HANDBOOK

FOR

CLERKS OF SESSION

IN THE

PRESBYTERY OF

GREAT RIVERS

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FORWARD

The **<u>Handbook for Clerks</u>** of Session is written for clerks by clerks as a guide to the responsibilities of the clerk of session. It is written with the following assumptions:

a. the clerk of session plays a vital role within the Presbyterian Church (USA)

b. the clerk of session maintains the history of the faithfulness of the church through careful minutes and records;

c. the clerk of session is interested in and knowledgeable about Presbytery polity;

d. the clerk of session, along with the moderator, is the liaison between session and presbytery;

e. the clerk of session is always striving to be a servant to session, in the fullest biblical sense, and is equipped spiritually to fulfill the servant role;

f. the clerk of session is elected to be the continuing ecclesiastical officer of the congregation. In this capacity, the clerk has the responsibility of keeping the church records and making sure that all the procedures in the Form of Government section of the Book of Order are followed. In addition, the clerk has the responsibility to see that the Session fulfils its responsibility to see that worship takes place and that the pulpit is filled.

A clerk of a governing body understands that our order is to be derived from Scripture, as it is expressed in the Confession of our church. Our order expresses the principle that we must live our lives together in accord with our faith and as witness to the demands of Scripture. A clerk of a governing body respects the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) as our covenant with one another about how we can, in our diversity, be such a witness. And a clerk knows that our rules are never an end in themselves, but rather an attempt to be faithful to our covenant. Our polity commits to a shared ministry among ruling elders, deacons, members and teaching elders; it commits to a representative form of government in which ruling elders and teaching elders have care of the congregation; and it commits to corporate governance 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”

The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, the 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. (F-1.0304)

ARE YOU A NEW CLERK?

A successful clerk is not made over night. Knowledge of your resources and diligence in using them will help you to become proficient in your task clerking. Here follows a list of priorities for you to pursue from the day of your election

1. Locate the minutes book and church register. Locate all previous record books. Are they properly stored? **These records should never be taken from the church (except when being read by Presbytery's Committee on Session Records) and should be kept in a fire proof safe when not in use <u>You are the only person who can authorize entries into these books</u>**

2. Locate a <u>**current** Book of Order</u>. The dates are on the front cover and a new one is published every other year. . In the chapter for Sessions, you will find instructions describing the rolls and registers of the church and how to maintain them.

3. Locate a copy of your church bylaws [if your congregation has them] and congregational charter. Where the Book of Order is silent, the congregation's bylaws will often tell you what needs to be done.

4. Locate copies of architectural drawings, mortgage papers, church histories.

5. Locate a copy of the "Handbook of Clerks of Session" published by the Presbytery of Great Rivers. You will find a great deal of helpful information in this document. Copies of the Handbook are available from the Office of the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery Great Rivers.

6. Keep the presbytery address and telephone number close at hand. You will find help on almost every issue at presbytery. The Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Great Rivers is the person to whom you directly relate for help on your questions and knowledge of whom to call, contact:

   Office of the Stated Clerk
   Presbytery of Great Rivers
   1230 W Candletree Dr, Suite D
   Peoria, IL 61614
   Phone (309) 683-6980
   Toll-free 800-537-8592
   Fax (309)-683-6983

7. Supplies you may need:

   Cokesbury, P.O. Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202; <u>www.cokesbury.com</u> has many of the supplies you will need. They usually will mail them to the church and invoice the church. The minute paper, register fillers; minute and register binders and an assortment of certificates are available from this source.

   The following supplies are available from the Presbyterian Distribution Center, 3906 Produce Road, Louisville, KY 40218 <u>http://www.pcusa.org/resourcecenters/</u>

   - Member transfer forms and stubs;
   - Baptismal form and stubs;
   - Postcards notifying another church that one of your members is in their area.

TIME LINE FOR CLERKS

Many clerks are aided by the church secretary. However, **the clerk is accountable** for the following responsibilities and directs the church secretary in the following tasks.

Two Weeks Before	Send meeting notices.
	Contact committee chairs about unfinished and referred business for which they are responsible. Remind chairs that all recommendations need to be in writing with enough copies for the members of session.
One Week Before Session	Develop the docket of the session meeting with the moderator.
Session Meeting	Seek approval of the minutes of the previous meeting (see minute format).
After the Session Meeting	Write the minutes. They may be mailed to all session members. If the minutes are not mailed; send excerpts from the minutes to each chair of all motions related to the particular committee.
	Complete all correspondence directed by the minutes, including letters of transfer. Remember that all correspondence between the Governing bodies of the church is “clerk to clerk”.
	Record in the rolls and registers all membership changes ordered by session.

Note: This is a manageable task if it is **done regularly**. If a clerk falls behind, the task becomes very difficult and memory fades. Set a regular schedule for yourself.

