

**HANDBOOK**  
**FOR**  
**CLERKS OF SESSION**  
**2008**

**PRESBYTERY OF WHITEWATER VALLEY**

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# **HANDBOOK FOR CLERKS OF SESSION WHITEWATER VALLEY PRESBYTERY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in G-9.0203, devotes four sentences of its 2007-2009 edition to its basic definition of the role and responsibilities of a congregation's clerk of session. We know there's far more to the clerk's work than those brief sentences suggest! And, whether you're experienced or new to the assignment, you know that too.

The Session Records Review Committee of Whitewater Valley Presbytery therefore offers you this *Handbook for Clerks of Session* with appreciation for your calling and prayers for your work. In it we suggest some philosophical background to Presbyterian polity, mention some resources to consider placing next to your Bible, walk you through the definitions and details of moderator and clerk, touch on relationships with other organizations and governing bodies in our connectional system, and delve into details of minutes and other session records for which you are responsible. In a separate section, we offer explanations that may assist you in your ongoing work on minutes and may also help prepare you for the annual review of minutes, rolls, and registers called for by the *Book of Order* and conducted by the Session Records Review Committee.

This *Handbook* is adapted from Heartland Presbytery's Handbook for Clerks of Session. Gratitude is expressed to that presbytery for sharing of its excellent resource.

Session Records Review Committee

**PRESBYTERIANS: WHO WE ARE**

Although Scripture does not clearly set down any form of church order as such, the Bible does reveal the nature of God, our relationship to God, and our relationship to the fellowship of believers. It does give us the experience of the early church and the beginnings of some form of organization.

Out of the Reformation came a specific form of Protestant church government: Presbyterian, that is, government by elders. In fact, *presbyter* is derived from the Greek term for elder. Elders are chosen and ordained to serve in positions of leadership. As an elder, you are called by God and by the congregation to a position of service and leadership.

You are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather as a session collectively to seek to find and to represent the will of Christ. Elders are to be leaders and listeners to the congregation. In your decisions as an elder, you are responsible, not only to the congregation, but also to Christ.

## **PARLIAMENTARY**

## **LAW**

Parliamentary law is not really law as such, but a body of conventions or customs used in decision-making. It encompasses common sense and courtesy, is a model for effective conflict resolution, and -- when used correctly -- will provide accuracy, efficiency, impartiality, objectivity, and uniformity. It helps us transact our business decently and in order.

Especially in the church, it is always out of order to use parliamentary procedure as a device to subvert the will of the Holy Spirit as our guide as we seek the truth.

## **SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

“The unity of the church is a gift of its Lord and finds expression in its faithfulness to the mission to which Christ calls it.” (G-4.0201). As Presbyterians, we covenant to work with one another as visible expressions of the Body of Christ and as representatives of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

One of the historic principles of our church is that we are to seek to know the will of God for our lives, yet we should exercise forbearance toward each other, understanding that “God alone is Lord of the conscience.” (G-1.0301(1)(a)). We are to seek unity, yet encourage diversity, and understand that through discussion and prayer we can more clearly discern God’s will and direction.

As a presbytery and as a denomination we believe “That the several different congregations of believers, taken collectively, constitute one Church of Christ, called emphatically the Church: That a larger part of the Church, or a representation of it, should govern a smaller, or determine matters of controversy which arise therein..that a majority shall govern.” (G-1.0400) In other words, in all assemblies we must strive for a balance of expression of individual conscience and the will of the majority. As individuals, we have several rights, among them: the right to know what is going on and why; the right to speak and to be heard under the rules of debate; the right to vote; and the right to hold office.

Serious conflict can arise from premature resolution of an issue without regard to members’ rights. Care must be taken within our polity and parliamentary practice to assure that rights of the minority as well as the majority are protected.

Our call is to seek the truth, not win a battle. In parliamentary procedure, there is no “battle” as

such, but there will be open debate.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

The *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* is divided into two parts: The *Book of Confessions* (Part I; see below) and the *Book of Order* (Part II).

The three sections of the *Book of Order* that specifically govern the life of the congregation are the *Form of Government*, the *Directory for Worship*, and the *Rules of Discipline*.

The *Book of Order* may be considered our denomination's by-laws as well as its standing rules. It is essential for the Clerk of Session to study the *Book of Order* because it contains the fundamentals for working within the church.

The *Form of Government* may be seen as the how and when: how and when we function within these beliefs. It explains thoroughly and (usually) clearly the polity of orderly workings of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We turn to the *Form of Government* to find answers to our frequent questions, and it is one of the standards under which the church makes decisions.

The *Directory for Worship* "reflects the conviction that the life of the church is one, and that its worship, witness, and service are inseparable," as its Preface declares.

