

The Clerk's Handbook

A Simple Introduction to Clerking

I. FOREWORD

Chicago Presbytery's *Handbook for Clerks of Session* is based on the following underlying principles:

- the clerk of session maintains the history of the church through careful minutes and records;
- the clerk of session is interested in and knowledgeable about Presbyterian polity;
- the clerk of session, along with the moderator, is the liaison between session and presbytery;
- the clerk is always striving to be a servant to the session, in the fullest New Testament sense, and is equipped spiritually to fulfill the servant role.

A clerk of a governing body understands that our order is to be derived from Scripture, as it is expressed in the *Confessions* of our church. Through it we try to live our lives together in accordance with our faith and as a witness to the demands of Scripture. A clerk also respects the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as our covenant with one another and knows that our rules are never an end in themselves, but rather an attempt to be faithful to our covenant.

Our polity commits us to a shared ministry among elders, deacons, members, and ministers of Word and Sacrament. It commits us to a representative form of government in which elders and ministers are trusted with the care of the congregation. It commits us to a government in which decisions are always corporate, never singular. The moderator and the clerk of session, together, are the guardians of this polity, all to the goal of furthering the "Great Ends of the Church." [G-1.0200]

The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Marianne L. Wolfe, former Stated Clerk of Pittsburgh Presbytery, for much of the material included in this handbook. Acknowledgment is also made for material from *The Companion to the Constitution*, by Frank A. Beattie.

II. DUTIES OF THE CLERK OF SESSION

The clerk is the primary corresponding and recording secretary for the session and congregation. You are responsible for official correspondence between your session and the presbytery and other churches. You are also responsible for recording the minutes of session and congregational meetings, and for maintaining the rolls and registers of the church.

Church Correspondence: Much of the mail addressed to the church will be addressed to you. This includes official correspondence from the presbytery, resources for Presbyterian churches and notices of upcoming events. It can also include mailings from other churches and advocacy organizations lobbying your church about controversies in the PC(U.S.A.) It is your task to review this incoming mail, bring appropriate mail to the attention of the session, and/or route correspondence to the appropriate committee. In case of doubt, talk to your moderator.

Member Status: As clerk of session, you are also responsible for outgoing correspondence related to members. This includes contacting members before and after they are placed on inactive status; issuing letters of transfer to other churches; returning the certificate of reception when a person is transferred to your church; and letting another presbytery know when a member has moved into its boundaries.

Session and Congregational Meetings: As the clerk, you assist the pastor and other session members in preparing the docket for the session meetings; you determine if there is a quorum; when appropriate, you report official acts that need to be recorded in the minutes, such as baptisms performed, communion served, and changes in member status; you record the minutes of the meeting; and, along with the pastor, you act as parliamentarian.

Annual Submissions to Presbytery: Finally, as clerk you are responsible for annually submitting the minutes to presbytery for its review and for periodically submitting the church registers to presbytery for its review. You are also responsible for preparing the Annual Statistical Report to the General Assembly. You will receive a packet in late December or early January, which contains what you need. Portions of the report will be filled in online. Other portions need to be filled out by you and other officers of the church, such as the treasurer, and returned to the presbytery. Contact the stated clerk for assistance.

III. CLERKING A SESSION MEETING

The *Book of Order* requires each session to keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings. [G-9.0407c] Minutes and other official records of the session, which include the minutes of the congregational meetings and records of the board of deacons and the board of trustees of a particular church, are the property of the session and the clerk shall be responsible for their preservation. They shall be available to the presbytery upon request and may be stored in the denomination's historical agency. [G-10.0301]

The session of a particular church consists of the pastor or co-pastors, the associate pastors, and the elders in active service. [G-10.0101] The officers of the session are the moderator and the clerk of session. [G-9.0201] The clerk must be an elder, but does not have to be a currently active member of the session. The clerk is elected by the session for such term as it may determine.

