



# **- Survival Guide - A Manual for Clerks of Session**

**The Presbytery of  
Western North Carolina**

**Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

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**(updated to new Form of Government)**

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# Introduction

Congratulations on becoming a Clerk of Session! You have joined a unique and important group of people in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The *Book of Order* mandates that each governing body of the PCUSA have a moderator and a clerk. (G-3.0104). So you are one of the two main officers of your session.

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

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

This manual has borrowed material prepared by the Committee on Session Records, Presbytery of the Western Reserve, as well as using information in the *Book of Order* and from various other manuals for Clerks of Session and Stated Clerks.

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# The Office of Clerk of Session

The Clerk of Session shall be an elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine (G-3.0104). The clerk may be a member of the session, or may be an inactive elder. If the clerk is not a member of session, he/she may not make motions or vote. The session may ask the clerk to be its parliamentarian and shall give the clerk voice in matters pertaining to the minutes and the clerk's report.

The person chosen to be Clerk of Session needs to be knowledgeable about session responsibilities, to have an understanding of Presbyterian polity, and be willing to learn basic parliamentary procedure. He/she must be able to write promptly a clear record of the proceedings at session and congregational meetings.

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

In spite of the fact that the core functions of the clerk are secretarial, the session, in electing a clerk, should seriously consider the qualifications needed to carry out the very significant "silent" function of being the senior lay officer of the congregation.

## Responsibilities 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 governing body of the church (G-3.0107).
5. Maintain and preserve rolls and registers required of session (G-3.0204). (See Rolls and Registers, pages 10-11.)
6. Be responsible for the preservation of the records of the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees (G-3.0204), if any.
7. Be familiar with the responsibilities and powers 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 shall be given on two successive Sundays. Adequate public notice of all congregational meetings shall be given, Congregations shall provide by their own rule for minimum notification requirements and give notice at regular services of worship prior to the meeting. (G-1.0500 and G-1.0502)].

9. Be sure that the annual statistical form requested by the General Assembly, is completed accurately and returned to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery by the deadline noted.
10. Submit the session minute book to the Presbytery for annual review when requested (G-3.0108a).
11. Serve as secretary for meetings of the congregation (G-1.0505), seeing that the minutes are approved by session and are inscribed in the permanent session minute book. (See *Congregational and Corporation Meetings*, page 9.)
12. Bring all official correspondence to the attention of session, and respond as directed by the session.
13. Keep a list old of unfinished business, including all matters referred to a committee or a staff member for later report to session, and remind the appropriate persons(s), if not reported expeditiously.
14. Be prepared to respond to questions of parliamentary procedure in meetings, if requested to be parliamentarian. (Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*, except in those cases where the *Book of Order* provides otherwise (G-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 Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of changes in the membership of session.
17. Assist the moderator in preparing the agenda for session meetings.
18. Assist the pastor in church officer training, when requested.
19. In consultation with the moderator, prepare a statement of highlights of session actions and reports following the meeting for information for the congregation (may be included in the next issue of the congregation's newsletter). **Note:** Confidential matters should not be included.
20. Perform such other duties as may be assigned by the session or moderator.

## **Guidelines for Session Minutes**

### **Minutes of each session meeting must include:**

1. Whether the meeting is a stated or special meeting.
2. The name of the church, the place, date and time of the meeting.
3. The name of the moderator of the meeting. If not the pastor or another minister appointed by Presbytery, give full name and position.
4. The opening and closing of each meeting with prayer.
5. The roll, listing elders present, elders absent and any who are excused; the clerk, moderator and staff present or excused; others present and their identity (please use first and last names).

6. The affirmation of a quorum (G-3.0203). Sessions shall provide by rule for a quorum for meetings; such quorum shall include the moderator and either a specific number of ruling elders or a specific percentage of those ruling elders in current service on the session. A quorum of the session shall be the pastor or other presiding officer and one third of the elders, but no fewer than two, except for the reception and dismissal of members, when the quorum shall be the moderator and two members of the session. The session may fix its own quorum at any higher number. A majority is suggested.
7. The approval of the agenda (In case of a special meeting, the call to the meeting stating the purpose becomes the agenda.)
8. The approval of the minutes of the previous meeting. (Any corrections of previous meeting minutes shall be listed.)
9. Clerk's report may include correspondence, announcements, and report of the celebration of the Lord's Supper, in addition to listing of baptisms, marriages, and changes in membership rolls.
10. Reports of pastor, other staff, the treasurer and committee chairpersons should be briefly summarized in the minutes.
11. All motions and amendments, if any, and whether they passed or failed. (Details of discussion should not be recorded, except when needed to give a sense of the action.)
12. When a previous action of the session is referred to, the page on which it is recorded; or the date of the meeting at which it occurred, should be designated.