The *Rules of Discipline* contains information regarding the nature and discipline of the church. In it you will find judicial process, how to file dissents and protests, administrative review, jurisdiction and process of permanent judicial commissions, procedural safeguards, and much more. The Preamble to the *Rules of Discipline* reminds us that church discipline is for the building up of Christ's church, not for tearing it down, and for restoration to wholeness of the offender. Church discipline is never taken lightly.

The *Book of Confessions* contains our historic Christian confessions that are basic to the theology of the church. All ordained church officers are to affirm that they will be instructed by these confessions; therefore, it is essential that this book be available for individual and group study as well as to be used at times of ordination and installation of officers. While officers are not required to agree with everything in these confessions, they are required to "sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and [to] be instructed and led by those confessions as [they] lead the people of God." (G-14.0207c) Through the *Book of Confessions*, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) declares to its members and to the world the who, what, and why of our beliefs.

*Companion to the Constitution: Polity for the Local Church*, published by the Office of the General Assembly, is an effective, simply written book that is considered a how, what, and why to do book.

*Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers*, by Joan Gray and Joyce Tucker (Westminster John Knox Press), is considered exceptional reading. This is the *Book of Order* in simple terms.

*Parliamentary Procedures in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* by Marianne L. Wolfe is a booklet that fits into the *Book of Order* and is a valuable rapid reference.

The latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* is mandated for use by the *Book of Order* (G-9.0302). Parliamentary law is common sense and politeness put into practice in meetings. It is a body of conventions and customs that aids decision-making, is a model for conflict resolution, and works for the protection of individual rights in the church.

*Called to Serve* is a 1997 resource from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that is designed to assist churches in preparing officers for leadership; suggested uses include individual study, a preordination retreat, or specific training workshops.

Whitewater Valley Presbytery publishes annually a CD ROM directory of the Presbytery, its officers, ministers, churches, and organizational committee members.

## **AUTHORITY OF THE SESSION**

“The session of a particular church consists of the pastor or co-pastors, the associate pastors, and the elders in active service. All members of the session, including the pastor, co-pastors, and associate pastors, are entitled to vote.” (G-10.0101)

“The session is responsible for the mission and government of the particular church.” (G-10.0102) Specific responsibilities and power (duties) are enumerated in Chapter X. “The Session.” and should be studied on a regular basis by all active elders.

Although most churches hold session meetings at least monthly, “the session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly.” (G-10.0201)

Open or closed meetings: Frequently the question is asked, “Are session meetings opened or closed to the congregation?” The *Book of Order* notes: “The session may invite members of the congregation to attend and observe its meetings if it so desires, without restricting its right to meet in executive session whenever circumstances indicate the wisdom of doing so.” (G-10.0201)

### **By-laws**

If your congregation does not have by-laws; or if your church's bylaws are in need of an up-date, please contact the stated clerk of the presbytery for information about how to establish them.

### **Incorporation**

The *Book of Order* (G-7.0401) states, “Wherever permitted by civil law, each particular church shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained.” This language is not considered permissive as the word “shall” is used. Clerks of session are reminded that the State of Indiana requires all corporations to renew the church's status by filing an annual report and paying a small fee. This may be done online via a link on the Presbytery's Web site [www.whitewatervalley.org](http://www.whitewatervalley.org); and it may be accessed under Presbytery Business; Clerk of Session Forms; Indiana Business Entity Report.

### **Insurance**

One of the items on the Presbytery's session minute review checklist is in regard to an annual review of the church's insurance. The *Book of Order* (G-10.0102o) outlines the responsibility of the session "to provide for the management of the property of the church, including determination of the appropriate use of church buildings and facilities, and to obtain property and liability insurance coverage to protect the facilities, programs, and officers, including members of the session, staff, board of trustees, and deacons." Also, churches should consider registering with their insurance company the names of people in the congregation who will be driving for church events. This is particularly true for retreats or youth events.

## **MODERATOR OF THE SESSION**

"The pastor of the church shall be the moderator of the session and the session shall not meet without the pastor except as hereunder provided. In congregations where there are co-pastors, they shall, when present, alternately preside in the session. When it may appear advisable for prudential reasons that some minister other than the pastor should preside, the pastor may, with the concurrence of the session, invite a minister of the same presbytery to do so. In addition, the moderator of the session of a church with a vacant pulpit may request an elder who is a member of the presbytery's committee on ministry, the stated clerk, executive presbyter, or associate executive presbyter, to preside; such elder may not moderate the session of the church of which that elder is a member. In the case of the sickness or absence of the pastor, the same expedient may be adopted; or the session, after having obtained the approval of the pastor, may convene and elect another of its own members to preside." (G-10.0103a)

"When a church is without a pastor, the moderator of the session shall be the minister appointed for that purpose by the presbytery, or a minister of the same presbytery invited by the session to preside on a particular occasion. When it is impossible for such a minister to attend, the session may elect one of its own members to preside" (G-10.0103b), with the permission of the pastor.

