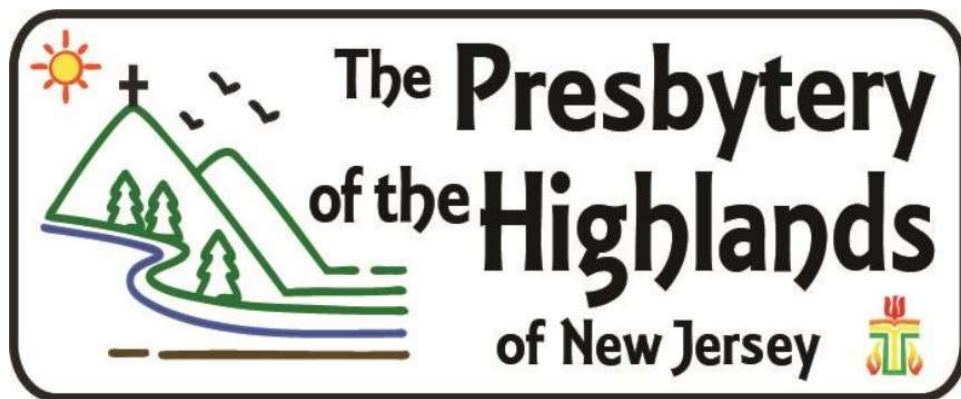


HANDBOOK FOR SESSION CLERKS

2022 edition



Presbytery of The Highlands of New Jersey

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GETTING STARTED AS A SESSION CLERK

The following pages contain tips that should help you if you've recently been elected clerk of session at your church, if you need a refresher, or if you want some new ideas.

First Things

Upon being Elected as Clerk of Session...

Locate the Session Minutes Book and the Church Register. They are likely to be in your church office but may be elsewhere. Locate all previous record books. The record books should never be removed from the church building except for minutes review or when sent to the Presbyterian Historical Society for archival storage. All record books should be kept in a fireproof safe or file cabinet.

Obtain a current *Book of Order*. Every other year, The Office of the General Assembly publishes a new edition of the *Book of Order*. The Presbytery office often has copies available, or you can order it from the PC(USA) Store or Amazon, or download a PDF version for free.

Locate the Congregational By-Laws. It is the function of By-Laws to make the general provisions of the *Book of Order* specific to the local situation. For example, while the *Book of Order* specifies three classes of elders and deacons, it does not specify the size of those classes. When there is a tension between the By-Laws and the *Book of Order*, the *Book of Order* always takes precedence. Congregational By-Laws may not conflict with the *Book of Order* requirements.

According to Robert's Rules, By-Laws may not be suspended. They may be amended only by a vote of the Congregation. Therefore, the By-Laws should be worded in a very general way and should not specify procedures that may need to be changed or adapted in an emergency, unless modified by the word "ordinarily" (example: "The annual general meeting of the Congregation shall ordinarily take place on the third Sunday in January.")

Locate the Session Manual of Administrative Operations. The Manual of Administrative Operations includes policies, procedures and best practices that are more detailed than what is found in the By-Laws. Portions of the Manual of Administrative Operations may be amended or suspended by the Session at their discretion. The Manual itself may not be a printed document but a collection of policies, procedures, and best practices in an electronic file.

Keep the presbytery stated clerk's email address and phone number in your contact list. The stated clerk of the presbytery is the one to whom you relate directly. Please do not hesitate to call or email.

Request a copy of the current presbytery directory. Call the presbytery office to have a current directory emailed to you.

Clerk of Session Resources

"Must Have" Tools for Clerks of Session

A current edition of the *Book of Order*

Every other year, the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) prints a new edition of the *Book of Order*. It is available for purchase and incorporates recent amendments to the *Book of Order*. You can also download a free pdf version of the *Book of Order*.

A current copy of the *Book of Confessions*

New editions are only published if there is a revision of a confession or a new confession. This is also available for download.

***Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 12th Edition* ~ Public Affairs press (Hachette Book Group)**

There are many Robert's Rules books out there, but it is this edition authorized by the Robert's Rules Association that is the "Bible" of parliamentarians worldwide.

You may find it more helpful to use *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 12th Edition In Brief* (same publisher as above). Be sure you get the Fully Updated 3rd Edition.

The "Guide to Parliamentary Procedure" by Gregory A. Goodwiller, available as a free download from the PCUSA.org website, contains helpful charts of the different types of motions that may be made under Robert's Rules:

https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/parliamentary_procedure.pdf

If You Want to Go Deeper

Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers, Fourth Edition, Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker

Principles of Presbyterian Polity by Carlos E. Wilton (Westminster John Knox Press).

You can purchase these books at Amazon.com or at pcusastore.com.