**When appropriate, include the following:**

13. The celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper must be reported at the next succeeding regular meeting. When the sacrament has been administered to those unable to attend public worship, the name of the minister officiating and the name of the elder or elders assisting those serving the sacrament should be noted. (This may be part of the clerk's report or the report of the worship committee.)
14. The celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism at the next succeeding regular meeting, giving the full name of adults baptized, including the maiden name of married women; the record of infants baptized, noting the name of the child, date of birth, and the names of the parents or the one rightly exercising parental responsibility (W-2.3014), and including the mother's maiden name. (This may be part of the clerk's report, the pastor's report or that of the appropriate committee.)
15. The full name of applicants for church membership (in the case of married women, include maiden name) and the manner of their reception:
  - a. by profession of faith, previously baptized
  - b. by profession of faith and baptism
  - c. by re-affirmation of faith
  - d. by letter of transfer, giving the name of the church from which received
16. The full title of the church to which a certificate of transfer is granted and the full name of the person transferred, with the date of transfer.

17. Record the job descriptions for employed personnel, both clergy and non-clergy, as they are approved.
18. Name of elders elected to be commissioners to meetings of the Presbytery, and the exact period for which elected (G-3.0202).
19. Record that commissioner(s) to Presbytery reported to session. The report may be briefly summarized.
20. 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.
21. Prior to initiating any disciplinary action, the session clerk should contact the Stated Clerk of Presbytery to review the process. Clerk of Session has very important role in handling disciplinary actions. Timing is very important in these matters.
22. In case of a sale, mortgage, gift or lease of property, the session records **must** show:
  - 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 Presbytery (if required)

**Be sure the following is included each year:**

23. Approval of the annual budget by the session, with information to the congregation.
24. Approval of the distribution of the church's benevolences.
25. Record the annual review with each pastor of the adequacy of compensation.
26. Record the recommendation to be made to the congregation for changes in the terms of call for each pastor.
27. Note the annual review by the personnel committee (or other responsible body appointed by the session) of the adequacy of compensation of all paid staff.
28. Note whether new elected officers have received training and been examined (G-2.0402).
29. Report the ordination and/or installation of elders and deacons (if any) at the next succeeding meeting
30. Report the recognition of trustees (if any) at the next succeeding meeting
31. Report that property and liability insurance has been obtained (G-3.0112). (Insert a photocopy of the church's certificate of insurance.)

# Clerk's Annual Report

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

32. Record that job descriptions have been approved for all employed personnel, both clergy and non-clergy, and indicate by page number where the latest job description for each staff person is located in the minute book.
33. Record changes during the year in the composition of the Session,(the Board of Deacons and the Trustees – if any) through death, resignation, or removal.
34. State the composition of the session with regard to racial ethnic members, women, men and age groups, and how this corresponds to the composition of the congregation. (This requirement may be fulfilled by photocopying the annual statistical report, required by the General Assembly, into the session records.)
35. Record the date of the latest renewal of the articles of incorporation with the state. This may be renewed periodically.
36. Report in the minutes where records of the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees (if any) are kept.
37. Include an Annual Narrative Report. (Moderator's annual report or periodic reports to the session of ongoing church life will satisfy this request.)

## Nuts & Bolts of Session Minutes

The method of recording session minutes is somewhat dependent on local circumstances.

The following is the suggested procedure used by a majority of churches:

- a) Clerk takes notes for the minutes at the meeting;
- b) Clerk writes the minutes and types or arranges for them to be typed;
- c) Makes copies and distributes before the next meeting;
- d) At the next meeting, the minutes are either approved as correct or corrections are made and the corrections are noted in that meeting's minutes;
- e) Clerk types or arranges for someone to type approved minutes in the session permanent minute book (these may be photocopied as long as archival quality paper is used);
- f) If using a computer for minutes in the permanent minute book, a laser printer and archival quality paper must be used;
- g) If you wish, 200-250 pages may be professionally bound into volumes. This can be done by the Presbyterian Department of History at a reasonable cost (215) 627-1852.

Do not use erasures, whiteout, interlineations or footnotes; or insert in the records separate sheets of paper with written or printed matter on them.

The records of each session meeting are to be duly attested (signed in ink) by the clerk (and the moderator, if desired). The records of congregational meetings are to be attested by the clerk **AND** the moderator.

The minutes of congregational meetings, the annual report of the church treasurer, and the annual statistical report required by General Assembly are to be included.