## **CLERK OF SESSION**

### **Annual Responsibilities**

Annually the clerk of session must complete the church's annual statistical report, which is submitted to the Office of the General Assembly Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The report is entered online but if your church has no access to the Internet then send it to the stated clerk of the presbytery by the announced date in February—usually near Valentine's Day!

An annual report must also be submitted to the Presbytery. These forms and information are provided to clerks and sessions in December, with most of the information available online. The Presbytery has endeavored to make this annual report task as "user friendly" and simple as possible. The categories of reports are as follows: Year End Reports; Clerk of Session Forms; Treasurer Forms; Mission Forms. The forms are available on the Web site under Presbytery Business, Forms.

The clerk of session is clerk for the congregational meeting, both ecclesiastical and corporate (G-7.0307). Specific details of what that entails are on pages 16-17.

Prepare your Minute Book and Church Rolls and Registers for the annual review by the Session Records Review Committee of the Presbytery (and subsequent approval by the presbytery itself). In the

preparatory form that the Committee will provide, please fill in the requested page numbers for each information category.

Inform the session of the presbytery's meeting dates for the year. The session should elect commissioners for each meeting, according to the number of commissioners assigned to your church for that year. If in doubt of the number, please contact the stated clerk.

## **Monthly Responsibilities**

Many clerks are aided by a church secretary. However, the clerk is accountable for the following responsibilities and may request a church secretary in the following tasks:

- Before the session meeting, send meeting notices. Contact committee chairpersons about unfinished and referred business for which they are responsible. Remind chairpersons that all recommendations need to be in writing with enough copies for each member of the session.
- Develop the docket of the session meeting with the moderator. Ensure that minutes of all meetings are reviewed and approved. Record the minutes of each meeting. Many sessions have found that written reports facilitate the flow of business. Historical and informational material always comes first in the report and recommendations come last.

A quorum of session must be present to have a legal meeting at which actions are taken. The quorum of session is the pastor session moderator and one-third of session membership, but no fewer than two; except for reception and dismissal of members, in which case the moderator and two members of the session is sufficient. "The session may fix its own quorum at any higher number." (G-10.0202)

- After the session meeting, take careful notes and begin the process of writing the minutes. Each member of the session should receive a copy prior to the next stated meeting.
- Complete any correspondence directed by the minutes, including letters of transfer.
- Record in the rolls and registers all membership changes ordered by the session.

## **SESSION DOCKET**

The docket (agenda) for a session meeting can be the responsibility of either the clerk in consultation with the pastor or the pastor in consultation with the clerk. Your input and frequent contact with other session members is invaluable. In case of a pastoral vacancy, the moderator named by the presbytery often will rely on the clerk of session to formulate the docket.

The session docket should be made available to session members prior to meetings so that the elders may be prepared to do the business of the church. Included in this information are the date, time, location, agenda or order of business, financial data, and other pertinent information as needed and available.

The value of the docket is three-fold:

- It provides for an orderly process in the handling of session business.

- It informs the members of issues to be discussed.
- It serves as a reminder of the necessary preparation for a meeting. The clerk of session can take this opportunity to assist the pastor/moderator in handling administrative details and sharing in the ministry of the church.

## SAMPLE DOCKET

### PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH STATED SESSION MEETING OCTOBER 15, 2008

#### DOCKET

1. Call to order, open with prayer
2. Record those present and absent, and determine that a quorum is present.
3. Approve the minutes of the previous meeting.
4. Present communications and correspondence and refer to the appropriate committee.
5. Hear reports from
  - pastor,
  - clerk,
  - treasurer,
  - other staff members,
  - permanent committees, and
  - special committees and task forces.
6. Take action regarding the reception and dismissal of members.
7. Hold dialogues with other governing bodies:
  - a. hear reports from commissioners to presbytery or synod.
  - b. prepare reports to presbytery as requested.
8. Present other matters.
9. Summarize the actions and confirm assignments.
10. Clarify plans for the next meeting.
11. Adjournment, close with worship/prayer.

#### THE SESSION'S RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

All organizations of the congregation are accountable to the session. All organizations should make a financial and programmatic report to session and the congregation annually.

**Board of Trustees:** (G-7.0400; G-8.0000) The board of trustees is accountable to the session. Their powers as trustees are listed in G-7.0402 and shall not infringe on the powers of session. G-7.0401 provides that the active elders shall be the trustees of the corporation unless the by-laws provide otherwise. Having such a unicameral board eliminates conflicts between the session and the board of trustees.

