whether the motions pass or fail
- Significant portions of reports
- The time of the meeting’s closing
- Closing with prayer
- Attesting by the moderator or the clerk by their signatures

When motions are passed unanimously, it is not necessary to state the unanimity. When motions have dissenting votes, the vote could be recorded by terms such as “by majority” or “with 1 exception”. Persons casting dissenting votes may request that their vote be recorded by name. It is neither necessary nor advisable to record the whole discussion prior to a vote; the record should be a very brief summary of any important aspects of the issues brought forward.

The reports presented can be recorded as “received” which indicates the report has been read or heard but does not necessarily indicate agreement with all aspects of the report. The minutes should contain, in addition to any actions taken, only those aspects that might be important to future readers of the minutes.

After the minutes have been approved by the session, they should be placed in the official *Minute Book* and signed by the moderator and the clerk. In this electronic age it is not necessary that minutes actually be typed into the *Minute Book*. Previously printed pages can be photocopied onto the *Minute Book* pages.

Electronic storage, in place of paper storage, might not be acceptable because there is no way to attest by signature to the accuracy and correctness of the documents and due to long term storage problems. The *Minute Book* needs to be kept in a secure fireproof environment. Motions from a committee do not require a second. The minutes should record who makes a motion (when made by an individual) but not who seconds the motion.

B. As Needed

There are some session actions and reports that should be included in the minutes that may or may not occur every month. Those actions or reports that normally occur every month that are to be recorded in the minutes include the following.

- Attendance at worship. The number of persons attending each worship service should be recorded. This will permit calculation of average attendance per week for the Session Annual Statistical Report. The attendance at Sunday School could also be included.
- Financial report. Session should receive the financial report. A summary of the report could be included, if desired.

Those actions or reports that normally occur less frequently than every month that are to be recorded in the minutes include the following.

- Authorization to celebrate the Lord's Supper at times other than normal. Session normally has a continuing approval for authorization at regular times such as the first Sunday of every month. The celebration of the Lord's Supper at other times, such as at a church retreat, needs special approval. The January minutes should note the usual, approval dates of celebrating the Lord's Supper for the year.
- Session action in receiving and dismissing members. The record should include the full name of the persons and family relationships where appropriate. For those transferring, the name, city, and state of the transferring church should be included. The method of reception (transfer, affirmation of faith, or reaffirmation of faith) should be recorded.
- Session action in transferring members from the active roll to the inactive roll or in removing inactive members from the roll. Active members should not be transferred to the inactive roll until the inactivity has been for a period of at least one year. Inactive members should not be removed from the roll until inactivity has been for a period of at least two years.
- Approval of guest ministers or others to conduct the worship service. At times when the pastor is not present for a worship service, such as during vacation time, the person to conduct the worship service and to preach the Word should be approved by session.
- Authorization and recording of baptisms. The authorization of session is needed for all baptisms. After the baptism, the occurrence should be recorded. The full name, birthdate, and place of birth of the person being baptized and the name(s) of parents(s) for infant baptisms should be recorded.
- Deaths. The death of any member should be recorded.
- Weddings. Any wedding taking place in the church and weddings performed by the pastor either at the church or elsewhere should be recorded.
- Commissioners to presbytery. The election of commissioners to presbytery and the receiving of the commissioners' report to the session after the presbytery meeting should be in the minutes.

C. Annually

Once each year the following items should be approved by session and included in the minutes.