As clerk, it is your task to check to make sure there is a quorum. According to the *Book of Order*, a quorum consists of the moderator and one-third of the elders (no fewer than two). The session may fix its quorum at a higher number. [G-10.0202] Be sure you check your bylaws. All

members of the session may vote, including the pastor, co-pastors, and associate pastors. A moderator appointed by the presbytery does not have a vote. In decisions of the session, a majority vote rules.

According to the *Book of Order* and *Robert's Rules*, the minutes for every session meeting should contain the following:

- the name of the church and city; the date and time of meeting,
- the names of the moderator and the elders, and whether they are present, absent, or excused,
- the opening and closing of the meeting with prayer,
- the reading and approval of the minutes of previous meeting(s),
- the record of session actions and decisions,
- any changes in member status, since the last regular (stated) session meeting,
- any communion(s) authorized or observed, since the last stated meeting,
- any baptisms authorized or performed, since the last stated meeting, (Include the date the baptism was performed, the date and place of birth of the baptisand, and the names of the parents, including the mother's maiden name) or other persons presenting a child for baptism.)
- any election, ordination, and/or installation of officers, since the last stated meeting.
- any weddings of church members, weddings conducted by the church pastor(s), or any weddings conducted by other pastors at the church, since the last stated session meeting, (Note: If you rent space to or from another congregation, you do not need to report weddings they hold in the sanctuary.)
- the names and terms of presbytery commissioners and their reports to session, if there have been any presbytery meetings since the last stated session meeting,
- any calling of congregational meetings, since the last stated session meeting.

Once a year, the minutes should also include the following:

- the composition of the session with regard to racial ethnic members, women, men, age groups, and persons with disabilities, and how this corresponds to the composition of the congregation, [G-10.0301]
- a record of the completion of a period of study and preparation for newly elected elders and deacons,
- the establishment of an annual budget and review of adequacy of compensation for all staff, including clergy,
- the annual review of financial records,
- the annual election of the Church treasurer by the session,
- the annual joint meeting between the session and the board of deacons,
- the annual inclusion of the summary portion of the General Assembly Statistical Report.

Note: In order to print out the summary portion of the GA Statistical Report, go to the web site (ogasys2.pcusa.org). Click on "Church Statistical Reporting." Type in the church's user name, which should be the church's pin #. Type in church's password. Click on "Printable Church Report," and select year to print.

The minutes of each session meeting should be signed by the clerk or the moderator.

The following guidelines should be helpful in deciding what to record.

- Record only that which is vital to the transactions of the meeting, including affirmative votes and significant negative votes.
- Details of discussions, or of plans which have not been adopted, or suggestions which have not been followed should generally not be recorded, except by special order of the session. That special order should be noted in the minutes.
- Reference to a previous action should include the page or pages of the of the official minute book on which that action is recorded. (The official minute book is described in Section VII.)
- If your session does business by passing an omnibus motion, include a copy of the motion in your minutes so you have a record of the decisions that were made.

Minutes should be typed or printed into the official minute book only after review, correction (if any), and approval. If a later revision becomes necessary, an entry in ink can be made in the margin indicating the entry changed, the type of change, and reference forward to the page of the new entry making the change. Marginal entries should be initialed and dated.

Under rare circumstances, the session may be called upon to enforce church discipline under the Rules of Discipline. If this happens, contact the presbytery's stated clerk for assistance.

IV. CLERKING CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

The clerk of session is the secretary of all congregational meetings. If the clerk cannot be present, the congregation should elect a secretary. Under Illinois law, congregational and corporate business can be conducted in the same meeting. However, if your church is not unicameral and elects to hold a separate corporation meeting, the congregation then elects a secretary for the corporate meeting. [G-7.0403] The person elected may be the clerk. At the meeting, check to be sure that proper notice of the meeting has been given, and that there is a quorum.

- According to the *Book of Order*, public notice must be given the Sunday before and the Sunday of the meeting. However, to elect a pastor nominating committee or to elect a pastor, public notice must be given at least ten days in advance, including two consecutive Sundays. Check your bylaws to be sure they do not have more stringent notice requirements.
- The *Book of Order* quorum is one-tenth of the active members, with a minimum of three members. [G-7.0305] Your bylaws may establish a higher quorum. The presbytery may grant a smaller quorum in special cases.