The Session Meeting: Things to Know

The Session cannot meet without its moderator, who ordinarily is the pastor of the church [G-3.0201]. If the church is without a pastor, the Committee on Ministry (COM) will appoint a moderator. *If the moderator is not able to moderate a meeting, he/she will ask another pastor to moderate.*

A quorum of the session must be present to have a meeting at which actions may be taken. A session shall provide by rule for the quorum [G-3.0203]. The quorum must include the moderator and either a specific number of ruling elders or a specific percentage of ruling elders in current service. The quorum is normally specified in the congregation's By-Laws.

Session meetings in most congregations are informal. Many of the actions will be approved by consensus, and *Robert's Rules of Order* may be loosely applied. As clerk of session, you record all actions taken by the session whether or not the vote is formal (with a motion) or is by consensus. If you are not sure what the exact wording of a motion is, ask the moderator to stop the meeting briefly so this can be clarified. In the case of controversial motions, you may want to encourage the moderator to back off the consensus model and apply Robert's Rules more strictly.

Do not include in the minutes the names of the mover and seconder of a motion. Naming movers and seconders is a tradition that is dictated by custom, not by rule.

The preferred format is simple:

"The session VOTED to..." or "MOVED, SECONDED AND CARRIED to..."

The purpose of a second is **only** to get the item to the floor. A seconder is not even bound to vote in favor of the motion. In Presbyterian polity, once an

action is taken it is an action of the body, making it completely irrelevant who made the motion.

You may occasionally be asked to help a session member to word a motion. Helpful questions to ask in framing a motion for session action are:

What—exactly—is going to be done? **Who** is going to do it?

When will it be completed and/or reported? **How much** will it cost?

Where will the money come from?

Is the action compatible with the *Book of Order*? (If not, the action is inappropriate.)

When crafting a motion that refers a task for an individual or group (such as a committee) to perform, it is wise to include a date for reporting back to the session. If the task involves spending money, it is wise for the motion to specify that the expenditure may not exceed a certain amount.

Do not include a summary of discussion in your minutes. Record only the motions made and their disposition (along with any subsidiary motions adopted, e.g., amendments). If you include other information include only that which will help a reader understand the motion (e.g., background information, rationale).

You may choose to include a notation of other topics discussed. This can be helpful if there is a need to know when a topic was brought to the session.

After the Meeting . . .

Write up the minutes immediately. Prepare a draft and provide it to the session as soon as possible for their review and approval at the next meeting.

Pro Tip: Some clerks, knowing what business is likely to come up, prepare a preliminary draft of the minutes *before* the meeting, modifying the draft as necessary based on what actually took place.

When the minutes have been approved, **transcribe them** or have them transcribed by the church's office staff into the minutes book. Everything must be typed or printed onto the pages. Many clerks wait until the end of the year to print all the minutes so they can be continuous. It is not necessary to use costly paper for the final copy. Most copy paper today is sufficiently acid-free that it is suitable for archival purposes.

Make all necessary entries into the rolls and registers. *No entry or deletion should be made unless a session action which appears in the minutes directs that entry or deletion.*

Complete or direct to be completed all necessary correspondence related to actions of the session. Among and between governing bodies of the PC(USA), **all** official correspondence is **clerk-to-clerk**. The clerk's signature authenticates any document coming from the session.

*NOTE: Some clerks are fortunate to have church secretaries who will print minutes or update rolls and registers. Some congregations even have a "rolls clerk" for the latter task. **The clerk of session supervises the church secretary or the rolls clerk in all matters related to the minutes and the rolls.** The accuracy of those records is always the responsibility of the clerk of session.*

Preparing the Minutes of a Meeting: A Guide

This section is intended as a **helpful guide**. What is offered here (a) is offered as suggestion only and (b) incorporates both helpful suggestions and some "best practices" for recording minutes of meetings. In general, this guide will apply to regular meetings of session, special meetings of session, and congregational meetings.

The minutes of the session or congregational meeting are a record of the **decisions** and **actions** taken by the group, **not the content of discussion**. The minutes serve the practical function of accurately recording what the particular group has done.

- Minutes ensure that there is an accurate record of proceedings and who participated.
- Minutes are a significant help in developing the resources to communicate to a congregation what their leaders are doing to further the ministry of the church.
- Minutes are a significant historical record of the life of a particular congregation, and its witness to the call of Christ to be faithful witnesses to God's love.
- Should there ever be a question or a complaint concerning an action or inaction of the session or congregation, the minutes provide accurate documentation, so that it may be determined fairly whether the particular action was or was not an irregularity, or whether the session has overlooked something important.

In the following sections, suggestions and commentary are indented and printed in italics.

