

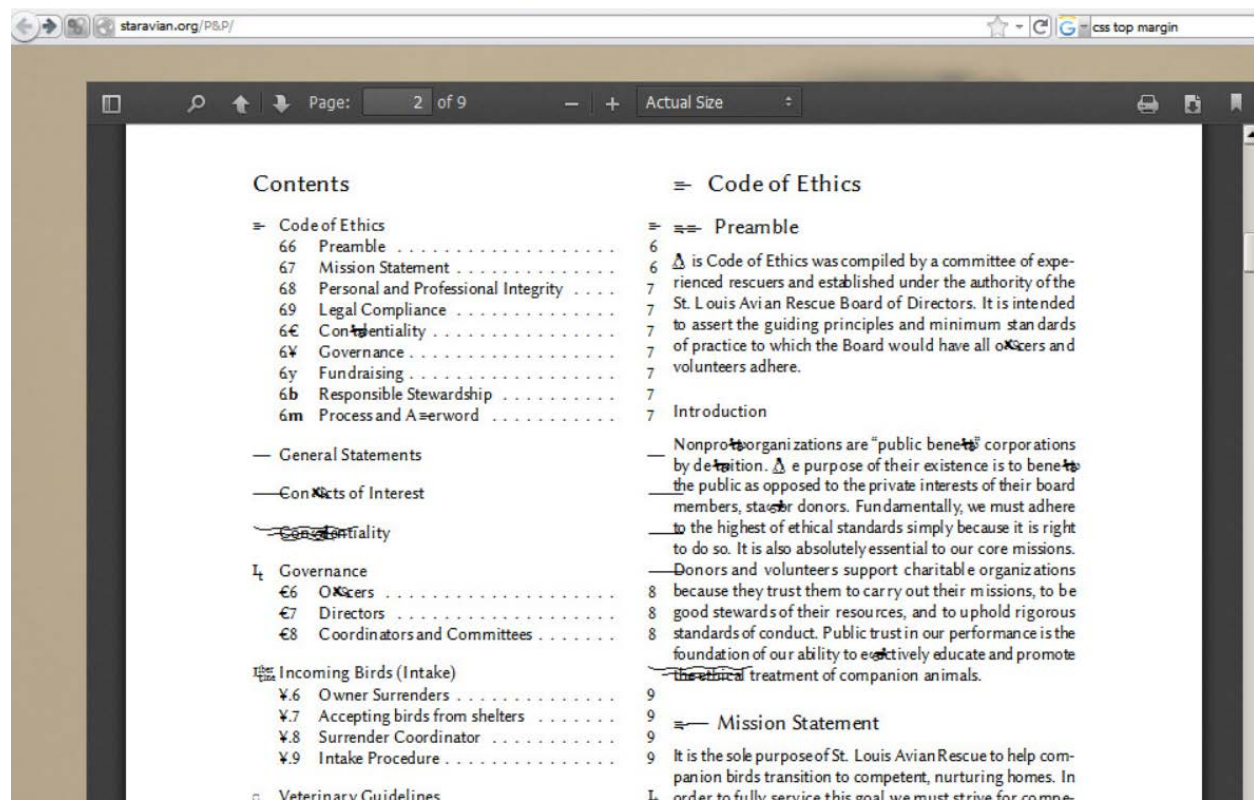
PDF/A(rchive): A Standard You Can Trust

December 13, 2013

Standards for keeping official records under the new Form of Government are handled by stated clerks of the presbytery. Many presbyteries are excited (or just being pushed) to move to a digital work flow. Keeping official electronic records can be daunting because of the numerous options available.

If a church session wants to keep its records in digital form, from start to end, it needs to ensure that the same things that lend authenticity and longevity to paper documents show up in digital documents that are being created. As software changes the files created by it continue to change, sometimes rendering old file formats obsolete. PDFs have long been a standard for creating a printed or finalized version of a document that is still kept electronically. PDF, though very useful, does not necessarily meet long-term storage needs. Software which opens old PDF files may replace a document's original fonts with current ones, making text illegible.