In the PCUSA, according to G-7.0304, the business that congregations may conduct is limited to:

- matters relating to the election of elders, deacons, and trustees;

- matters relating to calling a pastor or pastors;
- changes to the pastor's terms of call. (All such changes should be reported to presbytery.) Note: The salary of an installed pastor must be approved by the congregation once a year.
- requesting, consenting, or declining dissolution of a call.
- matters relating to buying, mortgaging, or selling real property
- the permissive powers of a congregation. See G-7.0304(5).

The annual budget is frequently presented at the annual congregational meeting. Be aware that the budget is adopted by the session, not the congregation. However, if the congregation raises serious concerns about the budget, the session would be wise to reconsider.

The clerk should take particular care to alert the moderator if the business is out of order because it is outside the scope of G-7.0304 or, in the case of a special congregational meeting, the business is beyond what was stated in the call for the special meeting.

Only active members of the congregation may vote at the congregational meeting. Only active members and affiliate members have voice. Note the following guidelines:

- Voting for officers is by ballot if there are more candidates nominated than offices to be filled. Be prepared for a ballot vote even if the nominating committee is presenting only one candidate for each office, since there may be nominations from the floor. A majority vote is required for election. [G-14.0233]
- Congregations are no longer required to use a secret ballot when voting on the call of a pastor. However, a secret ballot is still strongly recommended by the Committee on Ministry.
- Voting by proxy is not permitted. [G-7.0404] Under state law, those voting on corporate matters must be 18 years of age or older.
- In the case of a tie vote a second vote is taken. If the vote is still tied, the motion loses. Ministers of the congregation have no vote in congregational meetings, as they are members of the presbytery, not of the congregation. [G-7.0308]

The minutes for congregational meetings should follow the same basic form as session minutes, including noting the time and place of the meeting; the presence of a quorum, and the opening and closing of the meeting with prayer. Minutes of congregational meetings are stored in the official minute book, in the appropriate chronological order. Note these differences:

- The minutes of the congregational meeting are to be signed by the moderator and the secretary. [G-7.0307]
- The session may approve the minutes at its next scheduled meeting. Approval of the minutes of congregational meetings by the congregation is not required.

V. KEEPING THE CHURCH ROLLS AND REGISTERS

The church rolls and registers are a record of session action with regard to members. Each addition to the rolls and registers and change of status of members, elders, and deacons

involves an official action by the session and should be recorded in the minutes at the time it occurs. Like the minutes, the rolls and registers should be kept in a permanent book. The rolls and registers can be examined by the presbytery from time to time.

There are four types of rolls, one for each type of member: active members, inactive members, affiliate members, and baptized members. There are five types of registers: marriages, baptisms, elders, deacons, and pastoral personnel.

The *Active Members' Roll* is a list of members determined by the session to be in active relationship to your church. Active members have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, have been received by the session into membership, have voluntarily submitted to the government of the church, and participate in the church's work and worship. [G-5.0202]

Members are placed on this roll when received by the session into active membership through profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or certificate of transfer from another church. Members are removed from this roll by session action to transfer the member to another church; transfer the member to the inactive roll; delete or remove the person from membership (e.g. at member's request or if a member joins another church without requesting a transfer); or if the member dies or the session is unable to determine the person's residence.

The roll is usually kept in two forms: a chronological roll where members are entered in the order in which they are received as members and so numbered; and an alphabetical roll or index listed according to the first letter of the last name and cross-indexed to the chronological roll by membership number.

It is helpful to immediately add the names of members received in the chronological roll and the alphabetical index. Include the maiden names of married women.

Note any change of name or marital status.