**Board of Deacons:** (G-6.0400) The board of deacons is accountable to the session; chooses its own officers; meets annually with the session; and must submit its plans to session for approval. The pastor(s) are advisory members of the board of deacons.

***Nominating Committee:*** (G-14.0200) The church nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not the session. It does not report to session, although the committee may wish to consult with session. However, “at least two members of this committee shall be elders designated by the session, one of whom shall be currently on the session and serve as moderator of the committee.” At least one member shall be designated by and from the board of deacons if the church has deacons. (G-14.0201b) The pastor is an ex-officio member of this committee without vote. Churches with fewer than seventy members may choose “to elect a small church nominating committee which shall consist of one member of the session appointed by the session to be moderator and at least two members of the congregation not in active service on the session”. (G-14.0201c)

***Pastor Nominating Committee:*** (G-14.0502) The pastor nominating committee (PNC) is a committee of the congregation, not the session. The committee has several points of contact with the session:

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

***Session and personnel:*** (G-10.0102n) Session supervises all ordained and non-ordained personnel and annually reviews the adequacy of compensation for all staff, including all employees. Session recommends to the congregation the compensation and terms of call for the minister(s). This recommendation must meet the minimum guidelines set by presbytery.

***Outside organizations:*** (G-10.0102o) Session controls the use of all church property, including granting permission for the sanctuary to be used for weddings. The purpose of an organization using the church should not be contrary to the mission of the congregation or the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is wise to have a written contract for all organizations using the church building, stipulating any rental fee, maintenance standards, insurance coverage and rooms of the church to be used.

## **ACTIONS THAT MUST BE APPROVED BY MORE THAN ONE GOVERNING BODY**

Because the connectional system is one of the hallmarks of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), there are a number of actions that require approval by the Presbytery. Among them:

- Application to presbytery to take an “inquirer” under care of presbytery: session, Committee on Preparation for Ministry, and presbytery.
- Loans that use the church or its property as collateral and all sales of property: session and trustees, presbytery council, and presbytery (ecclesiastical and corporate).
- Any lease of its real property used for purposes of worship, and all leases of church property for a period of more than five years: session, presbytery council, and presbytery. (G-8.0502)
- All changes of church location, worship place(s) or church name: session, congregation (ecclesiastical and corporate), trustees and council of presbytery, and presbytery (ecclesiastical and corporate).

- All changes in terms of call for the pastor: session, congregation; Committee on Ministry, and presbytery.
- Dissolutions of pastorate and calls for new pastors: congregation; Committee on Ministry, ordinarily on behalf of the Presbytery.
- Appointment of moderator of session.
- Approval of interim pastor, designated pastor, stated supply, Commissioned Lay Pastor , and temporary pastor, parish associate; Committee on Ministry.
- Call for special session meeting: two members of the session, in writing.
- Call for a special congregational meeting: session, presbytery; session when requested in writing by one-fourth active members of the congregation (G-7.0303).
- Session meeting when pastor is ill or is out-of-town: if the pastor grants permission and appoints a member of presbytery as moderator pro tem.
- All waivers from the *Book of Order* terms of election (G-14.0202): congregation, and presbytery.

### **ACTIONS WHICH OCCUR ANNUALLY**

It is the responsibility of the session and clerk of session to see that certain important actions occur annually. The following is a list of some of the actions which a clerk should expect to encounter every year. Many of these occur at the same time each year or in the same sequence with other activities of the church. For instance, most congregations elect new officers at the end of the calendar year, often in October or November. Doing so requires the nominating committee to be formed and called into action in August or September so that it can properly perform its assigned task prior to the congregational meeting to elect those new officers. It also means that the examination, ordination and installation of the newly elected officers will probably occur in December or January, shortly after the election. Some of these yearly activities, such as the annual General Assembly statistical report and per capita apportionment payments, are due by specifically set dates. Each of these actions is described in more detail elsewhere in this manual.

- Nominating committee formed and new officers nominated and elected (both corporate and ecclesiastical)
- Examination by session and ordination and installation of newly elected officers
- Annual congregational and corporation meetings (may be combined)
- Review of compensation of pastor and all other staff (changes in terms of call for pastor must be approved by congregation)
- Budget approval
- Full financial review or audit of financial records

- Insurance review
- Select commissioner representatives to presbytery
- Schedule observances of Lord's Supper
- Review of membership rolls
- Annual corporation registration report form (if required by state law)
- Annual General Assembly statistical report (due in February )
- Per capita apportionment payments (due in January)
- Joint meeting of session and deacons
- Sexual Misconduct Policy Review and Training
- Review of session records by presbytery through the Coordinating Council's Session Records Review Committee.

