

## **Clerk of Session Training**

### **General Role and Book of Order Requirements**

- The main thing that a Clerk of Session is responsible for is to maintain and preserve the minutes, rolls and registrars of a congregation, including:
  - Session Minutes
  - Congregational Meeting Minutes
  - Minutes of Joint Meetings of Session with Trustees or Deacons
  - Baptized Members Roll
  - Active Members Roll
  - Affiliate Members Roll
  - Inactive Members Roll (optional)
  - Installed Pastor Register
  - Elder Register
  - Deacon Register
  - Baptism Register
  - Marriage Register (optional)
  
- Broadly, the Clerk of Session is also responsible:
  - to know the Book of Order
  - to know Robert's Rules
  - to send and receive communications on behalf of session
  - to assist the pastor regarding matters related to session
  - often keeper of the church's Bylaws and Manuals of Operation
  
- The Clerk of Session is also responsible for the following reports to Presbytery and GA:
  - Annual Session Minutes Review of Previous Year's Minutes
  - Necrology
  - Annual Statistical Report
  - Clerk's Annual Questionnaire

## Writing Good Minutes

**•\*\* remember according to G-3.0105 in the Book of Order that “meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of Robert’s Rules of Order EXCEPT when it is in contradiction to this Constitution” – for local churches, your Bylaws are part of this constitution.**

**Robert’s Rules guidelines** for what to include in minutes:

- General Principles
  - Record actions not discussion and not transcription
  - Don’t editorialize
- Recording of Motions
  - Record the *final* wording of main motions, and what happened to them (passed, failed, tabled, etc.)
  - Record even failed points of order or appeals
  - Names of Mover/Secunder of motions not required
- Location of meeting (church name)
- Date and time
- Type of meeting (stated or called)
- Name of Moderator
- Name of Clerk
- Time you begin and time you adjourn
- Number of votes for and against if voting by ballot
- Declaration of quorum
  - Clerk declare a quorum, so must know what quorum is for your session (varies by each church, and should be in your bylaws).
- When appropriate, election of Clerk and/or Treasurer
- Attendance, including guests
- Approval of agenda and the minutes of the previous meeting
  - If corrected, don’t include the changes, just note were corrected
- Summaries of Oral Reports of: (written reports may be attached to the minutes instead)
  - Clerk: May contain correspondence, announcements, and report of the serving of the Lord’s Supper, in addition to listing of baptisms, marriages, changes in membership rolls.
  - Treasurer
  - Pastor or other staff
  - Committees and Commissions
    - Don’t summarize the remarks of a guest speaker
- When selling, encumbering or receiving real property:
  - Name, address and legal description of the property;
  - Name of buyer/lessee;
  - Sale price/terms;
  - Loan amount, purpose and terms, including the name of the lender;
  - Lease terms and liability insurance;
  - Concurrence of presbytery

## **Book of Order Guidelines**

- The Book of Order directs that each meeting of a council (eg, your session) begin and end with prayer. The minutes should reflect this.
- Election of Elder Commissioners for Presbytery meetings
- Reports of Elder Commissioners from Presbytery meetings
- Approval of Communion dates
- Approval of Baptisms and dates
- Examination of new members
- Reception of new members by:
  - Profession of Faith and Baptism
  - Reaffirmation of Faith
  - Letter of Transfer
- Removal of members by:
  - Transfer
  - Inactive
  - Request
  - Death
- Examination and installation/ordination date for incoming Ruling Elders
- Meeting time and agenda of Congregational meetings
- Housing Allowance for Pastoral staff
- Approval of Budget (congregation only required to approve Terms of Call for budgetary purposes)

## **Tips and Tricks**

- Recording minutes is *much* easier if you write them out ahead of time and just leave the outcomes blank. Eg, you already know what motions are coming from which committees, just not if they'll be passed or not.
- You'll want to have a copy of the Minutes Review Sheet as your completing the minutes; this will help you make sure you've got everything you need come review time.
- Keep a calendar of events you may want to remind the pastor of for the agenda.
- Use example minutes from someone else as a base

## **Registers and Rolls Tips and Best Practices**

**\*\* Registers and Rolls are two different types of records even though they often overlap. Generally speaking, “registers” deal with actions (marriage, baptism, etc.) and “rolls” deal with people (who’s a member/elder/deacon, etc.)**

### **Rolls**

- can only be changed by the Session, but the clerk maintains them.
- There are only 3 rolls required by the Book of Order (notice “Inactive” is not one of them):
  - Baptized Members
    - People who have been baptized, but not confirmed (made a public profession of faith).
    - Record their Name, Date, and Church where their baptism occurred.
    - Remove people from this roll once they are confirmed, or once they leave the church
  - Active Members
    - Baptized person having made a profession of faith and commitment to their local church.
    - Record their Name, Date received, Method of Reception (Baptism/Profession, Reaffirmation, Transfer), Date of removal and method of removal (transfer, death, request of member, lack of activity).
      - Unless a member moves, the period of inactivity prior to removal must be at least 2 years, and the session “shall seek to restore members to active participation and shall provide written notice before deleting names due to member inactivity”. You don’t *have* to remove inactive members.
  - Affiliate Members
    - Active member of another church: college student, snowbird, etc
    - Must be renewed every 2 years
    - Record their Name, Date of Affiliation, Home Church, Date of Renewal and Date of Return to Home Church
  - Inactive Members (optional)
    - This is no longer a requirement, but if a session would like to keep this roll, there can be advantages: at times when a member would object to having a relative removed from the rolls entirely, for instance.
- **Registers** Required by the Book of Order:
  - Baptisms
    - Register of Infant and Adult Baptisms shall include name, parents’ names (if applicable), and date of birth and date of baptism of those being baptized.
  - Elders
    - Register of Elders shall include each elder’s name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.