- Annual Statistical Report. This report must be approved by session and included in the minutes.
- Annual budget. Session is responsible for the budget and expenditures of the church. The budget requires approval by session and should be included, at least in summary form, in the minutes.
- Election of the church treasurer.
- Church Nominating Committee. Session needs to appoint its representative(s) to this committee and to set the date for the congregational meeting for the election. In many churches this election is held at the annual congregational meeting. The composition of the Church Nominating Committee needs to be specified in the manual of operations. The manual should also state that the committee moderator is an elder currently on the session.
- Annual congregational meeting. Session needs to set the date and time for an annual congregational meeting. If the church is incorporated, this meeting is required by law. Annual reports should be presented at this meeting of the corporation.
- Newly elected elders. Session needs to arrange for the instruction, examination, ordination (where required), and installation of newly elected elders. This also applies to deacons for churches not under the unicameral system.
- Composition of session and congregation with respect to racial ethnic members, women, men, and age groups. These data are to be in the minutes. Since this information is in the Annual Statistical report, including that report in the minutes will fulfill this requirement.
- Pastor's Call. Session needs to call a congregational meeting or include in the agenda of another meeting a review by the congregation of the pastor's call. The pastor's call includes salary, other financial benefits, vacation (minimum of 4 weeks required), and study leave (minimum of 2 weeks required). The form can be found on the presbytery website under the Ministry committee:
<http://www.presbyteryofflorida.net/app/download/7126464135/2022-Pastor-Annual-Terms-Form.pdf>
- Insurance information (policy number, amount of coverage, insurance company)
- An Annual Audit or Review of Financial Records (G-3.0113) and Annual Review of the work of the Deacons (if any) (G-2.0202)

D. Other

Each person needs to work out the best ways for handling the preparation of the minutes. One suggestion is to prepare a template for use in taking the minutes during the meeting. This template would include the list of elders' names (to aid in taking the roll) and major category headings with blank spaces for writing in the information. If the meetings do not follow a regular format, the use of a template is limited. Using a template to take minutes may cause some difficulties since it may be difficult to predict how much space to leave. An alternative is

to use a checklist. Some people use a template file and a laptop computer and take notes on the computer during the meeting. A good, rather complete agenda makes this approach more feasible.

Either the template or the checklist has an additional benefit in that it will help you and the moderator to remember what needs to be done. This can be carried further by the clerk and the pastor meeting in advance of the session meeting with the purpose of including more details in the template or check list.

When typing the minutes using a computer word processor, it is suggested, again, that a template be established and the information be typed into the appropriate places. This avoids retyping some information such as the list of elders present and helps ensure that items are not missed.

E. Preparation for Session Annual Statistical Report/*Church Register*

When it comes time to prepare the Session Annual Statistical Report or when inserting data into the *Church Register*, being complete in the minutes will help.

Rolls

The session is responsible for maintaining the church rolls. Even if a session committee, a membership secretary, or the church secretary takes on this responsibility, it falls on the clerk to see that the job is done and done correctly. This section deals not only with the maintenance of the rolls but makes some suggestions to make later work easier.

The rolls are to be recorded in the *Church Register*, which provides sections for each of the rolls to be kept. Even if your church maintains rolls using some sort of computer program, there needs to be a permanent written record. The *Church Register* should be kept in a secure fireproof environment.

Arrangements need to be made for providing certificates to all new members, to all persons baptized, and to all persons ordained and/or installed. Appropriate certificates are available for purchase from the Presbyterian Publishing House. Alternatively, a church may print its own certificates if a suitable word processor and printer are available. The circular seal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can be downloaded from the world-wide web at <http://www.pcusa.org> as [cirseal.pcx](http://www.pcusa.org). This is in color, if you have a color printer.

A. Membership

There are three membership rolls to be kept:

- active members
- baptized members
- affiliate members

Active members, of course, are those who have been received into active membership by the session.

Other baptized persons who attend regularly (and who may even participate in church activities) but who have not been received into active membership by the session are called baptized members.

The largest percentage of this group will probably be the children of the congregation prior to their participation in a confirmation class. At the end of each calendar year, the Annual Statistical Report asks for the number of persons in each of these categories. The report also asks for the means by which new members were received into active membership (transfer or reaffirmation/affirmation of faith) and the means by which persons were removed from the active roll (transfer to inactive roll, removal, transfer to another church, death). It is suggested that lists be kept of each membership transaction as the year progresses so that at the end of the year the data will be readily available. Otherwise, it would be necessary to read through all the minutes at the end of the year to compile these lists. Updating the lists after each session meeting reduces the time required and results in fewer errors. If a computer program is used, the information could be entered each month using codes to enable the extraction of the required information at the end of the year.