# Congregational and Corporation Meetings

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

Minutes of these meetings shall include:

1. Indication of whether the meeting is "regular" or "special."
2. If it is a "special meeting," the minutes shall include the call to the meeting, which will serve as the agenda.
3. Name of the church.
4. Date, time, and place of the meeting.
5. Name of the moderator or presiding officer.
6. Presence of a quorum.
7. Opening and closing of the meeting with prayer.
8. Record of all actions, whether adopted or lost.
9. When applicable, action by the congregation on any change in each pastor's compensation, with terms of call specified.
10. Minutes of the meeting of the congregation or corporation at which the annual financial reports are made should indicate, at least:
  - a. Report of a full financial review of the financial records (G-3.0113) (formerly referred to as "audit"). (See page 12.)
  - b. A complete, itemized report of income and expenditures for the year
  - c. Provide the complete, itemized proposed budget adopted by the session for the coming year.
  - d. Details of the status of loans from General Assembly, Synod, or Presbytery, if any are outstanding.
11. If the congregation does not approve the minutes before adjournment, session may approve the minutes at its next scheduled meeting.  
Congregational meeting minutes must be attested (signed in ink) by both the moderator and the secretary (usually the clerk).

Corporation meeting minutes must be signed by the one presiding and the secretary.

# Rolls and Registers

**The Rolls of the church should contain information about those who are members of the local church.**

**It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to maintain, or to oversee the maintenance of the Rolls as required in G-3.0204.**

1. Names of members shall be placed upon, removed, or deleted from the rolls of the church only by order of the Session (G-3.0204a).
2. Session shall maintain the following membership rolls (G-3.0204a):
  - Baptized Members
  - Active Members
  - [Inactive Members]
  - Affiliate Members
3. **Baptized Member**
  - a. Baptized Member is one who has received the Sacrament of Baptism, but has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; and/or one who was baptized in any church and is currently worshiping regularly.
  - b. Record the name, date of baptism (if known); church where Sacrament of Baptism occurred. Names should be removed from this roll when profession of faith is made, or when the person moves from the community.
4. **Active Member**
  - a. An Active Member is one who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into active membership of the Church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of the particular church, and participates in the church's work and worship.
  - b. Record name, date received into membership, and method of reception. Record date of removal from the particular role and whether by death, transfer to another church, placed on inactive roll, or removed.
5. **Inactive Members**
  - a. An Inactive Member is one who no longer participates in the church's work and worship.
  - b. Record name, date; indicate if inactive member is subsequently removed or reinstated with date of action.
6. **Affiliate Members**
  - a. An Affiliate Member is one who is active in another church of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the church of active membership is located. Affiliate membership must be renewed every two years.
  - b. Record name, date of affiliation; name of home church, date of renewal, date of return to home church.
7. Roll books usually provide double pages for a chronological roll by date of reception into membership with columns for name, how received, name of church from which member transferred if that is the manner of reception, date of deletion from the active roll and reason by death, inactivity, or transfer, in which case the name of the church to which the member is transferring is listed.

8. Pages may be provided in the same binder for an alphabetical listing of members along with the membership number that is assigned in the chronological roll. Pages also may be provided for Baptized, Affiliate and Inactive member rolls in the same binder.
9. Pages containing columns for the information requested may be obtained through Cokesbury (800) 672-1789.

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Registers are historical records and need to be carefully maintained. It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to maintain or oversee the maintenance of Registers as required in G-3.0204a.

1. Session shall maintain the following registers:
  - Marriages
  - Baptisms
  - Elders
  - Deacons
  - Pastors
2. **Register of Marriages** shall include marriages of members of the church, all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the church, and all marriages performed on church property.
3. **Register of Infant and Adult Baptisms** shall include name, parents' full names, and date of birth of those being baptized.
4. **Register of Elders** shall include each elder's name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.
5. **Register of Deacons** shall include each deacon's name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.
6. **Register of Pastors** shall include the names of pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, assistant pastors, interim pastors, stated supplies, and parish associates serving the church, with dates of service.
7. All registers may be kept in the same binder; or in the binder with the rolls. Pages for each register listed may be obtained through Cokesbury Book Stores (800) 672-1789.

# A Full Financial Review

The "Form of Government" of the Presbyterian Church requires the following:

*"A full financial review of all financial books and records shall be conducted every year by a public accountant or committee of members versed in accounting procedures. Reviewers should not be related to the treasurer(s). Terminology in this section is meant to provide general guidance and it not intended to require or not require specific audit procedures or practices as understood within the professional accounting community." (G-3.0113)*

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

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

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

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

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