Format(s) for Session/Congregational Meeting Minutes

Minutes should be titled, and should include:

- the type of meeting
- the name of the church
- the date/time of the meeting
- the location of the meeting (e.g., session meeting room, fellowship hall, classroom, library, etc.)
- who was present and absent
- the presence and name of the moderator
- the names of any guests, especially those given permission to speak during the meeting

A **suggested format** for the opening part of the minutes
(NOTE – You DO NOT have to use this format. Use what works best for you.).

MINUTES
Regular [or Special] Meeting of the Session [or congregation]
 _____ **Presbyterian Church, _____, NJ**
[date, time, location]

Class of 20xx		Class of 20xx		Class of 20xx	
P	Name	P	Name	P	Name
Ex	Name	P	Name	P	Name
P	Name	P	Name	P	Name
P	Name	Ex	Name		VACANT

The session of the _____ Presbyterian Church of _____, NJ held a regular/special meeting in the [location] at [time] on [date]. A quorum being present, the Moderator called the meeting to order and opened the meeting with prayer.

Meetings of session and the congregation **must** be opened and closed with

prayer. If it is your session's practice for an elder to offer the devotion and prayer, the above sentence would read, "A quorum being present, the Moderator called the meeting to order. [name] offered the *devotion and the opening prayer.*"

You **must** indicate that a quorum was present. (You don't need to specify what the quorum is.)

If the meeting is a Special (or Called) Meeting, then you would list the call of the meeting in this way:

CALL FOR THE MEETING

The meeting was called for the following purpose: *[state the purpose here]* (NOTE: According to Robert's Rules, ONLY items of business stated in the call for the meeting may be acted on at a special meeting; anything else that comes up should be postponed until the next stated meeting.)

The main concern for minutes is **accuracy**. The minutes must be an accurate record of the meeting.

The minutes do not have to be **chronological**. There is no requirement that the minutes of a particular meeting reflect the *chronology* of the meeting. You may record the actions taken in whatever sequence seems most useful. Again, the question is, "Is it an accurate record?" *Robert's Rules of Order* suggest that all minutes follow a consistent order.

What are the benefits of recording minutes chronologically? • They are slightly easier for the clerk to record. It is a bit easier to record the meeting and actions as they happen, rather than fitting those actions and events into a pre-determined order. And . . . most meetings generally follow a consistent order of business.

What are the benefits of recording minutes by a "standard" or "non-chronological" order?

- A standard/non-chronological order makes the minutes easier to review by persons who read them (either for the annual review, or for a person researching the historical record).
- It is easier for a subsequent clerk to learn the "pattern" of recording minutes.

- Should there be a question months later about a particular decision in a particular area of the session's work, that decision will be easier to find.

Some clerks will record a brief "table of contents" for the minutes of each meeting. This is rare, but it is another way of tracking actions. It would also be helpful for reviewing minutes that are recorded chronologically.

Simply know that you have a choice in how to organize your minutes. Whatever pattern you follow, be sure to use clear **headings** for each section of the minutes. These are some examples of how clerks have organized their minutes:

LEFT MARGIN HEADING

Section of the minutes to the right. Subsections recorded as appropriate.

SINGLE LINE HEADING

Section of the minutes recorded below the heading. Subsections recorded as appropriate.

NUMBERED SECTIONS

This is a common format for non-chronological minutes.

If this is used, a list of the numbers should be provided at the beginning of each section of minutes. For example:

- 1.0 Opening
- 2.0 Routine Business 3.0 Committee reports
- 1.1 Worship Committee
- 1.2 Christian Education Committee

Recording Routine Business

Routine business is that which usually occurs at every meeting, and which does not involve much discussion, if any. Routine business may be scheduled at any time in the meeting. Some sessions take care of it right away; others handle routine business at the end of the meeting. When it is handled does not matter.

Routine business includes:

- Approval of the **agenda** of the meeting. *This is **required** for every meeting and does have to occur at the beginning.* If your agenda includes specific times when items of business are expected to take place, it is known as a **docket**, not an agenda. (The docket method is useful for keeping session meetings from going on too long.)