An affiliate member is a member of another congregation of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the congregation of membership is situated, has presented a certificate of good standing from the appropriate council or governing body of that congregation, and has been received by the session as an affiliate member. An affiliate member may participate in the life of the congregation in the same manner as an active member except that an affiliate member may not vote in congregational meetings or be elected to ordered ministry or other office in the congregation.

Note that in the current Book of Order there is no longer provision for inactive members.

B. Baptisms

It is important to maintain an accurate baptism roll because it can serve as a legal backup for birth certificates, especially for infant baptisms. The information to be entered includes the person's full name, date and place of birth, names of parents, date and place of baptism, and name of minister performing the baptism. When an adult is baptized upon reception into membership, this information is also part of the membership roll.

C. Deaths

The *Church Register* provides a section for listing deaths. This information also needs to be recorded in the membership roll. Report deaths of ruling elders (whether actively serving or not) to the presbytery annually. The deaths from October 1 to September 30 are reported at the Fall Meeting; the information may be entered at any time in the online form found at bit.ly/pofnecro

D. Ordination and Installation

The *Church Register* provides sections for listing all ordinations and installations of elders and deacons.

When the session finds it necessary to exercise discipline, the Form of Government and the Rules of Discipline should be carefully studied by a committee of the session and if discipline be administered, the minutes of the session must contain such a record of the proceedings, which will enable the presbytery to know who was disciplined, why and how. **If you need guidance regarding a disciplinary matter, contact the stated clerk's office as soon as possible.**

In case of a sale, mortgage, gift or lease of property, the session records must show (in addition to the record of congregational approval as stated in the *Book of Order* (G-1.0503d & G-4.0101):

- a. Name, address and legal description of the property
- b. Name of buyer/lessee
- c. Sale price
- d. Loan amount purpose and terms, including the name of the lender
- e. Lease terms and liability insurance
- f. Concurrence of the presbytery

Note that the *Book of Order* requires:

Each council shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings. Minutes and all other official records of councils are the property in perpetuity of said councils or their legal successors. When a council ceases to exist, its records shall become the property of the next higher council within whose bounds the lower council was prior to its cessation. The clerk of each council shall make recommendation to that body for the permanent safekeeping of the body's records with the Presbyterian Historical Society or in a temperature and humidity controlled environment of a seminary of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). (G- 3.0107)

The Presbyterian Historical Society will preserve records for congregations. See their web site <http://www.history.pcusa.org/> or call them for information. Their address is 425 Lombard St., Philadelphia, PA 19147. Telephone: 215-627-1852, Fax: 215-627- 0509. Hours are Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Records of existing congregations remain the property of the congregation and may be recalled at any time if needed. In addition, records that are more than 50 years old may be made available to researchers, especially genealogical researchers.

Secretary of the Congregation

For congregational meetings, the *Book of Order* specifies that the clerk of session is to be the secretary of the congregation for the meeting. In the absence of the clerk, the congregation is

to elect its own secretary for that particular meeting. The secretary is to take the minutes of the meeting. Since the secretary (clerk) is also parliamentarian, it is necessary to be familiar with the whole section of the *Book of Order* related to Meetings of the Congregation (G-1.05). This includes what business can and cannot be transacted and what constitutes a quorum. Minutes of congregational meetings can be approved by the Session or by the congregation at the next congregational meeting. Other information related to meetings of the congregation appears under the election and ordination of elders and deacons. The election of a Nominating Committee requires one member of the session. The composition of the committee should be specified in the manual of operations. It is good practice for the session to make these appointments in advance of the congregational meeting so that the congregation has this information when it votes on its at-large representatives. G-2.0401 notes your manual may provide your rule for the nominating committee, but it shall meet all 3 criteria of G-2.0401. The session representatives should be active on the session during the time they serve on the nominating committee.