(see example below)



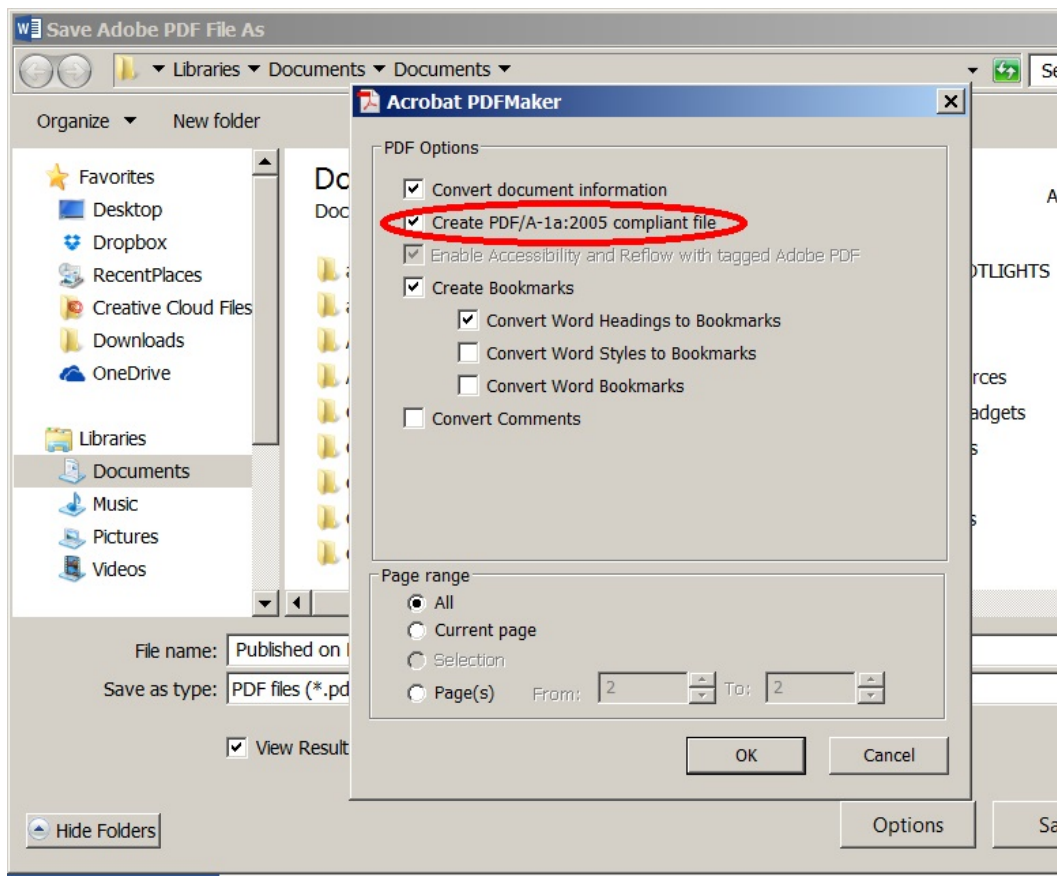
The University of Michigan's Bentley Library offers guidance here:

“It is likely that different “PDF” files could be corrupted or otherwise unreadable by a PDF reader. PDF/A, with the ISO standards, should not have the long-term storage problems that a PDF file can have.”

<http://bentley.umich.edu/uarphome/bestprac/pdfafaqs.php>

Technical Details of PDF/A: <http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/formats/fdd/fdd000125.shtml>

PDF/A is being embraced by archives, libraries, and government agencies around the world as a standard for digital files. Not all files are best represented in PDF. In our collections, we've run across screensavers, for example, which no one can say confidently will be accessible 50 years from now, or even five years from now. For congregational records, PDF/A should be a go to standard for final documents, minutes, publications. PDFs can be created directly from most applications, and there is usually the option to make the file PDF/A-compliant.



Binghamton Library has a wonderful post on saving from Microsoft Word 2010 to a PDF/A for digital preservation:

<http://www.binghamton.edu/libraries/technology/digital-preservation/word-to-pdf.html>

There are many other guides and tutorials on saving to PDF/A. If you need help figuring out how to save to PDF/A with your application of choice, please email the Presbyterian Historical Society Digital Archivist for help. ewarshavsky@history.pcusa.org