THE CLERK AND THE SESSION

BEFORE THE MEETING

1. <u>Plan the Docket</u>: It is the responsibility of the clerk of session and the moderator of session to prepare the docket so that all business is handled in the most efficient manner. The docket becomes the outline for the session minutes. (A sample docket appears at the end of this section).

2. <u>Meeting Notices</u>: Send or arrange to have sent, notices of the meeting. It is helpful to accompany these notices with reminders to committee chairs of reports due and docketed, business referred, previous assignments. (*The Call of a special meeting must include the exact purpose for which the meeting is called and no business other than that named can be transacted. The phrase "and such other business as may come before session" is not adequate in the case of a special meeting.)*

3. Most sessions have found that written reports facilitate the efficient flow of business. In such reports historical and informational material always comes first in the report and the recommendations come last. Only the recommendations appear in session minutes unless session orders the entire report be added to minutes. Many sessions find it very helpful for committees to have their reports ready in time to be mailed with the call of the meeting.

TAKE TO THE MEETING

You are responsible for all papers and documents that aid session in reaching its decision. It will be helpful to have at each meeting:

- <u>**Current**</u> Book of Order
- Congregational bylaws (contents of a notebook for all session members appear at the end of this section)
- Session committee membership lists;
- Current - year session minutes;
- A list of all referred and unfinished business.

DURING THE SESSION MEETING

Session **cannot** meet without its moderator, who normally is the pastor of the church. If the moderator is absent or ill, the moderator may appoint another teaching elder of Presbytery to moderate over the session, or the session, **with the approval of the pastor** may elect one of its own members to preside. If your pulpit is vacant, presbytery will appoint a moderator for session. In this event, please call the presbytery.

A quorum of session must be present to have a legal meeting at which actions may be taken. The quorum of session is predetermined by the session. It must include the moderator and either a certain number or a certain percentage of ruling elders. (G.3.0203)

Session meetings in most churches are informal. However, as clerk, <u>**require**</u> that <u>**all**</u> actions by session be voted upon. As clerk, you can <u>**require**</u> that all motions be in writing. Stop the meeting if you must until you are given the exact wording of the motion in writing.

You may find it necessary to help members of session word their motions. Helpful questions to ask about every session action are:

- **<u>What</u>** exactly is going to be done?
- **<u>Who</u>** is going to do it?
- **<u>When</u>** will it be completed or reported?
- **<u>How</u>** much will it cost?
- **<u>Where</u>** will the money come from?
- **<u>Is</u>** the action compatible with the Book of Order? (If it is not, the action is null and void.)
- **<u>Do not</u>** include discussion in your minutes only main motions made and subsidiary motions adopted. **<u>Failed</u>** **<u>motions</u>** must be recorded in the minutes.
- **<u>Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, Scott, Foresman</u>**, editor (latest edition) governs all the procedures of session in all cases not specifically provided for by the Book of Order. (**G-3.0105**)

AFTER THE MEETING

1. Write up the minutes immediately, transcribe or have them transcribed into the minute book. Never include attachments or place inserts in the minutes book. If necessary photocopy whatever must be included onto number minute **paper. (e.g. recommended for page 1 of the annual General Assembly Statistical Report or reports to be added to the minutes.)**

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

Complete or dictate all necessary correspondence related to the actions of session. Within the church, **<u>all</u>** communication is from **<u>clerk to clerk</u>** or from **<u>clerk to stated clerk</u>**. The clerk's signature (not the moderator's or the secretary's signature) authenticates any document coming from the session.

Some clerks have secretaries who have the primary responsibility for the minutes and the rolls and registers. **The clerk of session supervises the church secretary in all matters related to the minutes and rolls and register**. The accuracy of these records is the clerk's responsibility, **<u>not</u>** the secretary's. The clerk must attest the authenticity of minutes of each meeting of the session by signature.

SESSION'S CONTINUING EDUCATION

(G-3.0201)

National studies show that very few elders understand their office, or the history, theology and polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The Book of Order requires the session plan for the continuing education of its elders.

Here follows a sample docket of the business which should take place at a session meeting. Use it to guide your participation with the Moderator in preparation of the session docket.

SESSION DOCKET SAMPLE

<u>Note</u>: There are <u>many</u> other ways to order a session meeting as long as the elements listed in the following example are included. The meeting should be ordered in such a way as to facilitate business *as well as* provide for the spiritual, community and educational life of the session.

SESSION DOCKET

1. **Constitute meeting with prayer.**

2. **Roll (present, excused, absent)**

3. **Approve minutes of previous meeting**

4. **Report of Clerk**
   Correspondence received and referrals
   Unfinished business to be completed

5. **Report of Pastor**
   Baptisms requested
   Baptisms performed
   Weddings
   Funerals
   Other information such as people in hospital, people needing visits

6. **Report of the Treasurer**

7. **Report of Commissioner to Presbytery, and appointment of commissioner to next Presbytery meeting.**

8. **Reports of session committees**

9. **Reports of commissions or special committees**

10. **New Business**

11. **Adjournment with Prayer**

A NOTEBOOK FOR SESSION MEMBERS

Some churches have developed notebooks, or manuals, for each session member that includes the necessary documents and information for intelligent decision making. Such a tool is particularly helpful in orienting new session members to their task. Here follows a suggestion for index tabs for such a notebook.