After there has been a vote to close nominations, if the number of nominees equals the number of vacancies, the election may be by voice vote or show of hands to elect the slate by unanimous consent (or by acclamation). While the *Book of Order* does not require that nominees give permission for their names to be entered into nomination, it is good practice for the church to have such a requirement written into its bylaws. *Robert's Rules of Order* specify that no person can make more than one nomination and that nominations do not need to be seconded. The *Book of Order* does not require a secret ballot for this type of election when the number of nominees exceeds the number of vacancies but it is good public relations practice to do so. This means that the clerk should have ballots prepared in advance.

Note that proxies are not permitted in this election. Only active members who are present may vote. (These requirements hold for all votes.)

An annual meeting of the congregation is required for the purposes of receiving reports from the session and to fulfill any legal requirements with respect to the church as a corporation. It is customary that the annual review of the pastor's call occurs at this meeting.

Matters related to capital expenditures that may or will result in a church mortgage require congregational approval and eventually presbytery approval.

Other less frequent actions of the congregation may require that the clerk to take a leading role. These include the dissolution of a pastoral relationship, the formation of a pastor nominating committee, and the subsequent election of a pastor. All of these actions require consultation with and/or approval by presbytery. Early discussion with the presbytery committee on ministry is encouraged.

Secret ballots should be used. Again, proxies are not permitted and only active members who are present may vote.

The Session may, in advance of the congregational meeting, specify that a vote should be by secret ballot. According to *Robert's Rules of Order* secret ballots are used when specified by the constitution or by-laws or when specifically voted on (by majority vote) by the congregation. For a vote by ballot where the actual motion may not be known in advance can be handled by the use of a generic ballot.

Interactions between Session and Presbytery

Official communication between session and presbytery is from the clerk of session to the stated clerk of presbytery. The relationship between the session of a congregation and presbytery is set forth in the *Book of Order* and in the Manual of Presbytery of Florida. The manual is on the presbytery website at:

<http://www.presbyteryofflorida.net/app/download/7126469377/Manual+of+Operations+2020-06-16.pdf>

Each minister has a copy of this Manual. The Manual and most of the information routinely needed by Clerks of Session can be found on the presbytery's website, PresbyteryOfFlorida.net

Sessions interact with presbytery in the following ways:

Sending Commissioners to Presbytery Meetings

Presbyterian polity is a representative polity. It works only when each church takes seriously its responsibility to elect elder commissioners who attend the meeting and stay through the end of the meeting, and report to the session. There are three regular presbytery meetings each year: Fall, Winter and Spring. Previously the Manual stated these meetings to be held on 4th Saturday of January, 3rd Tuesday of May, 4th Tuesday of October. Currently the Coordinating and Planning Commission sets the dates for the coming year in time to be announced at the Fall meeting.

Each session is responsible for electing commissioners to presbytery. The number of commissioners depends upon the size of the congregation. (G-3.0301) The number of commissioners to which a congregation is entitled also varies according to the annual plan for ruling elder equalization. Each church is entitled to one commissioner. Churches with membership over 500 have additional commissioners. That information is found in the docket material for each presbytery meeting.

Churches are encouraged to elect their commissioners for the entire year, preferably for two or three years. Some churches elect different commissioners for each meeting.

Notices of presbytery meetings are sent to clerks of sessions to be distributed to the duly elected commissioners before the presbytery meeting by email. Business papers for the presbytery meeting are available on-line at the presbytery's web site two weeks before the presbytery meeting. Information about the meeting is also included in the weekly eUpdate from the presbytery office. Informational and promotional papers are distributed at the presbytery meeting. These papers should be distributed by the commissioners when the commissioners return to their churches.

Each commissioner is required by the *Book of Order* to report to session about the meeting: significant actions taken by the presbytery; a summary of issues deliberated upon; policy decisions made; implications of presbytery actions for the congregation; concerns and opportunities open to the congregation through presbytery; raising of consciousness of the congregation's participation in the total ministry of Jesus Christ.

