CLERK OF SESSION HANDBOOK

PRESBYTERY OF Cincinnati

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2020

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this important ministry of your congregation! As a clerk of session in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), you are serving a unique and vital role in the Body of Christ. We Presbyterians keep a lot of records and statistics and we follow certain procedures and processes. This doesn't just ensure that we do all things "decently and in order"; it helps us see the larger picture of how God is at work in and through the Church. Clerks of session not only help tell that story, but also help the congregation fulfill its mission by attending to the details of its corporate life.

In the PC(USA), every council (session, presbytery, synod, and the General Assembly) has 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 role of the clerk of session is defined by the *Book of Order.*

> "Each council shall elect a clerk who shall record the transactions of the council, keep its rolls of membership and attendance, maintain any required registers, preserve its records, and furnish extracts from them when required by another council of the church. Such extracts, verified by the clerk, shall be evidence in any council of the church. The clerk of session shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine." (G-3.0104)
>
> "The clerk of session shall serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If the clerk of session is unable to serve, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting. The secretary shall record the actions of the congregation in minutes of the meeting." (G-1.0505)

The clerk of session can be elected either from among the members of session (and therefore have both voice and vote at meeting) or from among ordained ruling elders of the congregation who are not currently installed as a member of the session (and therefore have voice, but not vote at meetings).

This handbook can serve as a guide to your work as a clerk of session. But learning the job of clerk can take some time, so please feel free to ask questions as you go. The best people to help in the process are your pastor or session moderator, other clerks, and the stated clerk of the presbytery. There are also some essential resources you will need:

- A current edition of the *Book of Order*, which is updated every two years (download for free, or purchase a hard copy from the Office of the General Assembly website oga.pcusa.org; search for "Constitution")
- The *Book of Confessions* (also available on the OGA website)
- Your congregation's Bylaws and/or Manual of Operations
- *Roberts' Rules of Order Newly Revised*

ROLE OF THE CLERK OF SESSION

Keeping Records:
The clerk of session is responsible for keeping certain records of the church.

- Minutes of the meetings of the session (G-3.0107; G-3.0204)
- Minutes of the meetings of the congregation (G-1.0505)
- Membership Rolls (G-3.0204a)
- Registers (G-3.0204b)
- Submitting annual reports required by the presbytery.

Take a moment to review the sections referenced in your *Book of Order*. These documents are the permanent records of the church and have great value for guiding the ongoing life of the congregation as well as helping discern God's guidance and presence through the years. Care must be taken both in how minutes are recorded and how they are preserved. The checklist used for the annual review of your minutes, rolls, and registers, attached at the end of this handbook, is a valuable resource for knowing the format and information you should have in your minutes.

Relationship to the Pastor:
The role of clerk of session means you will be working closely with the pastor. You are in a position to provide invaluable support by:

1. Being prudent in confidential matters that may need to be considered by session
2. Providing for agenda planning for meetings
3. Keeping up with annual requirements, unfinished business, communications, and rolls and register upkeep.
4. Being diligent and timely with the various duties of the clerk
5. Being knowledgeable about the *Book of Order*, the *Book of Confessions, Roberts' Rules of Order,* and the bylaws and manuals of the church and the presbytery.

Communications with the Congregation:
As the clerk of session, you are the communicating link with the session, pastor(s), and congregation. Your expertise and promptness in fulfilling the following responsibilities helps keep the congregation informed and functioning.

1. Send a reminder of session meetings.
2. Bring to the attention of the moderator, the session, or appropriate committee of the session all official communications.
3. Notify persons, committees, or special groups when they are affected by acts of the session.
4. Release promptly, after session has acted, appropriate communications and interpretations for increased communication.
5. Communicate to the congregation all matters affecting the whole congregation such as:
   – the calling and purpose of congregational meetings
   – policies/guidelines established by the session
   – summary of minutes of session after their approval
   – new members received by the session.

Communications with Other Councils:
As clerk, you are your church's designated correspondent to receive and submit communications to and from other councils (other sessions, the presbytery, synod, or General Assembly). Correspondence will normally be related to:

- actions and recommendations which impact the local church
- letters of transfer
- benevolences
- presbytery's annual review of session and congregational minutes
- qualified names to nominating committees of church or presbytery
- overtures to presbytery.

In some churches, some of these roles may be performed by a church administrator or a recording clerk, but the clerk of session still is the person responsible for them.