Introduction

Church History

- Includes a list of programs and activities with contact people, telephone numbers, meetings times and places.

Church Officers and Staff

- Includes names, addresses and telephone numbers

Bylaws of the Congregation

Functions, Duties and Responsibilities
- Includes ordination vows

Session Committees Objectives and Duties
- Includes list of committee membership

Other Committees
- Deacons
- Presbyterian Women
- Presbyterian Men

Annual Budget

Financial Summary

Special Rules and Regulations

Session Minutes

Church Members

Notes

SESSION AND ITS RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

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

Board of Trustees (G-4.01 - G-4.0208) – IF APPLICABLE

If in place, the board of trustees is accountable to the session. Their powers as trustees are listed in G-4.0101 and shall not infringe on the powers of session. It is possible for session to delegate powers to the trustees, although session is still responsible for the delegated powers.

G-4.0102 provides that 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.

The Board of Deacons (G-2.02)

The board of deacons is accountable to session; chooses its own officers; meets annually with the session; and must submit its plans to session for approval. The pastors are advisory members of the board of deacons.

Nominating Committee (G-2.0401)

The church nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not of the session. It does not report to session; although the committee may wish to consult with session. The pastor is an ex-officio member of this committee. The committee must also consist of at least three active members of the congregation and at least one ruling elder currently serving on session.

Pastor Nominating Committee (G-2.0802-G-2.0803)

The pastor nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not of session.

The committee has several points of contact with the session:

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

Session and Personnel (G-2.0804)

Session supervises all ordained and lay personnel. Session recommends to the congregation the terms of call of all ordained personnel. This recommendation must meet the minimum guidelines set by presbytery.

Outside Organizations

Session controls the use of all church property, even to granting permission for the sanctuary to be used for weddings. If outside organizations use your building, please see the cautions under “Legal Questions.” The purpose of an organization using the church should not be contrary to the mission of the congregation or the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is wise to have a written contract with all organizations using the church building, stipulating any rental fee, maintenance standards, and rooms of the church to be used.

THE CLERK AND THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

TIPS ABOUT CLERKING THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The clerk of session is secretary to the congregational meeting, both ecclesiastical and corporate (G-1.0505)

It is good practice for the congregational minutes, both ecclesiastical and corporate, to be signed by the moderator and the clerk. If your congregation does not have a unicameral board the congregation elects the secretary of the meeting of the corporation if one is held. The person elected may be the clerk. (G-1.0505)

Check both the Book of Order and your bylaws for what constitutes "due notice" for the congregational meeting. Congregations choose their own rule for what the minimum notification requirement is for a congregational meeting. (G-1.0502)

A congregational meeting may be called only by session, presbytery or one-fourth of the members of the congregation on the active roll. (G-1.0502) Refer to G-1.0503 to determine what business may be conducted at a congregational meeting.

As clerk you should take particular care to alert the moderator of the congregational meeting when business is out of order. You will find a careful listing of such business in the Book of Order "permissive powers" related to adopting congregational bylaws, establishment of a unicameral board, waivers from election of officers, raising of the quorum, and buying, selling, and mortgaging of real property. **The budget is adopted by session, not the congregation**. However, session must inform the congregation of the budget. If the congregation does not approve of the use of its gifts, the members will not give.

> **Suggestion**: At an informal meeting of the congregation after worship or at a church supper, session should present the budget, invite comment, and solicit suggestions. **No actions should be taken at this meeting**.

The pastor(s) salary must be approved by the congregation and reported to presbytery for its approval. The Presbytery office will provide this form. (G-2.804)

Proxy voting is not permitted in church 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. The election of a pastor is always by ballot.

> **Suggestion**: Since only members on the active roll can vote, have your roll book current. Bring it with you to the meeting. If there is considerable tension about a particular vote, have active members of the congregation come to your desk to pick up a ballot.

Minutes of the congregational meeting are ordinarily approved before adjournment. However, the session may approve the minutes and report its action at the next congregational meeting.

Check the Book of Order and your bylaws for the quorum of the congregational meeting. (G-4.0501)

If your congregation does not have bylaws, please contact the stated clerk for information about how to establish them.

THE CLERK AND RECORDS

HOW TO KEEP THE CHURCH ROLLS AND REGISTER

CHURCH ROLLS AND REGISTERS ARE LEGAL DOCUMENTS

Presbytery checks your rolls and registers annually. The roll and registers are checked against session minutes. You will find your responsibilities related to the rolls and registers in the Book of Order (G-3.0204) Read these pages carefully.

There are only three ways a person can join the Presbyterian Church: profession of faith, transfer, and reaffirmation of faith. All three ways require formal session action.