–Deacons

- Register of Deacons shall include each deacon's name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.

–Pastors

- Register of Pastors shall include, with the dates of service, the names of pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, and assistant pastors, and may include interim pastors, stated supplies, and parish associates serving the church.

–Marriages (Optional)

- Prior to 2011, sessions were also required to maintain a register of all marriages. After 2011, in Michigan, only all marriages performed on church property must be recorded. If you wish to continue maintaining a full register, then marriages of members of the church and all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the church may be included.

## **Preservation of Records (Minutes, Rolls and Registers)**

- Digital is NOT good enough – programs change, and they're sometimes harder to authenticate.

- Creating/accessing records digitally is fine. Storing them digitally is not.

- Vinyl binders are bad for long term storage. However the old Minute Book covers are not required.

- Inkjet printers are superior to laser printers for long term record keeping. Most paper is already acid-free (that is required)

- Make sure the final minutes are signed (by you) and reviewed (by the Presbytery)

- Records should be:

- Kept in a binder

- Have numbered pages to prevent insertion of counterfeit pages.

- Blank pages should be marked with a large X, or labeled as intentionally blank, also to prevent insertion of counterfeit pages.

- Presbyterian Historical Society Guidelines:

- <http://www.history.pcusa.org/services/records-management/records-congregations>

–Most everything except detailed financial records is of value.

How Long Should Various Records Be Kept?

- Minutes permanent

- Registers permanent

- Annual reports permanent

- Bylaws/charters permanent

- Incorporation records permanent

- Annual budgets permanent

- Annual audits permanent

- Annual financial statements permanent

- Subject files: permanent correspondence, minutes, or other records surrounding subject matter of continuing administrative or legal value, or comprising information on the mission, vision, and actions of the congregation

- Manuals/handbooks permanent

- Newspapers/newsletters permanent

- Architectural drawings, plats, plans, blueprints permanent

- Wills, bequests permanent

- Legal/judicial cases permanent

- Loan agreements satisfaction + 20 years

- Property appraisals, records of sale 20 years after sale

- Personnel records/employee records employment + 7 years

- Contracts active + 6 years

- Accounts payable 7 years

- Accounts payable invoices 3 years

- Accounts receivable records 3 years

- Bank deposit slips 3 years

- Bank statements 7 years

### Preservation of Records (Minutes, Rolls and Registers)

- Canceled checks 7 years
- Cash receipt records 3 years
- Donations (regular, weekly) 7 years
- Expense reports 7 years
- FICA / W-2 records 7 years
- Payroll records 7 years
- Petty cash records 7 years
- Receipts of purchases 7 years
- General/routine correspondence 3 years
- Travel plans/arrangements 3 years
- Periodic financial statements 2 years
- Data for updating Mailing lists 1 year
- Invitations 1 year
- Meeting notices 1 year
- Reference/Resource materials active

### **Rules of Discipline**

- The session is the judicial body of complaint against a member of the church, including Ruling Elders (but not Teaching Elders).
- If you ever need this, ask the Stated Clerk for resources.

### **Congregational Meetings**

- Minutes of all congregational meetings shall be included in the session record book along with session minutes in one chronological order.
- The installed pastor shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the congregation.
- The clerk of session shall serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If the clerk of session is unable to serve, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting.
- The business of a congregational meeting may only include the following:
  - electing ruling elders, deacons, nominating committees and trustees;(always allow for nominations from the floor: G2-0401)
  - calling a pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor;
  - changing existing pastoral relationships, eg, approving changes to the terms of call of the pastor or pastors, or requesting, consenting to, or declining to consent to dissolution;
  - buying, mortgaging, or selling real property;
  - requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption to officer term limits as permitted in the Constitution (G-2.0404).
  - approving a plan for the creation of a joint congregational witness, or amending or dissolving the joint congregational witness (G-5.05).

## **Annual Responsibilities**

- You have 2 major annual responsibilities to the GA:
  - The Annual Statistical Report
    - Deadline is usually in February
    - \*\* - **important: *this is the only mechanism by which the church membership number can be changed. If not filed, neither the Stated Clerk nor the General Assembly Office can change it until the next year's filing period. That membership number will be used to determine Per Capita costs.***
  - Clerk's Annual Questionnaire
    - This is sent out as a link in an email, similar to surveymonkey if you've ever used that. This usually comes out towards the end of the year.
    - This is a completely different report than the Annual Statistical Report, although they cover some of the same ground.
  
- You have 2 major annual Presbytery responsibilities:
  - the Necrology Report
    - This is a list of the Ruling Elders who have passed away in your church. It will be read at a meeting of Presbytery.
  - Session Minutes Review

## **Common Questions**

- Who can serve as Clerk of Session?
  - An elder, not currently active on session, may serve as clerk of session.
- Is the Pastor a member of Session?
  - Yes, all installed Teaching Elders are full members of Session, including voice and vote. (G-3.0201)
- Additionally, I believe it's also widely unknown that Presbytery permission is required if you lease any portion of your church building, or any property owned by the church at all for more than 5 years (eg, an old manse or a rental building left to the church):
  - G-4.0206 Selling, Encumbering, or Leasing Church Property a. Selling or Encumbering Congregational Property A congregation shall not sell, mortgage, or otherwise encumber any of its real property and it shall not acquire real property subject to an encumbrance or condition without the written permission of the presbytery transmitted through the session of the congregation. b. Leasing Congregational Property A congregation shall not lease its real property used for purposes of worship, or lease for more than five years any of its other real property, without the written permission of the presbytery transmitted through the session of the congregation.***

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