- Approval of the **minutes** of previous meetings (including the most recent congregational meeting). Simply list the date of the meeting and the type of meeting.
- Reports of **services of baptism**:
 - Name of person baptized (and parents—including family name of mother—if the person baptized is a child).
 - Date, time, and location of the baptism.
 - Name of officiant (usually the pastor, but it might be someone else).
- Reports of **services of the Lord's Supper**:
 - Date, time, and location.
 - **ALL** services of the Lord's Supper must be approved by the session and **must** be recorded. (This would include services at times other than Sunday morning, services at locations like a nursing home or senior center, home communion services, services at retreats or other gatherings, etc.)
 - **A session may (annually) give approval for regular services of the Lord's Supper at times other than Sunday morning.** All such services **must** be reported to the session. Here are some examples:
 - Approval for communion at confirmation retreats during the next year.
 - Approval for monthly communion at a senior living center. □Other regular celebrations of the Lord's Supper (e.g. special seasonal services).
- Reports of **weddings**:
 - All weddings that take place in the church or on church property should be recorded including the names of the couple, their family name, date, time, and name of officiating minister.
 - All weddings at which the pastor or associate pastor presided during their term of service (regardless of where the ceremony took place), including the names of the couple, their family name and date, time, location and name of officiating minister.
- Report of the **ordination and installation of officers**:
 - Date and time of the worship service during which the installation occurred.
 - Name of the persons ordained/installed and the office to which each was installed, and the duration of their term (e.g., Class of 2024, second term).
 - The minutes of a previous meeting will have recorded **that** persons were approved for ordination/installation. Later minutes **must** record that the ordination/installation occurred.
- Report of the **public welcome** of new members:
 - Name of persons welcomed
 - Date and time of worship service during which they were welcomed (NOTE: For those received by **letter of transfer or**

reaffirmation of faith, the date on which a person's church membership commences is the date the session votes to approve them. For those received on **profession of faith**, the date on which a person's church membership commences is the date their profession of faith took place, which is generally the date of the worship service in which they are officially welcomed.)

- Report of **routine membership actions**:
 - Transfers of membership at a person's request
 - Removal of names from the church rolls due to death or inactivity (NOTE: Sessions are no longer required to maintain an inactive members roll, although they are free to do so if they find it useful.)
- Report of **significant correspondence** received and referral of the correspondence. Examples:
 - A letter from the General Assembly, thanking the congregation for General Mission Giving—referred to the Stewardship Committee for sharing with the congregation
 - A request that the congregation participate in an upcoming county-wide evangelism event—referred to the _____ Committee
- Report of the **moderator** if written (other than items listed above)
- Report of the **clerk of session** if written (other than items listed above)

A **Consent Agenda** can save significant time. This is a complex motion that includes a number of items of business that require little discussion. Any session member wishing to ask questions about or discuss any item in the Consent Agenda may request that it be lifted out of the Consent Agenda and be voted on later as an individual item. A single session member's request is enough to remove the item from the Consent Agenda; no vote is taken on the merits of removing it.

Recording Motions

The simplest way to record motions is this:

Upon motion and second, the session VOTED to . . . OR

Upon recommendation by the _____ Committee, the session VOTED to . . . OR
Moved, seconded and carried to ...

The record of the motion should include:

- A **clear** statement of the action taken.
- **Who will follow through** to implement the motion (whether an individual or individuals, or a committee or board).
- The **anticipated deadline** for implementation of the motion –OR–the anticipated time of a **report** regarding progress.
- If finances are involved, an indication of (1) the amount and (2) the

budget line to be charged.

- If the motion is taken by other than voice vote (e.g., counted vote or secret ballot), both the manner of voting and the results must be recorded in the minutes.
- If it is appropriate to the record, it is good (even advisable) to record below the motion a brief **rationale** for the action. That rationale may have been presented with the motion, or the session may deem it important to express the rationale.

It is not necessary to indicate who made the motion and who seconded the motion. (Once a motion is passed, it is the action of the entire body; the name of the mover and seconder is irrelevant.)

Reporting the Annual Review of Session Records

Each year the presbytery will review the session's records, as required by the *Book of Order*. The review will typically include the minutes of session and congregational meetings, church rolls and registers, and the congregational By-Laws. (NOTE: the difference between rolls and registers is this: **rolls** are records of names; **registers** are records of events that took place. For example, the rolls record the names of church members, baptized members (unconfirmed children) and officers. The register lists dates of events such as baptisms, marriages, deaths and ordinations/installations. In the case of deaths, the date of death should be recorded, not the date of the funeral service.)

Suggested Format(s)

REPORT OF ANNUAL REVIEW OF SESSION RECORDS.

The session received from the clerk the report of the presbytery's annual review of the session records. The records were reviewed on [date] at [location].

The session celebrated that the records were reviewed with no exceptions.

OR

The session noted the following exceptions to the minutes:

List each exception, and the session's response to the exception (including steps to be taken to correct it). If the session disagrees with an exception, that disagreement may be noted next to or under the exception.

Required Routine Reports

The minutes are required to include certain routine reports:

- A regular report of the treasurer (at least quarterly is recommended; monthly is ideal).
- Election by session of a commissioner to presbytery meetings, and a report by that commissioner to the session meeting following a meeting of the presbytery.
- Approval of the budget (at least annually).
- Review of church membership rolls, reporting all changes made (at least annually).