SUGGESTED CALENDAR OF ANNUAL CLERK OF SESSION / SESSION DUTIES

Annually

- Joint meeting of session and deacons
- Personnel review with pastor(s) and other staff
- Review of Bylaws, Manual of Operations, insurance coverage (liability / property), Sexual Misconduct Policy, Child Protection Policy
- Financial review or audit (outcome reported in minutes)

January

- Annual meeting of congregation as outlined by church bylaws
  NOTE: Some congregations operate on a fiscal year beginning in a different month, instead of a calendar year. Annual meetings, and actions related to them, might then be shifted to correspond with that calendar.
- Election of officers (usually at annual meeting, but not necessarily)
- With moderator, instruct, examine and ordain/install new officers
- Complete annual statistical report from General Assembly (due 1st week of February)
- Send Per Capita apportionment to presbytery
- Note in minutes:
  - ☐ Election of clerk of session
  - ☐ Election of treasurer
  - ☐ Election of ruling elder commissioner(s) (and alternates) to Presbytery for the year
  - ☐ Authorization of communion schedule and list of those able to serve
  - ☐ Approval of special offerings for the year
  - ☐ Adequacy of insurance coverage for church (and manse)
  - ☐ Annual review of reports from all groups within the church

February

- Approval of annual statistical report, which is included in minutes

March – April

- Annual terms of call for the pastor(s) and licensed Christian educators report to presbytery
- Annual staff compensation report to presbytery

September

- Nominating committee begins to work

October

- Submit necrology report of ruling elders who have died in the past 12 months to presbytery

December

- Review adequacy of terms of call with pastor and note in minutes
- Include in minutes any items like housing allowance provided by congregation
- Prepare annual budget
- Send shared mission pledge to the presbytery
- Review rolls of members baptized and active
- Annual review of minutes and rolls/registers by the presbytery

ANNUAL REPORTS

There are a number of annual reports clerks of session are asked to complete each year. Some of these go to the Office of the General Assembly, and some go to the presbytery. The stated clerk of the presbytery will send reminders and instructions as each report is due. If you have any questions or difficulty with any of these reports, don't hesitate to contact the stated clerk!

Clerks Annual Questionnaire (CAQ)
Collected by Presbyterian Research Services (PRS) of the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA), this information helps the PC(USA) better understand what our congregations face on a day-to-day basis. It is usually conducted in November.

Session Annual Statistical Report
This is the most important report for session clerks to complete. These annual statistics of membership, participation and budget of each congregation are reported to the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) each year and are combined with all other PC(USA) congregations to become part of the annual "General Assembly Minutes, Part II, Statistics." The Statistical Report consists of the "Statistics Questions" (which is 4 separate reports) and "Supplemental Questions" tabs. The membership numbers you report determine your per capita assessment for the following year, and help the presbytery determine its budget.

The easiest way to complete this report is online, and it is usually available in November or December. You can work on this report in pieces (it saves information as you enter it, and when you log out, and you can resume where you left off). The deadline for submitting the report is usually the first week of February.

Terms of Call Report
This report is one way we are accountable to one another. It must be submitted for pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, designated pastors, certified Christian educators, and certified associate Christian educators. It does not need to be submitted for interim pastors, interim associate pastors, stated supplies, temporary supplies, or ruling elders commissioned to pastoral service.

2019 Congregational Staff Compensation Report
This information is very helpful for other congregations as they make staffing and budget plans.

Other Reports
From time to time, the presbytery may ask clerks of session for help in gathering other information or distributing surveys.

THE CLERK'S ROLE WHEN THERE IS NO PASTOR

When the church is without a pastor, the clerk of session becomes the primary communication person with presbytery staff and the presbytery Committee on Ministry (COM) who will provide assistance and guidance for the congregation through transition.

Session and Congregational Meetings
The *Book of Order* requires a teaching elder or a commissioned ruling elder to moderate the session. The COM will appoint a moderator to the session and it is important for the clerk of session to be in contact with that person concerning business that needs to be addressed and to help the moderator form the agenda of the meeting. The moderator should receive $50 plus mileage for each meeting.

Sunday Worship
The clerk of session can assist the session or its worship committee in finding pulpit supply, if necessary. The pulpit supply list is posted on the presbytery's web site in the "Quick Links" box.