## **MINUTES, ROLLS AND REGISTERS**

### **Session Minutes**

Session minutes are to be kept in a book designated solely for that purpose. This book should be a book or binder of good quality with acid-free paper. Pages should be numbered, but you may want to purchase a minute book without numbers. Having a separate numbering device allows you to include other items (approved budget, copy of annual statistical report to the General Assembly, and record of examination of session records) that cannot be copied on pre-numbered sheets.

According to *Robert's Rules of Order*, the record of the proceedings of a deliberative assembly is usually called the minutes. In ordinary society, unless the minutes are to be published, they should contain mainly a record of what was done, not what was said by the members. Using the journalistic approach of reporting who, what, where, when, how, and why is suggested for accurate accountability. Minutes are a history of the actions of the governing body.

It is recommended that minutes should be interesting, with enough information so that our grandchildren will know what happened in this church years before. One of the primary reasons for the emphasis on precise, accurate record keeping is the role that the minutes play in recounting the history of the congregation, often retrievable in no other way.

Additionally, the minutes of a meeting should never reflect the clerk's opinion, favorable or otherwise, on anything said or done.

The moderator, co-pastors, associate pastors and all active elders should receive and approve the minutes of all session meetings. The *Book of Order*, as well as *Robert's Rules of Order*, specifies that ownership of these records resides with the body that constituted them. In other words, the session has

ownership and the clerk has responsibility for preserving these records. Keeping the book(s) in a fireproof file cabinet or safe is highly recommended.

Should a situation arise in the congregation where a member other than a session member asks for permission to read session minutes, you are encouraged to make these minutes available to any member who asks. Also be prepared to discuss and explain any questions about actions. In the church, we have no room for mistrust.

Because session minutes are unique to various churches and clerks of session, the following Minutes of Stated Meeting of Session are to be used only as a sample or guideline.

**MINUTES OF STATED MEETING OF THE SESSION  
OF YOUR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
October 19, 2008**

The Session of Your Presbyterian Church held its stated meeting in the library on October 19, 2008, at 6:30 p.m. The meeting was called to order by moderator (name), who declared a quorum was present and opened the meeting with prayer.

**Attendance:** The following persons were in attendance: Elders (names); excused: (names); absent: (names). Visitors: (names).

**Adoption of Docket:** Rev. Heimach called for approval of the docket. Moved, seconded, approved.

**Consent Agenda**

1. The minutes of the September 20, 2008 stated meeting be approved as distributed.
2. Approve the transfer of John and Elizabeth Doe to Faith Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis; and the Doe baptized children, Mary and Frank be transferred to Faith Church's baptized member roll.
3. Approve the baptism of Alice May Jones, child of Jerry and Martha Jones, born April 5, 2007, on Sunday, November 5.
4. Approve the use of the sanctuary for the wedding of Lisa Brown and John Burke on Saturday, December 11, 2008. Rev. Heimach will officiate.

**Clerk's Report**

**Communications**

The clerk informed the session of the recent correspondence, none of which required action at this time. By consent, requests for use of the church building were referred to the Building and Grounds Committee for review and recommendations to session.

**Items of Information**

Beulah Snow died on September 6, 2008; Rev. Schwarz officiated at the memorial service.

Elder Rachel White was elected a commissioner to the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010) at the September 2, 2008 stated meeting of Whitewater Valley Presbytery.

The following committee reports were heard:

**Christian Education Committee:**

**Finance Committee:**

**Property Committee:**

**Worship Committee:**

**Report from commissioners to the meeting of Presbytery on September 2, 2008:** (Name) and (name) served as commissioners to the meeting of presbytery held at Northminster Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. (Name) reported that the presbytery-wide worship service held on (date) was well attended and is hoped to be scheduled sometime during the summer in 1998. A report was also heard of work being done by PYOCA.

**Full Financial Review /Audit Committee Report:** The moderator of the full financial review committee reported that the 2007 financial records of the church have been reviewed by the committee formed for that purpose and no discrepancies were found and no recommendations were made. The committee was dismissed with thanks for a job well done.

**Old Business:**

**New Business:**

**Adjournment and Closing Prayer:** There being no further business to come before the meeting, the moderator/pastor announced that the meeting was adjourned and provided the closing prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

(Name)  
Clerk

## **Congregational and Corporation Meetings**

The role and responsibilities of the clerk of session is to be the secretary in congregational and corporation meetings. A congregational meeting may be called only by session, by presbytery, or by session on written request of one-fourth of the members of the congregation on the active roll (G-7.0303).