ROLLS

The church rolls record every member who has ever belonged to your church. These rolls must be kept current. The official church rolls may **not** be kept in a card file or on a computer. There are **four** church rolls.

a. **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 the roll by action of session or because of death. The only ways a name can be removed are by a transfer to another church, transfer to the inactive roll, removal from the inactive roll, death, ordination to Ministry of Word and Sacrament, deletion or removal from membership.

b. **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.

c. **Baptized Roll**: For most churches in the Presbytery the baptized roll is the same as the register of baptisms. *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 baptisms, 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 alphabetical rolls. Adult baptism is always accompanied by joining the church and joining the church is always accompanied by baptism if the person is unbaptized. The only ways a name can be removed from the baptized roll are by profession of faith, transfer, or death.

e. **Affiliate Roll**: The affiliate roll enables a member who is away from his/her home church to join temporarily another church while remaining on the active roll of the home church. It must be renewed every two years. It is a very helpful roll for college students and "snowbirds'.

   NOTE **Inactive Roll**: The inactive roll is no longer a mandated roll by the Book of Order. If a congregation wishes to keep an inactive roll, it can be volted upon and placed in the by-laws but it is no longer reported to higher governing bodies. Previously, the inactive roll listed the names of members of the church, who in the judgment of session, had willfully let their active membership in the church lapse.

***Note**: To fill out the question on the General Assembly statistical report on "number of person on the baptized roll," count the names listed on your baptized roll, or register of baptisms. 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. If your roll book does not have a baptized roll, it will be necessary for you to use the register of baptisms. In this event you will need to make note of the changes on the register related to the changes in membership. Do not obliterate any name from the baptized register. This is a historical document.

Example: Mr. and Mrs. John Adams are received by session on letters of transfer.

1. Session receives Mr. and Mrs. Adams into membership. **Do not make entry into the roll book unless there is session action indicating this in the session minute book.**

2. Record "John Edward Adams" on the chronological roll opposite the first free membership number Indicate the way Mr. Adams joined the church (by certificate) and the date of the session action

3. Record "Mary (maiden name) Adams (Mrs. John E)" on the chronological roll opposite the next free membership number exactly the same way you listed Mr. Adams.

4. List both new members on the alphabetical roll (the "A" page) with their membership number.

Example: Mr. and Mrs. Adams have a son, Brian, three years old, who was baptized in the former church.

List Brian Lee Adams on the baptized member roll (register if you do not have a roll) with the date and place of his baptism, and his parents' names. His mother's name is recorded as "Mary (maiden name) Adams"

Example: Mr. and Mrs. Adam's infant daughter, Sarah, is baptized after they join the church.

List Sarah Jane Adams on the baptized members' roll arid the register in exactly the same way in which Brain's name was listed.

> *If Sarah is the daughter of a single mother who did not wish to state the father's name, list only the mother's name
>
> *If Sarah is adopted or a legal ward of Mr. and Mrs. Adams, their names are listed as the parents of Sarah.
>
> *If Sarah is a ward of the court she cannot be baptized without permission of the parents or the court. Her legal parents' names are listed.

Example: Mr. and Mrs. Adams have a son, Richard, sixteen, who has never been baptized. Session authorizes the baptism and receives him as a new member.

List Richard Adams on the chronological roll, indicating that he was baptized when he joined the church. List him also on the alphabetical roll and the baptized register, noting the date he made a profession of faith and joined the church. **Richard cannot be baptized as an adult without a profession of faith, which makes him a member of the church.**

Example: Mary Jones has been in a nursing home for one year. She cannot attend worship services and does not contribute to the offering.

As clerk you must inform session that since her absence is involuntary she cannot be removed from the roll and session continues to be responsible for her nurture.

Example: Billy Willmer hasn't been to church for over five years. Session discovers he went straight to graduate school after college graduation.

Write both Billy Willmer and a church located near his school suggesting that he affiliate with the church temporarily. Do not remove him from the active roll unless you receive no response from him.

Example: Session continues to contact Mabel Frisch for two years. She still does not reply or come to church.

1. Session votes to remove Mabel Frisch from the rolls.

2. You draw a thin ink line through her name on the active roll and on the chronological roll, **noting the date of removal**.

Example: James Parr requests that session transfer his membership to First Church, St. Louis.

1. Session votes to transfer Mr. Parr.

2. You fill out the transfer certificate, noting on the back of the form the ordination Mr. Parr holds and the date of ordination and the dates of service.

3 You draw a thin ink line through his name on the chronological roll, noting the date of transfer **after you receive his certificate of reception**.

Example: Mr. Parr's son, Jeffrey, ten years old, is on the baptized roll.

1. You note Jeffrey's name and date and place of baptism on the back of Mrs. Parr's transfer form.

2. You note on the baptized members roll that Jeffrey's baptism was transferred to First Church, St. Louis.

Example: Mary Jones dies in the nursing home.

1. You draw a thin line through her name on the chronological roll, noting the date of death.

2. If you have a death register, list Mary Jones' name in the register along with date of death, place of death and place of burial.