Annual Review of the Call

Each year the session is required by the *Book of Order* to review the adequacy of the salaries of all pastoral staff. If session wishes to make any change in the terms of call as they were last approved by presbytery, the change in terms of call must be brought to the congregation for approval, contingent upon the approval of presbytery which, finally, approves all terms of call and all changes in terms of call. Annually, the Committee on Ministry sends to each session a form upon which to report changes in terms of call. As soon as the congregation has approved new terms of call for its pastor(s), the call forms must be returned to the Committee on Ministry for recommendation to presbytery. Please be sure that this form is returned each year. **The terms of call report must be submitted even if you already have submitted a renewed contract for a temporary or interim pastor. The form must also be submitted even if there is no change in the terms of call from the previous year.**

The form may be found on the presbytery website in the Committee on Ministry section: <http://www.presbyteryofflorida.net/app/download/7126464135/2022-Pastor-Annual-Terms-Form.pdf>

Minimum Compensation for Pastors

Each year the presbytery adopts minimum terms of call for all installed pastors. All terms of call must meet this minimum standard for presbytery to approve the call. The minimum terms of call are published to the churches each via the report of the Committee on Ministry to the presbytery. Annually, session will receive notification of minimum terms of call as soon as they are adopted by presbytery.

Approval of Certain Actions

Certain actions sought to be taken by sessions must first be approved by presbytery and/or a committee thereof, including sale or encumbrance of property, taking an Inquirer under care, changing the name of the church, waiving the limitations of terms of officers, etc.

Overtures to Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly

A member of the congregation may ask session to petition the presbytery. A session may petition or overture presbytery or synod or General Assembly through the presbytery. Session cannot overture Synod or General Assembly directly. Overtures must be presented to and approved by the presbytery in order to meet published deadlines set for each General Assembly and must comport with the rules set forth for the assembly. For information on overtures, including deadlines, contact the Stated Clerk's office.

Assistance with Required Policies

All councils are required by the Book of Order to have a manual of administrative operations, a sexual misconduct policy and a child and youth protection policy. (G-3.0106). The Stated Clerk's office can provide assistance and examples if your church needs to prepare one of these policies. Child and youth protection policies, which often also cover vulnerable adults, should be highly customized to suite the circumstance of each church. A free resource to assist with drafting a child and youth protection policy may be found at:

<https://www.insuranceboard.org/safety-resources/safeconduct-workbench/>

Additionally, the clerk should report to the presbytery office each year the list of church leaders (<http://www.presbyteryofflorida.net/app/download/7126502631/Church+leaders+update+form+fillable.pdf>)

Incorporation

Florida law does allow a congregation to be incorporated (G-4.01). As of December 31, 2021, all 37 congregations of our presbytery are incorporated. It is important to file an annual report with the Secretary of State (via SunBiz) and to update the list of corporate officers. The manual of operations should specify who on session serves as corporate officers and this should be reviewed every January. The treasurer usually takes care of this filing, but it is the clerk's responsibility to see that it is properly taken care of.

Helpful resources:

HANDBOOKS:

A number of presbyteries have prepared handbooks for clerks of session. While they are specific to that presbytery, there is often valuable information found in them.

Presbytery of Genessee Valley: <https://pbygenval.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2019/01/2019-HANDBOOK-for-Clerks-of-Session.pdf>

Frank Walmley – not specific to a presbytery:

http://www.presbyteryov.org/Documents/session_clerks/annual_clerks'_packet/clerks'_essentials_folder/handbook.pdf (this handbook has a number of appendices with form templates for you to use!)

Varous forms and templates: <http://presbycc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Handbook-Appendix-for-Clerks-of-Session2014.pdf>

Presbytery of Hudson River: <https://www.hudrivpres.org/information-and-training-for-sessions>

TRAINING:

(remember older trainings do not reflect the current *Book of Order*)

From 2014: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnZ9v_TfRT6AC8CGzDQX68SbaDAtJkCcm

From 2014: <http://presbycc.org/2014/clerktraining/>

2017 YouTube training: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpI3lHzW3k>

Tampa Bay: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7psji1kgfT8&feature=emb_imp_woyt