If a PC(USA) pastor is not available to preside at the communion table, it is possible for a ruling elder(s) to be trained to officiate. In such a case, the Committee on Ministry should be notified who and when such trained elders will be officiating, so it can be recorded in their minutes. If a ruling elder from the pulpit supply list will be officiating at the Table, it is also necessary to request permission from the COM for that person to officiate. Permission must be obtained each time the ruling elder presides. In both these cases, an email to the secretary of COM from the clerk of session is sufficient to get the business to the COM.

Pastor Nominating Committee
The Pastor Nominating Committee may need information from the clerk of session as it prepares the documents for its work and goes about the search. Candidates often like to see statistical reports, mission statements, policies and bylaws, and financial statements.

SESSION MEETINGS

Sample Docket for Meetings of Session

Devotion and Opening Prayer (can be led by rotation of ruling elders or by moderator)

Report of the Moderator/Pastor

Report of the Clerk (includes approval of minutes, member transfers, communications)

Report of the Treasurer (this report should be filed for review, not approved)

Reports from permanent and special committees

Report from presbytery meeting (at the session following a meeting of presbytery)

Unfinished Business

New Business

Adjournment with prayer

Called Meetings of Session
Councils of the church have stated meetings – which must be held at least quarterly and are regularly scheduled throughout the year – and called meetings which happen in addition to stated meetings and are called by the moderator when necessary, or wen requested in writing by any two members of session. (G-3.0203) Meetings may be called for particular items of business that need to be handled between scheduled meetings. A called meeting is limited to the declared purpose for which it was called, and the minutes of that meeting must include that reason. The presbytery can also call for a special meeting of the session.

Called meetings for receiving new members or approval of baptism do not require a full quorum of the session. These can be achieved with the presence of 2-3 members of the session.

Conducting Business Virtually
Meetings of the session or the congregation should ordinarily be in-person. However, there are times when it may be convenient or even necessary to hold meetings and conduct business via audio or video conferencing. The possibility and conditions of electronic meetings *must be authorized by the bylaws of the congregation or the session.* Virtual meetings may be held unless a simple majority of the body requests an in-person meeting, and must:

- ensure that every member of the session – or in the case of a congregational meeting, every congregation member who wishes to attend - has access to adequate technology that allows participation in the meetings
- provide at a minimum, conditions of opportunity for simultaneous aural communication.

Conducting Business by E-mail

It is not uncommon for sessions to make simple and time-sensitive decisions via email between meetings. However, email does not provide for simultaneous aural communication which "is essential to the deliberative character" of meetings (*Robert's Rules of Order*). Therefore, there are some guidelines for conducting business via email:

1. All session members must be included in communication and must "Reply All" so that the full conversation is shared by the whole session.
2. If there any significant discussion or any disagreement or concern on the item under consideration, the decision must be deferred to an in-person meeting (which could be virtual).
3. The results of any decision made by email should be included in the minutes of the next regularly scheduled meeting of session.

Reminders for Session Minutes

The presbytery's Committee on Ministry conducts the annual review of the session's minutes, rolls and registers, as required by the *Book of Order*. The Checklist for this review, attached at the end of this handbook, is a useful reference for what must be included in your minutes.

Here also are some reminders:

1. Record the date, time, and place of each meeting.
2. Record the names of members of session (teaching elders and ruling elders) who are present, excused, or absent (unexcused).
3. Record the opening and closing of each meeting with prayer.
4. Record the approval and corrections of the minutes of the previous meeting. (If there are corrections, note it in the current minutes but also go back and change the previous minutes.)
5. Record only that which is vital to the transaction of the business of the meeting.
6. Record motions that are carried or defeated. Record discussion if directed by the session to do so.
7. Once the minutes are placed into the minute book, avoid erasures, interlineations, and footnotes. Mark through empty space on a page.
8. Do not insert in the records written or printed material on separate sheets of paper.
9. Record the authorization and the administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and Baptism. If home-bound communion is served, note the names of the authorized persons who delivered it and how many people were served.
10. Record the full name of applicants for church membership and whether they are baptized. If received by letter of transfer, list the name of the previous church. If an elder or deacon, record their names on the appropriate roll, if possible with the church and date of ordination.

11. Record the full name and address of the church to which a certificate of transfer is granted along with the full name of the person transferred, including the date. On the letter of transfer sent to the receiving church, list dates of ordination if applicable, and the names of baptized children.
12. Record the name of elder(s) elected as commissioner(s) to presbytery and the period of service.
13. Include a report from the ruling elder commissioner(s) following each meeting of presbytery.
14. Record marriages of members of the church and all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff with approval of the session.
15. If the session should find it necessary to exercise discipline, contact the Stated Clerk of the presbytery for guidance. Keep minutes of all proceedings.
16. The annual General Assembly statistical report should be presented to the session and approved by them, preferably before the report if submitted.
17. Since it is only by order of the session that names are added or deleted from the rolls and register or moved from one roll to another, such changes are recorded in the session minutes as well as being made in the register.
18. Minutes of meetings of the session are signed by the clerk. Minutes of meetings of the congregation are signed by the clerk and the moderator.