- If a woman member changes her name upon getting married, add her married name to the original entry on the chronological roll and to the alphabetical index.
- When members are transferred to other churches, record the date of transfer and the name of the church.
- Former members who were transferred or removed from the list and then received again should be entered on a new line.
- When members are transferred to the Inactive Roll, show the date and indicate the transfer in the chronological roll. Line out the name in the roll and index with a fine pencil line.
- Members who are restored to active status should not be reentered. Instead, show the restored date at the original number on the roll and erase the line through the name in the roll and index.
- When members are removed from the roll, show the date of removal by the session in the chronological roll and line out the name in the roll and index with a fine ink line.

When an active member is transferred to another church, issue letters of transfer to the new church. Such letters are not sent to individual members. Certificates of transfer should

include information on the member's ordination as elder or deacon and information on the baptism of any of the member's children. When an active member is received from another church, be sure you return the certificate of reception to the transferring church. The pastor's signature is required on all such certificates.

Inactive Members are members who, in the judgment of the session, have intentionally failed to participate in the church's work and worship for a period of at least one year. Even after a person has been transferred to the inactive roll, the session should provide pastoral care for a period of two years. The session should try to determine why the person is inactive and attempt to restore the person to active membership. Members must be informed when placed on this roll.

Members are removed from the inactive roll by session action when: the member is restored to the active roll; a non-resident member has been on this roll for one year; the session is unable to determine the member's residence; a resident member, after pastoral care for two years, is not restored to active participation; the member dies; the member joins another church without regular transfer; or when requested by the member.

Members on the inactive roll may be transferred to another church. However, the session may wish to restore the member to the active roll before transfer.

Affiliate membership allows a person who is away from his or her home church to temporarily join another church while remaining on the active roll of the home church. It is a very helpful roll for college students and "snowbirds." This roll lists those received into affiliate membership by the session. Affiliate membership must be renewed every two years.

Baptized members are persons who have not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and who are currently under the care of your church.

Baptized members include anyone baptized in your church (regardless of age) who has not yet become an active member; baptized children of active and inactive members even if the children were not baptized in your church; and the baptized children of ministers related to your congregation, even if the children were not baptized in your church. As a practical matter, the roll of baptized members will be very close to your Sunday School roster.

Names are removed from this roll by session action when baptized members are confirmed and placed on the active membership roll, or the parents of the baptized members are removed from membership in the church.

Registers are permanent historical records and names are never removed from the registers. These registers are sometimes needed as alternatives to more formal legal records such as birth and marriage certificates, and therefore should be carefully kept.

The Register of Marriages includes the marriages of all members of the church (no matter where the marriage was performed); all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the church (no matter where the marriage was performed); and all marriages performed on church property. [Note: If you rent space to or from another congregation, you do not need to report weddings they hold in the sanctuary.]

The *Register of Baptisms* is a record of all baptisms performed in your church or by the ministerial staff in any location. Separate registers can be maintained for infant and adult baptisms or a single register can be used, indicating whether an infant or adult was baptized. Either way, record the following information:

- the full name of the person baptized for both infant and adult baptisms,
- the parents' full names for both adult and infant baptisms (including the maiden name of the mother); or the names of those presenting a child for baptism,
- the date and place of the baptisand's birth,
- the date and place of baptism,
- the name of the presiding clergy.

The *Register of Elders* and the *Register of Deacons* should each list the place (church) of ordination for all elders and deacons, regardless of where the person was ordained; the terms of each elder or deacon's active service; and, if an elder or deacon is removed from ordained office, the record of that removal.

The *Register of Pastors* includes the names and years of service of all pastors, co-pastors, assistant pastors, associate pastors, interim pastors, stated supplies, and parish associates who have served your church.