TIPS ON KEEPING THE REGISTERS

Detailed instructions for keeping the registers may be found in the Book of Order (G-3.0204b). The registers are:

a. Register of Baptized Persons

b. Register of Marriages (this register is not a mandated register by the Book of Order)

c. Register of Pastors

d. Register of Elders

e. Register of Deacons

f. Register of Trustees

SESSION RECORDS BOOK APPEARANCE

1. Use the standard loose-leaf minute book (See page 6 for ordering) or you may use standard three-ring acid free paper (8 ½ x 11 inches) with reinforced punched edge.

2. The leaves should be:

   a. Of uniform size and style

   b. Numbered consecutively and uniformly (a mechanical numbering machine is preferable. One is available in the Presbytery office for use.

   c. Ultimately bound in permanent book form of not more that 400 pages or, preferably, sent annually, after Presbytery approval, to the Department of History, 425 Lombard Street, Philadelphia, PA 19147 (215-627-1852) for archival preservation. If minutes are sent for preservation, a copy of those sent should be kept at the church for reference.

3. All minutes and records should be typewritten, not handwritten.

4. Do not leave blank pages or blank space of more than two inches on any page. If space is left, cross it out with pen and ink.

5. Do not insert into records any written or printed matter on separate sheets of paper.

6. Minutes should be typed into the official record book only after review, correction and approval. If, however, 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 new page where the change is authorized. The Clerk should initial the marginal note.

A. ENTRIES TO BE RECORDED IN THE MINUTES FOR EVERY MEETING

1. **RECORD DATE, TIME, AND THE TYPE OF MEETING.**
   The type of meeting should be identified: session, congregation, regular, special, annual.

2. **INDICATE THAT MEETING OPENED WITH PRAYER.**

3. **IDENTIFY MODERATOR OF MEETING.**
   Ordinarily the Pastor, Interim or Stated Supply, is the moderator. In cases where another moderator is present the reason and name of person should be given.

4. **RECORD ELDERS PRESENT, ABSENT AND EXCUSED.**

5 **INDICATE THAT A QUORUM IS PRESENT.**
   The Book of Order allows the session to determine the quorum for meetings. (G-3.0203) The moderator should be familiar with what constitutes a quorum in the church for both bodies, and minutes must confirm that a quorum was present.

6. **RECORD APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES.**
   Ordinarily, minutes shall be approved at the next regular meeting of the session. They should be identified by date and type of meeting, and any corrections noted. While not required, it is expedient for the congregation to authorize approval of its minutes by the session. To avoid the need for confusing corrections, it is suggested that minutes not be entered in the Record Book until after their approvals.

7. **ENTER MINUTES OF CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS IN THE RECORD ROOK.**

Minutes from the annual congregational meeting and any specially called congregational meeting shall be entered in the session minutes book, and is good practice for them to be signed by both the Moderator and the clerk.

8. **RECORD ALL MOTIONS.**
Record motions, even those which are defeated, with all pertinent information included. Reference to other documents which do not appear in the minutes should be avoided whenever possible. Record presentation of committee reports **without** including the content of the report unless directed to do so by the session. Record only that which is vital to the transactions of the meeting or of historical value.

9. **INDICATE THAT The MEETING CLOSED WITH PRAYER.**

10. **SIGN THE MINUTES.**
When the minutes have been entered in the Record Book, Session minutes must be signed by the clerk **<u>or</u>** the moderator. Congregational meeting minutes should be signed by the clerk **<u>and</u>** the moderator. Minutes entered in the Record Book should appear without erasures and interlines. If corrections must be made, corrected sections appear in the minutes following discovery of the error with a handwritten signed or initialed note in the margin by the error indicating the page where the correction has been made. Under no circumstances may a page be permanently removed from the Record Book.

B. ENTRIES TO BE RECORDED <u>AS NEEDED OR INDICATED.</u>

1. **RECORD THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.**
Observance of the Lord's Supper is authorized by session. All regular and special celebrations of the Lord's Supper should be recorded in the minutes of the next regular session meeting. While it is required to report only that the Lord's Supper was served, it may be advantageous for the church's historical record or worship attendance to record how many people partook.

2. **RECORD THE PRIVATE ADMINISTRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.**
When the Lord's Supper is administered privately, the minutes should record this action and who was present

3. **RECORD THE CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM.**
All celebrations of Baptism shall be recorded in the minutes of the next regular meeting of the session, indicating who was baptized and when. The session shall authorize baptisms.

4. **RECORD PERSONS WHO ARE BAPTIZED.**
When an infant is baptized, the minutes shall record the infant's full name, the name of parents, and date of birth. The information is then recorded on the Roll of Baptized Members. The Baptized Member Roll includes the children baptized in your church and names of children of members who were baptized in other congregations. When an adult is baptized, the minutes include the full name of the person, and it is recorded on the roll of adult baptisms.