RECORDS, DOCUMENTS AND POLICIES

Historical Preservation
The minutes and rolls/registers are permanent historical documents of the church and should be recorded in ways that will allow them to be available for future generations. Acid-free paper should be used for keeping the final copies of minutes and for the roll book. Books that are full and no longer used can be sent to the Presbyterian Historical Foundation for safe keeping. The session can always request access to books that the Foundation has received. Many electronic media are not safe ways to store records. If a church wishes to keep digital copies of minutes and roll book, cloud storage is safest. Do not rely on flash drives or other physical storage media.

Consult the attached Retention Schedule recommended by the Presbyterian Historical Society for how long to keep other documents of the church.

Rolls and Registers
The clerk of session is responsible for maintaining the membership rolls and registers of the church. The membership rolls include lists of:

- Active Members - who have been baptized, made a profession of faith in Christ, have been received into the membership of the church, have voluntarily submitted to the government of church, and participate in the work and worship of the church

- Baptized Members – (usually children) who have been baptized but not yet made a profession of faith in Christ
- Affiliate Members – who are members of another congregation or another denomination who have temporarily moved to the area and connected with the life of the congregation.

Many churches also maintain a list of Inactive Members, which was a membership category no longer required by the *Book of Order.*

The required registers of the church are:

- Baptisms authorized by the session
- Ruling elders with dates of service
- Deacons with dates of service
- Installed pastors with dates of service.

Many churches also keep registers of marriages and deaths.

Bylaws, Manuals, and Policies

Each congregation must have athe following set of operational documents, which may be required by the state, or by the *Book of Order,* or by the presbytery. The presbytery stated clerk can provide samples of all these documents:

- Articles of Incorporation – a legal document, filed with the state, and renewed regularly
- Bylaws – (also called "Regulations" by the State of Ohio) deal with matters of organization, meetings, quorums, etc. Bylaws are a document of the congregation. They can be written by the session but must be approved by the congregation.
- Sexual Misconduct Policy
- Child and Youth Protection Policy
- Manual of Operations - includes the documents listed above, as well as policies regarding the use of the building, how finances are handled, and other matters that require guidance. The manual of operations is written and adopted by the session. A suggested outline for a Manual of Operations is Attached.

RESOURCES: MINUTES, ROLLS/REGISTERS CHECKLIST

YES	NO	
		SESSION MINUTES (Stated and Called meetings)
		Does the name of the congregation appear in the records book?
		Are the minutes on acid-free paper?
		Are all pages secured in the book?
		Are pages numbered consecutively?
		Are empty pages crossed off?
		Did the Session meet at least quarterly during the year?
		Did each Session meeting open and close with prayer?
		Do minutes record the name of the moderator and ruling elders present, absent, or excused?
		Were previous minutes read and approved or amended?
		Has the clerk signed the minutes of all Session meetings?
		For the following, please indicate the page number(s) where each is recorded
		Did Session elect a Commissioner to attend each Presbytery meeting during the past twelve months? *Page(s)* ____
		Did Commissioners report back to the Session? *Page(s)* ____
		Does the church have a Board of Deacons? If yes:
		Have Deacon minutes been reviewed by Session during the past twelve months? *Page(s)* ____
		Have Session and Deacons held a joint meeting during the past twelve months? *Page(s)* ____
		Does the church have Trustees? If yes:
		Has Session reviewed the Trustees' minutes during the past twelve months? *Page(s)* ____
		Have the Session and Trustees held a joint meeting during the past twelve months? *Page(s)* ____
		Has the Lord's Supper been observed at least quarterly during the past twelve months? *Page(s)* ____
		Do minutes/rolls include full names of new members and the manner of reception? *Page(s)* ____
		Do the minutes/rolls include the full names of those receiving baptism, including date and place of birth and the full names of both parents? *Page(s)* ____
		Is the annual budget given in full? *Page(s)* ____
		Is Session's Annual Statistical Report to the General Assembly included in minutes? *Page(s)* ____
		Has there been a full review of the congregation's finances in the last year? *Page(s)* ____
		Do minutes record date, time, and place of meeting(s), as well as moderators> *Page(s)* ____