Possible formats for recording these required reports:

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

The session VOTED to receive the report of the treasurer for the period ending [date], summarized as follows:

Receipts for [month] \$_____ Expenses for [month] \$_____

Receipts, year to date Expenses, year to date Net Income, year to date

\$_____ \$_____ \$_____

ELECTION OF PRESBYTERY COMMISSIONER

Each congregation is entitled and expected to elect at least one elder to serve as commissioner to presbytery, with full voting rights in the presbytery meeting. The presbytery may invite the session to elect one or more additional commissioners, based on the size of the congregation's membership and the presbytery's need to achieve a 50-50 balance between ministers and ruling elders. In order that elder commissioners may fully understand the business before the presbytery, it is strongly recommended that the same commissioner attend all meetings of the presbytery, with an alternate being elected only when the regular commissioner is unable to attend.

Here is how the election of a presbytery commissioner may be recorded in the session minutes:

The session VOTED to elect Ruling Elder _____ as commissioner to all stated and special meetings of the Presbytery of the Highlands during [note the year or the time frame].

REPORT OF PRESBYTERY COMMISSIONER

Ruling Elder [name] presented a report of the recent meeting of the Presbytery of the Highlands held on [date] at [location].

A brief summary of the report may be included in the minutes.

ANNUAL APPROVAL OF THE BUDGET

When a church budget is proposed for the coming year, the minutes should record session action on the budget, and the approved budget should be included in the minutes, either at that place in the minutes or as an appendix.

With the exception of the terms of call of an installed pastor (which the congregation must vote to approve), the congregation does not vote to approve the church budget. That is the prerogative of the session. The session merely reports the details of the budget to the congregation for their information.

The session should note its **recommendation** to the congregation of the pastor's terms of call (for installed pastors only!) for the upcoming year (terms of call for uninstalled pastors are approved by the session alone). If there are changes in the terms of call, the congregation must approve those at an annual or special congregational meeting. If there are no changes in the terms of call, that is simply noted in the budget. It is **vitaly** important that a detailed record of the terms of call be included in the session minutes.

The Internal Revenue Service requires that the full amount of compensation (broken down into salary, manse/housing allowance, Social Security offset, reimbursable expense allowances and other cash payments and bonuses) be listed in the minutes.

Housing allowance or manse furnishings allowance **MUST** be noted, and it cannot be noted retroactively. **It is important to note the housing allowance in the minutes PRIOR TO THE END OF THE YEAR BEFORE THAT HOUSING ALLOWANCE TAKES EFFECT.**

Please contact the presbytery office for a copy of the form used to report the pastor's terms of call to the presbytery. This is the exact format that should be used to record the pastor's terms of call in the minutes of the session, and subsequently of the minutes of the congregational meeting at which they are approved.

ANNUAL REVIEW OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP ROLLS

It is the session's responsibility annually both to (1) review the rolls of membership, and (2) invite persons to consider the integrity of their membership. There are various models for this, but the action of reviewing the rolls must be included in the minutes. Record any recommendations of the review group, and the disposition of those recommendations.

Recording the Annual Report to the Congregation

The Session's entire Annual Report to the Congregation does not need to be included in the minutes.

In the minutes of the annual congregational meeting, record something to this effect:

The congregation VOTED to receive the Annual Report for [year], with thanks to all those who submitted reports for inclusion. The [year] Annual Report includes the following program reports:

[List here]

The [year] Annual Report includes the following financial reports:

[List here in full detail]

Recording the Annual Statistical Report

The session does not vote to "approve" the annual statistical report; but the minutes should note that it has "received" the annual statistical report that is prepared by the clerk of session for submission to the presbytery.

You have two options for recording the report in the minutes:

- The session received the annual statistical report for [previous year], which is inserted as Appendix 1 following these minutes.

OR

- The session received the annual statistical report for [previous year], summarized as follows: [*then type in a very basic summary of the report*]

The presbytery requires clerks of session to complete a Clerk's Annual Questionnaire, including data requested by the denomination. The session does not vote to approve this questionnaire, nor is it necessary to include it in the minutes.

Recording Other Session Business

REPORT OF SESSION COMMITTEES

(Name of Committee)

Ruling Elder [name] presented the report of the [name] Committee. *list a brief summary here.*

If there are recommendations note them this way:

Upon recommendation by the [name] Committee, the Session voted to: *List the action taken*

DISCUSSION OF AN ISSUE BEFORE THE SESSION

The session engaged in discussion of [*state the subject or the issue*].

ONLY record pertinent facts, background, points of discussion. IF THE SESSION EXPLORED OPTIONS, you may list them.