5. **RECORD NEW MEMBERS RECEIVED.**
When new members are received by the session, the minutes shall record the individual's full name; the name of their baptized children, if any; the date and place of previous ordination as elder or deacon, if any, how they were received (profession or reaffirmation of faith or letter of transfer) and name of dismissing church. This information shall then be entered in the Roll and Records.

6. **RECORD MEMBERS DISMISSED.**
When church members are dismissed, the minutes shall record the individual's full name; names of their baptized children, if any; the record of their ordination as elder or deacon if any; how they were dismissed (transfer, removal from inactive roll, dropped from rolls); and in the case of person dismissed by letter of transfer, the name and location of the church receiving them and the number assigned to each member in the Chronological Roll should be recorded with the name.) This information shall then be entered in the Rolls and Records. The Book of Order (G-

3.0301b) outlines the grounds and process for dismissal of church members. The effective date of dismissal is date of reception in receiving church

7. **RECORD THE DEATH OF CHURCH MEMBERS.**
When a member dies, that death should be reported to the session, and the minutes should note the individual's full name, date of death, and if he or she was an elder. This information shall then be entered in the Chronological Roll. A special roll of those who died is no longer required.

8. **RECORD ANY TRANSFER OF MEMBERS ON THE CHURCH ROLLS.**
When church members are transferred from one membership to another (e.g. Active to removed from the rolls, Baptized Members to Active Members, etc.), the minutes should record the individual's full name (the number assigned to each member in the Chronological Roll should be recorded with the name) and the session actions.

9. **RECORD MARRIAGE.**
All marriages of church members, all marriages conducted by the pastoral staff of the church, and all marriages performed on church property shall be reported to the session and included in its minutes. This information (if one of the partners is a member of the church, the number assigned to each member in the Chronological Roll should be recorded with the name) shall then be entered in the Register of Marriages if the session chooses to keep a Register of Marriages(G-3.0301b).

10. **RECORD ELDERS AND DEACONS ELECTED TO SERVICE.**
When new elders and deacons are elected to be ordained and installed, the minutes shall record the individual's full name completion of period of study, and session examination (G-2.0402), the date of ordination and installation. This information shall then be entered in the appropriate Register of Elders or Deacons. The installation of pastors should also be noted, with the dates of their service in the present church.

11. **RECORD COMMISSIONERS TO OTHER GOVERNING BODIES OF THE CHURCH.**
When elders are elected by session as commissioners to Presbytery, or nominated as commissioners to Synod or General Assembly, the minutes shall record the individual's name and for how long they have been elected to serve. It may also be advantageous, upon completion of the term of service, to record the individual's attendance and fidelity to the task.

12. **RECORD DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS.**
When the session finds it necessary to exercise discipline, the Book of Order section "Rules of Discipline" should be carefully studied. If discipline needs to be administered, the minutes must contain such a record of the proceedings so the Presbytery will know who was disciplined, why and how. Check with the Stated Clerk for any questions on procedure.

13. **REPORT TO SESSION ON PRESBYTERY'S REVIEW OF SESSION RECORDS.**
When the session's records have been reviewed by the Presbytery, that report should be received by the session and appropriate actions taken to adjust or correct the records as indicated.

14. **FURTHER SUGGESTIONS:** It would be helpful, when referring to church members in the minutes, to identify them by the number where they may be found on the Membership Roll. In addition, it is advantageous when actions are taken in specific compliance with the Book of Order (e.g. disciplinary action, removal of members, etc.) for the appropriate Book of Order paragraph number to be identified.

C. ENTRIES TO BE RECORDED <u>ANNUALLY</u>.

I. **RECORD ANNUAL REVIEW OF PASTOR'S COMPENSATION.**
It is the responsibility of the session to review annually the adequacy of compensation which the church provides its pastor(s). (G-2.0804) It should be reported to the session when this review has taken place, and the session minutes should note it.

2. **RECORD ANNUAL FINANCIAL AUDIT OR FULL FINANCIAL REVIEW.**
The church's financial records shall be audited annually (G-3.0113). An audit is defined to be "an examination or review of financial statements and records to determine that they present fairly the financial position and results of operation for the period then ended". It should be reported to the session when this has been done, and the minutes should note it. The audit itself does not need to be in the minutes.

3. **RECORD ANNUAL JOINT MEETING WITH BOARD OF DEACONS.**
The Book of Order requires "that a joint meeting of the session and board of deacons be held **at least annually** to confer on matters of common interest" (G-3.0204). Since no binding decision may be reached at such a meeting, minutes do not need to be recorded. It should be reported at the next regular session meeting, when the joint meeting was held, and the minutes should note it.

4. **RECORD ANNUAL REPORTS RECEIVED FROM OTHER BOARDS AND ORGANIZATIONS.**
It is the session's responsibility to supervise the work of all other boards and organizations within the church - deacons, trustees, men's and women's groups, etc. (G-3.0204). The minutes should show at least annually, when these other groups have reported to the session on their work and their finances. The reports themselves need not appear in the minutes.