- Check both the *Book of Order* and the congregation's by-laws for what constitutes "due notice" for a congregational meeting. The minimum *Book of Order* requirement is that public notice must be given to the congregation the Sunday before and the Sunday of the meeting (G-7.0303b).
- Check your congregation's by-laws and the *Book of Order* for the quorum of the congregational meeting (G-7.0305).
- The business to be transacted at a congregational meeting shall be limited to items specifically listed in the publicly announced call for the meeting. No other business may be transacted at this meeting. You will find a careful listing of such business in G-7.0304 of the *Book of Order*.
- Business to be transacted at meetings of a congregation may be of two kinds: ecclesiastical and corporate. Whenever permitted by civil law, both kinds of business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting.

- The compensation and terms of call of the pastor or pastors must be approved annually by the congregation and reported to presbytery for its approval. The congregation approves the pastor's terms of call for recommendation to presbytery for approval (G-7.0302, 7.0304a(3)).
- Proxy voting is not permitted in congregational meetings, ecclesiastical or corporate.
- Always be prepared for a ballot vote to elect officers. If there is more than one nominee for an office, the election must be by ballot (G-14.0204b). The election of a pastor is always by ballot (G-14.0503b).
- Minutes of a congregational meeting may be approved before adjournment; "if the congregation does not approve the minutes of that congregational meeting before adjournment, the session shall read correct, and approve the minutes at its next scheduled meeting..." (G-7.0307). The congregation's minutes are signed by the moderator and the clerk.
- If your congregation does not have a unicameral board, the congregation elects the secretary of the corporate meeting. The person elected may be the clerk (G-7.0307, 7.0403).
- The State of Indiana requires corporations to file annual registration report forms with the state official, office or agency which oversees corporations to remain in good standing. Contact your church's legal advisor or the stated clerk of the presbytery for information regarding whether or not such a report is required for your corporation.

In addition to the session minutes, the minutes of all congregational meetings should be printed in the session minute book. One of the duties of the clerk of session is to serve as secretary for all congregational meetings; therefore, all your minutes are to be recorded in one book. The minutes of the annual congregational meeting on the following page are to be used only as a sample or guideline.

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING OF YOUR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH JANUARY 26, 2008

The congregation of Your Presbyterian Church was called to meet on Sunday, January 26, 2008, immediately following the 11:00 a.m. worship service. The meeting was called to order by the moderator, (name), who declared a quorum was present and opened the meeting with prayer.

**Secretary:** (name), was present and served as secretary.

**Approval of the Docket:** The docket was approved as printed.

### Annual Reports

Reports of the various boards and committees were presented in written form. Opportunity was given for questions or concerns about any of the reports. The financial report, including the budget for this year were presented and explained.

**Approval of the Change in the Pastor's Call:** Upon motion, second, congregation approved the following changes in the pastor's call: Salary, \$\_\_\_\_\_ ; housing allowance; car allowance, \$\_\_\_\_\_ ; Board of Pensions (pension and medical). These changes represent a 4% increase. Professional expense \$4,000; continuing education \$1,500.

**Congregational Nominating Committee:** (Name) made a motion that the church officer nominating committee for 2008 be composed of two members from the session (G-14.0201b) and one member from each of the following organizations: board of deacons, youth group, Presbyterian Women, and two persons at large. Seconded, approved.

**Adjournment:** There being no further business to come before the meeting, a motion was made by (name) to adjourn. The meeting closed with moderator/pastor providing a prayer and benediction.

Attested:

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Moderator

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Secretary

## Church Rolls and Registers

The counterpart of the session minute book is the church roll and register. They contain all vital information on the life of the congregation. It is part of the Session Records Committee's annual review and subsequent approval by the presbytery. The *Book of Order* (G-10.0302) calls for every session to maintain rolls of members (categories of membership are defined in G-5.0200 as baptized, active, inactive, and affiliate) and registers (which are listed in G-10.0302c: marriages, baptisms, elders, deacons, and pastors and other clergy serving the church) and to report the composition of the session (race, gender, age and disabilities) and compare it to the composition of the congregation (G-10.0301).

Although by some churches' tradition, the pastor or the church secretary may maintain the church rolls and registers, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to ascertain that they are kept up to date and are accurate.

The importance of accurate church rolls and registers emerges when church members request information that has civil as well as ecclesiastical value. Civil officials will usually accept information recorded in the church register to fulfill details of birth, marriage, and other family data. Be particularly careful in recording names and family relationships as it is now quite common for spouses and children not to share a common last name. Church bodies occasionally make requests for recorded information. If these records are accurate and properly kept, such requests can be easily facilitated.