YES	NO	**MINUTES OF CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS**
		Did meetings open and close with prayer?
		Is the declaration of a quorum recorded?
		Was the purpose of the meeting recorded?
		Is the election of the Nominating Committee recorded?
		Is the election of Elders and Deacon and Trustees (as applicable) recorded?
		Are any other main motions recorded?
		Are minutes signed by both clerk and moderator?
		Did the congregation review the terms of call of the pastoral staff?
		ROLLS AND REGISTERS
		Are new members recorded? Date of most recent addition:_________________
		Are baptisms recorded? Date of most recent addition:_________________
		Are ordination/installation of Elders and Deacons recorded? Date of most recent class: __________________
		Is register of pastors updated?
		OTHER INFORMATION
		Do minutes show the name of the COM liaison? *Page*_______________________
		Do minutes show the amount and payment of per capita? *Page(s)*_______________________
		Has Session reviewed the adequacy of insurance? *Page(s)*_______________________
		Has Session adopted/updated a sexual misconduct policy? *Page(s)*_______________________
		Has Session adopted/updated a child protection policy? *Page(s)*_______________________
		Does the congregation have a manual of operations? *Page showing approval by Session*____________________

RESOURCES: RETENTION RECORDS

(recommended by the Presbyterian Historical Society)

Types	**Retention Period**
Minutes	permanent
Registers	permanent
Annual reports	permanent
Bylaws/charters	permanent
Incorporation records	permanent
Annual budgets	permanent
Annual audits	permanent
Annual financial statements	permanent
Subject files: correspondence, minutes, or other records surrounding subject matter of continuing administrative or legal value, or comprising information on the mission, vision, and actions of the congregation	permanent
Manuals/handbooks	permanent
Newspapers/newsletters	permanent
Brochures/promotional material (1 copy)	permanent
Photographs	permanent
Architectural drawings, plats, plans, blueprints	permanent
Wills, bequests	permanent
Legal/judicial case records	permanent
Loan agreements	satisfaction + 20 years
Property appraisals, records of sale	20 years after sale
Personnel records/employee records	employment + 7 years
Contracts	active + 6 years
Accounts payable	7 years
Accounts payable invoices	7 years
Accounts receivable records	7 years
Bank statements	7 years
Canceled checks	7 years
Cash receipt records	7 years
Donations (regular, weekly)	7 years
Expense reports	7 years
FICA / W2 records	7 years
Payroll records	7 years
Petty cash records	7 years

Receipts of purchases	7 years
Bank deposit slips	3 years
General/routine correspondence (acknowledgments, requests, travel arrangements, etc.)	3 years
Travel plans/arrangements	3 years
Periodic financial statements	2 years
Data for updating mailing lists	1 year
Invitations	1 year
Meeting notices	1 year
Mailing lists	active
Reference/resource materials	active

RESOURCES: SAMPLE MANUAL OF OPERATIONS

Originating Documents

a) organizing covenant
b) list of charter members
c) articles of incorporation
d) bylaws
e) mission statement

Nominating, Electing, and Ordaining/Installing

a) description of the work of the congregation's nominating committee
b) elements in the examination by the session of those elected
c) procedure on the day for ordination/installation

Membership

a) procedures for contact and invitation for membership
b) procedures for removing names from the roll

Committees and Organizations

a) job description of the work of each committee and organization
b) description of annual sequence of the work required for each committee and organization
c) time, place, and frequency of meetings of each committee and organization
d) expectations of persons serving on committees and organizations

Contact with the Presbytery

a) list of presbytery commissioners
b) form to nominate persons to serve on presbytery committees

Personnel

a) position description for each church staff position—paid or volunteer
b) personnel policies
c) forms used in hiring, including disclosure forms for prior charges or conviction in sexual misconduct and sexual abuse
d) description of performance review and compensation review procedure

Finances

a) church budget
b) description of procedure for stewardship and pledging
c) procedures for counting the offering

Calendar

church calendar of events during the year

Annual Meeting

description of preparation for the annual meeting with copy of last meeting

Worship and Sacraments

a) instructions for ushers
b) instructions for greeters
c) instructions for those serving communion
d) instructions for those preparing communion
e) procedure for ruling elder assisting in baptism

Safety

a) sexual misconduct policy
b) child protection policy
c) catastrophic event policy