5. **INCLUDE THE ANNUAL STATISTICAL REPORT.**
It is a requirement of the Presbytery that a summary of the statistical and financial information reported to the General Assembly each year be entered in the minutes. This summary should include at least the following: number of baptisms (adult and infant), number of members received (by profession or reaffirmation of faith or letter of transfer), number of members removed (by letter of transfer, death or other cause), the total number of active church members as of December 31; the beginning and ending balance of church finances, total receipts and total expenditures (broken down as appropriate), total mission giving, and the value of all investments.

FURTHER SUGGESTION: For entries recorded annually in the session minutes, it is suggested that the Clerk keep an index or table of contents, so that these items may be easily located when needed, either by the church or the Presbytery.

SAMPLE DOCUMENTS

The following sample minutes contain examples of things that might occur at a session meeting. Many can be used as a standard format such as the opening paragraph. Others may occur occasionally or never. The order is suggestive only and needs to be adapted to the particular actions taken by session. All reports should be in writing, including that of the clerk and pastor.

[**Example reports for information and/or action are shown in the following SAMPLE MINUTES** in *italics*]

Minutes of the Regular (Special) Meeting of Session
February 17, 20____

A regular meeting of the Session of ________________________ Presbyterian Church was held in the church parlor at 7:00 pm February 17, 20____. The meeting was opened with prayer offered by the Moderator, the Reverend _________________________. A quorum was present.

Present were: The Moderator and Elders ____

Excused were: Elders ____

Absent were: Elders ____

Staff and Guests present ____

Approval of Minutes The minutes of the January 17, 20____ were **approved** (or **approved with the following amendments:**)

CORRESPONDENCE

The Clerk presented the following correspondence and referrals were made in consultation with the Moderator:

1. *Notice of the Presbytery Meeting referred to the Committee for nomination of commissioners.*
2. *Notice of Christian Education event referred to Christian Education Committee*
3. *Statement on per capita giving referred to Treasurer*
4. *Request for Session to participate in annual parade referred to Session*

Session **ratified** the referrals and directed the Clerk of Session to respond to Item # 4 with regret.

PASTOR'S REPORT

The Pastor presented the following report of his/her activities since the last regular Session meeting.

Baptisms Requested

*Session approved the requests for baptism of the following people and **referred** to the Christian Education Committee a request that a date be set for the committee and pastor to meet with the parents prior to baptism (or to meet with ____________ concerning the meaning of baptism and church membership):*

child's name _______________ parents' name _____________
adult's name _______________

Baptisms Performed

_______ *approved by Session, January 17, 20____*
_______ *on behalf of Christ Church approved by Session January 17, 20____*
_______ *extraordinary baptisms*

Session ratified the baptism of Baby Doe by the pastor and instructed the clerk to note the baptism on the Baptized Roll. Session instructed the clerk to notify Christ Church of the baptism of ___________ (include date, birthday, parents' names using mother's maiden name.)

Weddings

(all weddings performed on church property, performed by the pastor(s) anywhere, of members of the church married elsewhere)

Session instructed the clerk to record the weddings on the register (if the session chooses to keep a register of marriages).

Funerals

Session instructed the clerk to record the deaths on the rolls.

REPORT OF THE CLERK

Clerk of Session presented the following report and recommendations.

Annual Review

That the Minutes and Register had been reviewed by presbytery with one exception that the annual joint meeting of the deacons and session was not held and that this be added to the Minutes.
The recommendation was **adopted**.

REPORT OF TREASURER

The Treasurer presented the financial report for the period from January 1 to February 1, 20____.

Receipts _____________

Disbursements ______________
Receipts, year to date ______________
Disbursements, year to date ______________
Balance, year to date ______________

The report was received and filed for audit.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER

Elder ________________ presented a report on the January Presbytery meeting and made the following recommendation:

Special Offering

*That session authorize a special offering for the Lazarus Fund in accordance with Presbytery request. The recommendation was **referred** to the Worship Committee.*

Next Presbytery Meeting

*That the next Presbytery meeting would be held on March 20 at Second Presbyterian Church at 1:00 p.m. and that session appoint a commissioner. Session **appointed** Elder ________________ commissioner to the March 20 meeting*.

REPORT OF SESSION COMMITTEES

Special Committee on Name Change

Elder ______________________________________, Chair of the Special Committee, recommended that the name of the church be changed from ________________________ United Presbyterian Church to ____________________ Presbyterian Church, contingent upon the approval of the congregation and the presbytery.

Session **approved** the recommendation.

Elder ________________________ moved that Session call a special meeting of the congregation on March 1, 20____ in the sanctuary, following worship, for the purpose of taking action on session's recommendation that the name of the church be changed from ______________ United Presbyterian Church to ______________ Presbyterian Church, contingent upon the approval of the Presbytery. Session **approved** the recommendation and instructed the clerk to issue a call of the meeting.