There are five church rolls:

- **Chronological roll:** The chronological roll has numbers down the left side of a double page. Each member of the church is assigned a number at the time that person joins the church. Columns to the right offer space for necessary comments from time to time. A name is removed from this roll by action of the session or because of death. The only ways a name can be removed are by transfer to another church, transfer to the inactive roll, removal from the inactive roll, death, deletion, or removal from membership. (Details of these processes are in G-10.0302(b)(1.-8.)).
- **Alphabetical roll:** The alphabetical roll groups church members according to the first letter of their last names. This roll is cross-indexed with the chronological roll by membership number.
- **Baptized roll:** The baptized roll lists all infants, children, and adults baptized in your church or transferred into your church, with the name of the minister who baptized them. In the case of infant baptism, the parents' names must be listed. In the case of adult baptism, the name of the person baptized is always entered on the chronological and the alphabetical rolls. Adult baptism is always accompanied by joining the church and joining the church is always accompanied by

baptism if the person is not baptized. The only ways a name can be removed from the baptized roll are by profession of faith (at which point the person is entered on the chronological and the alphabetical rolls), transfer, or death. (G-10.0300a.(1))

- ***Inactive roll:*** The inactive roll lists names of members of the church who, in the judgment of -- and formal action by -- session, have willfully let their active membership in the church lapse. The person must have been inactive for at least one year and session must have diligently tried to discover the cause of the member's nonparticipation. (G-10.0200(3)(a))
- ***Affiliate roll:*** The affiliate roll enables a member who is away from his or her home church to temporarily join another church for up to two years while remaining on the active roll of the home church. (G-10.0300(2)(b))

(Note: To fill out the question on the General Assembly statistical report on "number of persons on the baptized roll," count the names listed on your baptized roll. This includes minor children of active members and/or ministers, and any other persons baptized in your church for whom the church feels a current pastoral responsibility. Do not remove any names from the baptized register. This is a historical document.)

## **PRESERVING YOUR RECORDS**

The clerk, in keeping records, is creating the history of your church for posterity. The Department of History of the General Assembly [425 Lombard Street, Philadelphia, PA 19147; (215) 627-1852] is a nationally recognized archive for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is important that you protect your minutes and register book from loss, theft, and fire or water damage. Current records that have not been microfilmed should be stored in the church in a waterproof safe.

At present, the Department of History will microfilm your records for a minimal charge under an arrangement between the Presbyterian Historical Society and the Society of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons). Acceptance of this agreement releases a copy of the church records to the Society. The session would need to make a decision about such a release and acceptance of the agreement.

## **REPORTS TO PRESBYTERY**

The clerk is responsible for a timely filing of several reports to presbytery.

### **Annual General Assembly Statistical Report**

The Annual General Assembly Statistical Report is session's report to the General Assembly and is the specific responsibility of the session and the clerk of session. It is sent by the stated clerk of presbytery to the church in late November or early December. The report is due in mid-February.

Tips on completing the report:

- Complete the membership part of the form immediately after your last session meeting of the year.
- Early in December, work with the treasurer on the definition of expenditures that you will find in

the workbook.

- During December, work on the programmatic questions of the report, referring each question to the proper person for an answer.
- If it is not possible to meet the deadline, please tell the stated clerk the estimated delivery date.
- The clerk of session relates directly to the stated clerk of presbytery. All correspondence between presbytery and the session is sent to the clerk of session with a copy to the session moderator.

### **Per Capita Apportionment Payments**

The per capita apportionment is adopted by the presbytery in the fall and an invoice is sent to each church treasurer soon thereafter. The per capita payment is due in January; however, payment may be made quarterly.

The per capita apportionment for the coming year is figured upon the latest published reported membership times the total per capita adopted by General Assembly, synod, and presbytery. The per capita apportionment is used for governing body ecclesiastical expenses mandated by the *Book of Order*.

### **Annual Review of Minister's Call and Compensation for all Church Employees**

Each year, the session is required by the *Book of Order* to review the adequacy of the salaries and terms of call for all ministers (G-7.0302n) and the review of the adequacy of compensation for all staff, including all employees (G-10.0102n). If the session wishes to recommend any change in the terms of call, the changes must be approved by the congregation contingent upon the approval of presbytery. The new terms of call for its pastor(s) must be reported to the Committee on Ministry for its recommendation to presbytery.

### **Minimum Compensation for Pastors**

Annually, presbytery adopts minimum terms of call for all installed pastors. Terms of call for all installed pastors must meet this minimum standard.

## **ANNUAL REVIEW OF SESSION RECORDS**

“Each session shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings which shall be submitted at least once each year to the presbytery for its general review and control.” (G-10.0301).

The presbytery has the responsibility and power... “to review session minutes and records at least once each year” (G-11.0103x).

## **COMMISSIONERS TO PRESBYTERY**

An ongoing relationship between the presbytery and ministers and elders is a foundational aspect of Presbyterian polity because when ministers and elders are commissioners to a presbytery meeting it is a clear statement of the voice of the people of God. Each church should take seriously its responsibility to

elect elder commissioners to attend the meeting, stay through the end of the meeting, and report to the session. There are four stated meetings of each year and the times and dates are published annually. Churches are encouraged to volunteer to host a presbytery meeting through the stated clerk's office.