IF THE SESSION MADE DECISIONS, record them. It is important to list follow-through information:

Describe **who** will do **what**, and by what **deadline**.

If there is a cost, describe what it is, how much, and where it will come from in the budget.

Describe other follow-through actions and their responsibility.

CLOSING

The meeting of the session ended with prayer offered by _____.

The Congregational Meeting

The clerk of session is the secretary of both regular and special congregational meetings. [G-1.0505] If the clerk of session is unable to serve, the congregation must—as a first item of business—elect a secretary for the meeting. That action is recorded in the minutes. Minutes are taken exactly as for a session meeting.

A congregational meeting may be called only by the session, the presbytery, or by the session when requested in writing by one-fourth of the active members of the congregation.

It is important to ensure that **adequate public notice** be given for a meeting of the congregation. [G-1.0502] That notice **must** specify the nature of the business for which the meeting is called. The *Book of Order* specifies that the congregation shall provide by its own rule for the minimum notification requirements. The *Book of Order* requires that notice shall be given at regular services of worship prior to the meeting (but does not specify details as to how many worship services).

In G-1.0503, the *Book of Order* strictly limits the business that may be conducted at congregational meetings. The call to the annual meeting of a congregation may include a phrase like "...and other business which may rightly come before the congregation. But even so, that other business is limited to one or more of the following matters:

- electing ruling elders, deacons, or trustees (if the congregation has a separate board of trustees)
- calling pastors
- changing existing pastoral relationships, revising the terms of call or considering a request to dissolve a pastoral call
- buying, mortgaging, or selling real estate
- requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption to the usual requirements for term length and/or term rotation for ruling elders and deacons (G-2.0404)
- approving, changing, or dissolving a plan for a "joint congregational witness" (which includes such proposals as "yoking" a congregation with another, so they may be served by the same pastor, or various ecumenical arrangements)

According to Robert's Rules, a special or called meeting of the congregation may ONLY consider the business listed in the call for that particular meeting. **The phrase ". . . and other business which may rightly come before the congregation" is NOT PERMISSIBLE for a special or called meeting.**

Changes to an installed pastor's compensation package (terms of call) are the only part of the church budget that must be approved by the congregation and subsequently reported to the presbytery. With respect to an installed pastor's compensation, the session has only the authority to recommend. All "covenant supply" pastors (interim pastors and others supplying the pulpit for a designated period of time) are serving under a covenant with the session; consequently, their terms of call are approved by the session.

Proxy voting and absentee voting is not allowed for any meeting, congregation or corporate. Only active members who are present may vote. Although in-

person congregational meetings are always preferred, it is advisable for congregations to add to their By-Laws a provision for electronic meetings, such as the following: *"The session may arrange for active members to participate in congregational meetings by means of electronic audio or video technology, provided the electronic technology allows for contemporaneous (real-time) participation in both debate and voting."*

The congregation is responsible for establishing the **quorum** for congregation meetings. [G-1.0501] **Best practice:** At the next congregational meeting, have the session recommend a quorum for the congregation to add to its By-Laws. To ensure flexibility in future years, make sure the quorum is expressed in percentage form (example: **"10% of the congregation's active membership"**), rather than a specific number of people.

The congregation is responsible for approving its own minutes, but this can be difficult to do if many months have elapsed since the last congregational meeting. **Best practice:** Have the session recommend that the congregation ask the session to approve the congregational meeting minutes on their behalf at the next session meeting. Those approved minutes will then be reported at the next regular or special congregational meeting.

Maintaining the Membership Rolls and Registers

Your session will have to decide how to handle the previous category of "Inactive Members," that is no longer required by the *Book of Order*. Although an Inactive Members roll is no longer *required*, it is not prohibited; many sessions continue to make use of it on the local level, as a list of members targeted for outreach with the goal of inviting them to become more active.

What follows is a set of suggestions for how to maintain the rolls and registers. Each membership scenario is listed in bold print, followed by the "tip" for making entries in the rolls and registers.

The standard Church Membership Roll book has the following sections:

- Roll of Pastors
- Roll of Elders Roll of Deacons
- Chronological Roll of Members (recorded by date of their being received as members)
- Alphabetical Roll of Members Roll of Baptized Members

The Standard Church Register book contains sections to record the following events, with the dates they took place:

- Register of Baptisms
- Register of Deaths
- Register of Marriages

An important general principle: **Every entry or change in a membership roll or register MUST be connected to a particular action of the session** (or congregation in the case of calling an installed pastor or dissolving the relationship with an installed pastor). **Every one. Without exception.**

Best practice: Include in your template for session minutes a section called Church Rolls and Registers Report, in which you include a motion listing all additions to the rolls and registers that have come up in the past month. *(If this information is consolidated in a consistent place in the minutes of each session meeting, it's relatively simple to go back, as you're preparing your annual statistical report to the presbytery, and reconcile the minutes with the rolls and registers book.)*

Recommendations for recording membership, baptisms, profession of faith and transfers

Pastors of Congregation

- Record the full name of the pastor on the Roll of Pastors.
- Record whether the person is pastor, associate pastor, co-pastor, interim pastor, stated supply, temporary supply or commissioned ruling elder.
- If the pastor is installed (pastor, associate pastor, co-pastor) list the date of installation.
- If the pastor is temporary (interim, stated supply, temporary supply, commissioned ruling elder), note the date their service begins.