VI. MAINTAINING AND STORING MINUTES, ROLLS, AND REGISTERS

While it is convenient to prepare and store minutes and other records on the computer, computer media cannot be used for the official, permanent storage of the minutes, rolls, and registers. Computer development is so rapid that software and hardware are quickly rendered obsolete. Moreover, magnetic storage media are subject to decay over time, especially if there is any exposure to a magnetic field. Instead, store all records as follows:

- Use the standard loose-leaf minute or register books (such as those available from Cokesbury). The leaves should be acid-free paper and of uniform size and style. Minutes should be numbered consecutively and uniformly by some printing mechanism, and ultimately bound in permanent book form of not more than 400 pages.
- All session minutes and reports should be typewritten or printed, not handwritten.
- Do not leave blank pages or blank space of more than two inches on any page of the minutes. If space is left, cross it out with pen and ink.
- Do not insert into the records any written or printed matter on separate sheets of paper. Records may be photocopied onto numbered minute pages.

Arrangements can be made to microfilm records through the Department of History, which is the nationally recognized archive for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Their address is:

The Department of History of the General Assembly (215) 627-1852
425 Lombard Street
Philadelphia, PA 19147

VII. PRESBYTERY REVIEW OF MINUTES

Approved minutes are to be typed or printed on acid free paper on consecutively numbered pages. (In other words, if you start a new book, do not begin that book on a new page 1.) The clerk should proofread the permanent record and correct any errors before signing each set of minutes. Also obtain the signature of the moderator of congregational meetings and the signature of any others who submitted minutes for the permanent record.

Session minutes are submitted to presbytery for review once each year. The review may take place through the presbytery office or at special review meetings at various times and places in the presbytery year.

In general, original pages should not be submitted. There are two exceptions. The original of the last page should be submitted so that it can be stamped as approved. If you do send in the original last page, keep a copy for your own records. The other exception is when you or another authorized person brings the minutes to a scheduled meeting for reading minutes. Other than these exceptions, minutes sent or delivered to the presbytery office should be photocopies, not the original pages.

Submit a *Session Minutes Cover Sheet* with your minutes. You can receive a copy of this form from the stated clerk.

When minutes are sent or delivered to the presbytery office, you should indicate whether the minutes are to be returned to the church office or the clerk of session. Please provide the proper address.

Minutes will generally be returned by UPS or certified mail, so someone must be available to accept delivery. If no designation is made, minutes may be held at the presbytery office until picked up.

If you need more help, contact the Constitutional Procedures Work Group and we will be happy to assist you.

VIII. IMPORTANT RESOURCES FOR THE CLERK

A successful clerk is not made overnight. Knowledge of your resources and diligence in using them will help you become more proficient in your task of clerking. You will need to have access to the following official documents:

- The session minute book and church rolls and registers are the primary documents for which you are responsible. Locate all previous record books.
- A current *Book of Order* is important as a basic reference. (Changes are made every other year.) Chapter 10 of *The Form of Government* in the *Book of Order* tells about the duties of the session. You will find most of the information you need in this chapter.
- Secure for yourself a copy of your church bylaws and locate the congregational charter. Where the *Book of Order* is silent, the congregation's bylaws and *Robert's Rules of Order* will often tell you what needs to be done.

Locate resources relating to the clerk's responsibilities. Some useful resources are:

- *Companion to the Constitution - Polity for the Local Church*, F. A. Beattie, Geneva Press, Louisville, KY.
- *Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers*, Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker, Geneva Press, Louisville, KY.

In addition you will need to keep your minutes on acid free paper. If you wish to keep your minutes in a formal minute book, the appropriate supplies can be obtained from:

- Presbyterian Publishing House, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202, 1-800-227-2872, or from the
- Cokesbury Bookstore, 4358 E. New York Street, Aurora, IL 60504, 630-585-0996.

Formal minute paper is now available that is 8½ by 11 in size. Since this paper will fit through a standard printer or copying machine, it is highly recommended.

You may also keep your minutes on acid free paper in a three ring binder. Most standard office paper is now acid free. Your local office supply store can help you secure acid free paper.

Keep the presbytery address and telephone number close at hand. The stated clerk of Chicago Presbytery is the person with whom you will directly relate.

Rev. Barbara A. Bundick 312-243-8300, ext. 1313
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Chicago, IL 60607

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Training for clerks is available at workshops held at various times throughout the year by the Constitutional Procedures Work Group.