Each session is responsible for electing commissioners to presbytery. The number of commissioners depends upon the size of the congregation (G-11.0101). The number of commissioners to which a congregation is entitled also varies according to equalization. At presbytery, synod and General Assembly meetings, there must be an equal number of minister members and elder commissioners. Before the summer presbytery meeting of each year, the stated clerk of presbytery will notify each clerk of session by letter of the number of elder commissioners the congregation is entitled to send to presbytery.

Parity of elders and ministers is based on the information collected through the churches' annual statistical reports. The formula is developed by the stated clerk and approved by the presbytery at its spring meeting. That representation formula is in effect until the next year's formula is adopted.

Sessions are encouraged to elect commissioners who may serve for the entire year. Some churches elect different commissioners for each meeting of presbytery. In order to assure continuity and understanding of presbytery business, it is best to elect commissioners for extended periods of time. A session that does not have commissioners attend at least half of the presbytery meetings in a given year is not eligible to propose an elder for nomination as a commissioner to Synod or General Assembly.

The docket and the supporting reports for each presbytery meeting are posted on the presbytery's Web site ([www.whitewatervalley.org](http://www.whitewatervalley.org)) for the commissioners. Commissioners are expected to report to session about the meeting (G-10.0102p(1)), including 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; and raising of consciousness of the congregation's participation in the total ministry of Jesus Christ.

Session members including presbytery commissioners, should bear in mind the opportunities and need for nominations to presbytery units and committees. Whitewater Valley Presbytery is committed to identifying elders – and especially racial/ethnic minority members of our churches – with skills and interests in serving on a presbytery committee.

## MOTIONS

**Main motion:** Any motion that proposes an action to be taken by the governing body. Main motions are debatable.

**To amend:** A motion to amend is to perfect (change, improve) the main motion; therefore, an amendment contrary to the intent of the main motion is out of order. A motion to amend a motion takes precedence over the main motion. It must be adopted or rejected before the main motion is considered. If adopted, it becomes part of the main motion. It is debatable.

**To substitute:** A motion to substitute is a form of amendment. It takes precedence over a main motion. If approved, it replaces the main motion. It is debatable.

**To postpone indefinitely:** This is a motion to delay action on the motion before the body and can result with the motion never returning to the body for action. It is debatable.

**To postpone definitely:** This motion delays action until a specific time and/or date on which

this motion will be presented to the deliberative body. It is debatable.

***To commit or refer:*** A motion to refer must include the body to which this action is referred. It is debatable.

***To reconsider:*** Once a question has been decided, it must not be reconsidered again at the same assembly unless a motion to reconsider is made by a person who voted *with the majority*. It is debatable.

***To move the previous question:*** This is a motion to close debate and to bring the issue to vote. It requires a two-thirds vote and should not be used to close off debate or opposition prematurely. This motion requires a second and is not debatable.

## **Church Members**

It is the responsibility of the session to receive and dismiss all members. Minutes should reflect the receiving of new members prior to public reception during worship. When members are received by transfer of membership, the name of the transferring church must be recorded. In the case of minor children, parental relationships should also be recorded.

Motion was made by (name) to receive father (full name) and mother (full name, including maiden name), along with their baptized children (name) birth (date) in (city and state). Motion was seconded by (name) and approved.

When members are dismissed to another congregation, the full name and address of the receiving church must be recorded.

The session approved the transfer of member (name) to the Wesley Methodist Church, Canton, Ohio.

Sessions are also charged with the responsibility of regular (at least annual) review of church membership rolls. It must be recorded in the session minutes when this is done, along with any actions taken.

## **Worship**

The session is responsible for authorizing and approving every baptism and this must be reflected in session minutes.

Motion was made by (name) that the session authorize the baptism of (name), son of (father and mother), born (date) in (city and state), to be held during the 11:00 a.m. service of worship on (date). Seconded, carried.

The session is additionally responsible for authorizing the observance of the Lord's Supper. Sessions are encouraged to approve a full year's observances of the Lord's Supper in one vote at the first session meeting of the new year.

## **Administration and Program**

The session is responsible for the approval of an annual budget, and when approved, a copy of this budget must be included in the session minutes. The session should receive regular financial reports.

An annual review of the financial records of all funds of the congregation must be made. Financial records may be reviewed by persons designated by the session or a CPA, but persons designated by the session should not have routine responsibilities for financial matters of the church.

A report of that financial review must be included in session minutes along with the name of the reviewer.

The session submits annually a statistical report to the General Assembly. It is the responsibility of the session to approve this report, and a copy must be filed with the minutes.

Minutes must reflect ordination and installation of new officers.