Dissolution of Pastoral Relationship

- If the pastor is installed, record next to their name (1) the date of congregational action dissolving the relationship and (2) the date that the pastor's service ends. *(Those dates are not always the same.)*
- If the pastor is temporary, record next to their name (1) the date of session action ending the service and (2) the date that the pastor's service ends.

A member of the church ordained or installed as an elder or a deacon

- Record the person's name on the Roll of Elders or the Roll of Deacons.

- Note the date of the service of ordination (or the service of installation, if previously ordained).
- When the person's term of service ends, note that date next to their name on the appropriate roll.

Members Received by Letter of Transfer

- Record the full name (including family name) on the chronological roll, opposite the first free membership number. Indicate the way he/she joined the church (letter of transfer), the church from which they transferred, and the date of the session action.
- Record the name again in the alphabetical roll, noting his/her chronological membership number.

Children (not confirmed) of Members but baptized in another congregation

- List name(s) on the roll of Baptized Members, with the date and place of his/her baptism, and the names of parents (including mother's family name).

Children of members Baptized at your church

- List full name on both the Roll of Baptized members and the Register of Baptisms, with the date and place of his/her baptism and the names of her/his parents (including mother's family name).

Member received by Profession of Faith and Baptism

- Session votes to receive member by profession of faith with baptism. • List name on the chronological roll, opposite the first free membership number.
- Note that he/she was received by profession of faith and the date of session's action.
- Record his/her baptism on the Register of Baptisms noting this person is an adult.
- List his/her full name on the alphabetical members roll, noting his/her chronological membership number.

Member received on Reaffirmation of Faith.

- Session votes to receive member by reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ.
- List full name on the chronological roll, opposite the first free membership number.
- Note that she/he was received by reaffirmation of faith and the date of session's action.
- List her/his full name on the alphabetical roll, noting her/his chronological membership number.

Member requests that session transfer his/her membership to another PCUSA congregation or another church (often, this request comes through the clerk of session of the new church)

- Session votes to transfer member to another congregation.
- The clerk sends a letter to the other congregation which includes his/her information, including (if applicable) ordination as a ruling elder or deacon and service dates.
- Next to the member's name on the chronological roll note the date of transfer and the church to which he/she was transferred. Do this **after** you have received notice that he/she has been received by the other church.

Children on Baptized Members roll transferred to another church along with parent(s)

- Note child's name on the back of parent's transfer letter, along with the date and location of his/her baptism.
- Draw a thin line through child's name on the roll of Baptized Members and note that his/her baptism was transferred.

Member death

- Draw a thin line through her/his name on the chronological roll and note the date of her/his death.
- If you have a death register, list her/his name in that register along with the date of death, the date of her/his funeral, the location of her/his funeral service, and the location of her/his interment or burial.

Member requests to be removed from the membership roll.

- Session acts on the request for removal.
- Next to member's name on the chronological roll indicate the date of the session action to remove him/her from the roll, and that it was by member's request.
- If parent(s) moves and is transferred to another congregation the child's name is noted on the letter of transfer and a line is drawn through their name.

Session Minutes Books and Registers Preservation

Preserving church records is a key responsibility of PC(USA) stated clerks and clerks of session. The *Book of Order* charges clerks with the "permanent safekeeping" of all official records. Certain types of records are deemed permanent because of their legal, administrative, or historic nature. Permanent records document many aspects of the historic development of the

denomination and the commitment to the community of faith. In addition, they are valuable in understanding legal and financial developments and have ongoing administrative uses within the synod, presbytery, congregation, and national office. The Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS) offers services to assist you. See more at: www.history.pcusa.org (select the "Services" tab, then "Records Management," then "Records of Congregations").

Records older than the current century (i.e. prior to 2000) should be sent to the archives at the Presbyterian Historical Society. PHS holds original records of permanent value on deposit in an environmentally controlled archival storage area with specialized fire detection and security systems. Congregations can deposit records at no charge. The church retains ownership of the records and may request their return at any time with written authorization from the clerk of session. PHS also offers digitization of records (for a fee).

The "Retention Schedule for Congregations" (displayed on the PHS website) is a particularly useful tool, recommending which types of records need to be retained permanently and which may be discarded after a given number of years.

Electronic Meetings Policy

Electronic meetings of the Presbytery or any of its entities shall be conducted under the following provisions.

- Electronic meetings may be held when the Presbytery or any of its entities must conduct business that is time sensitive and in need of action before the next regular meeting.
- Electronic meetings are permissible only if every member of the Presbytery, committee or other Presbytery entity has access to the technology that allows participation in the meeting.
- Electronic meetings must provide for simultaneous audio communication among all participants in order to allow for discussion of the issue being considered. Collaborative technologies such as web-based Go To Meeting and Skype, conference calls, and interactive video teleconferences fit the necessary requirements for maintaining the deliberative character of meetings held in accordance with the most recent edition of Roberts Rules of Order.

- Only the chairperson or moderator of the Presbytery, committee, or other Presbytery entity may call an electronic meeting.
- Notice of an electronic meeting shall be given by the chair or moderator of the Presbytery, committee, or other Presbytery entity at least 3 days before the meeting and shall include the purpose of the meeting. Instructions on how to participate technologically shall accompany the call for the meeting.
- A quorum for an electronic meeting shall be a majority of members of the Presbytery, committee, or other Presbytery entity and shall be declared at the beginning of the meeting.
- Just as in a traditional meeting, electronic meetings shall begin and close with prayer.
- The same rules regarding participation apply in electronic meetings as in traditional ones: the body may but is not obligated to grant the privilege of the floor to a guest, who may not vote or speak to an issue once debate
- closes. A guest in an electronic meeting is someone who is not a member of the Presbytery, committee, or other Presbytery entity.
- Electronic meetings must be held in accordance with the policy of open meetings, and care must be taken to provide opportunities for others to be in attendance as observers just as they would in a traditional meeting.
- Minutes of the proceedings shall be recorded and added to the minutes record.
- Motions shall be processed in the same manner as in a traditional meeting. The chair shall also give careful consideration to technological issues that might impact a person's ability to participate fully and give opportunity for adjustments before business is taken up. Before a vote is taken or consent measured, the chair will also determine whether any members are no longer present due to a technological disruption.
- The chair shall give attention to ensuring that all persons are included in the discussion and have the capability of hearing and participating fully in the meeting.
- When e-mail is used for sharing information and coming to consensus on a matter, the resulting decision shall be confirmed or rejected by vote at the next meeting of the Presbytery, committee, or other Presbytery entity.

- An email vote shall only be allowed in the instance that the business to be transacted has already been discussed in a traditional or electronic meeting. The vote shall be unanimous. If questions are asked and/or a negative vote is cast the issue shall be considered in either a traditional or electronic meeting.

Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey March 2021

Additional Thoughts on Electronic Meetings and Voting

What does it say in your bylaws or standing rules? Whatever your process is for electronic meeting and/or voting, it must be **stated clearly and voted upon by the appropriate body**. It should not be left to memory or “common understanding” which may lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

To be a “meeting” requires that all voting members can simultaneously communicate, whether in person or at a distance. All voting members must be able to hear and debate simultaneously, otherwise no action should be taken.

Voting by email is therefore discouraged for all but non-controversial matters. Even then, safeguards are needed.

When a non-controversial matter requires decision between session meetings, the Sender (Moderator or Clerk of Session, as determined by the bylaws or standing rules) must communicate that matter to all voting members, and the subject line should indicate that a “Matter for Debate” is included.

For “discussion,” the use of “reply all” allows everyone’s thoughts to be shared. Bear in mind, this is an attempt to reach simultaneous communication, but it falls far short of in-person or hybrid (in-person and internet) interaction. Therefore this is not recommended for general use.

To address: How will those without access to email be included in this action, in a manner that allows them to know what other persons are contributing?

When it comes time for a vote, with the email subject line reading “For Voting Purposes,” voting members should reply only to the Sender. This is to avoid individual members being influenced by the votes of others.

To address: How much time is permitted between the posting of a motion and moving to a vote, and how do those without email access make their vote known in a timely manner?

Any action taken by these means is not final until it has been ratified at the subsequent face-to-face/hybrid meeting when simultaneous communication is possible. This does mean that the potential exists for an email vote to be reversed at that more traditional meeting. The confusion and conflict that may occur because of such reversal is the reason for only the most non-controversial matter to be approached in anything other than a stated or called meeting, allowing for everyone to speak and be heard at the same time.

To conclude, a reminder: **no electronic means should be used until there is common agreement as to when and how these will be used, and how every voting member can participate.**