Report of Membership Committee

Elder ________________ Chair, presented the report of the Membership Committee, making the following recommendations:

Receptions

That the following people have completed membership classes and are recommended to Session for examination for membership in the congregation

John Smith for baptism and profession of faith on March 3, 20____

Mary William Smith (Mrs. John) reaffirmation of faith

Elder Herny Brown by letter of transfer from First Presbyterian Church, Ordained elder 1964 in First Presbyterian Church Deacon

Mary Cooper Brown (Mrs. Herny) by letter of transfer from First Presbyterian Church, ordained deacon 1968 in First Church.

The Moderator introduced the proposed members, who were examined by the session. Session approved the examinations John and Mary Smith and Henry and Mary Brown were received as active members of the congregation, to be introduced to the congregation the following Sunday. Session instructed the clerk to record the names of the new members in the roll book and to forward the letters of reception for Henry and Mary Brown to their former session.

Affiliate Members

Elder ________ moved that Elder William Jones be received by session, at the request of First Church, Los Angeles, as an affiliate member of the congregation effective February 17, 20____ to February 17, 20____.

The Moderator introduced Elder Jones, who was examined by the session. Session **approved** the examination and enrolled Mr. Jones as an affiliate member of the congregation. Session instructed the clerk to forward a letter of reception to First Church.

Deletions from Church Roll

That Jonathan Edmund (0612) be deleted from the roll at his own request.
The recommendation was **adopted**.

Report of the Worship Committee

Elder _______________, Chair, presented the report of the Worship Committee, making the following recommendation:

Lord's Supper

That the Lords Supper be celebrated the last Sunday of each month.
The recommendation was **adopted**.

Elder ________ recommended that Elder ____________ accompany the pastor in serving communion to shut-ins.
The recommendation was **adopted**.

Report of the Christian Education Committee

Elder _______________.Chair, presented the report of the Christian Education Committee, making the following recommendations:

Sunday School Teachers

That the following teachers be approved for the Spring Term:
___________________________ and _______________________

The recommendation was **adopted**.

Curriculum

That the following curriculum and teaching materials be approved for the Spring term for grades K-adult.

The recommendation was **adopted**.

Church School Sunday

That Sunday, June 6, be approved as a special Church School Sunday with Sunday worship to be planned by the Church School.

The recommendation was **referred** to the Worship Committee in consultation with the pastor for study and recommendation.

Report of the Mission Committee

Elder _______________, Chair, presented the report of the Committee with the following recommendation:

Mission Fair

That a mission fair be held in October in conjunction with the stewardship campaign.

The recommendation was **adopted**.

Report of the Stewardship Committee

Elder _______________, Chair, presented an informal report concerning the plans for the stewardship campaign and the intention of the committee to bring a final plan for session's approval at the next meeting.

Report of the Finance

Elder______________, Chair, recommended that Session approve the sale of the manse and refer the terms of the sale to the Board of Trustees for implementation

The recommendation was **approved** for recommendation to the congregation and to the presbytery.

RECESS

The Moderator recessed the session meeting at 8:30 p.m. for the purpose of meeting as a Board of Trustees.

(If session is unicameral)

MINUTES OF THE BOARD 0F TRUSTEES
February 17, 20____

The regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of ________________________________ Presbyterian Church was held in the church parlor at 8 30 p.m., February 17, 20____. The meeting was called to order by the President__________________.

A quorum was present.

Present were: President ___________________ and Trustees: _______________________________________

Excused were: __________________________ Absent were: ____

Approval of the Minutes The minutes of the meeting of January 17, 20____ were **approved** (or **approved with the following amendments**)

Manse The Secretary to the Board of Trustees moved that the manse be sold for no less than $120,000.00 to the highest bidder; that a corporation meeting be called following the special meeting for the purpose of seeking the approval of the sale by the congregation, contingent upon like approval by Presbytery. The recommendation was **adopted** and the secretary directed to give notice of the meeting.

Adjournment The meeting of the Board of Trustees was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.
/s/President of the Board /s/Secretary

SESSION RECONVENES

The Moderator reconvened the meeting of the session with prayer at 8:45 p.m.

Report of the Ecumenical Committee

Elder _______________, Chair, reported that final arrangements were being made for a Good Friday Worship Service, making the following recommendation:

That Session investigate the feasibility of purchasing a bus in cooperation with the Lutheran, Episcopal, and Methodist Churches in town for the purpose of transporting elderly people to church on Sunday mornings.

The recommendation was **adopted** and the Ecumenical Committee was instructed to consult with the other churches, and, if possible, develop a cooperative plan for the purchase and operation of such a bus. The Finance and Property Committee was requested to report to the next meeting concerning the cost of owning and operating a bus as well as the liabilities related to such a purchase.

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before session, the meeting was adjourned with prayer offered by Elder ___________________ at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Clerk of Session

THE CLERK AS HISTORIAN

WHEN AND HOW TO PRESERVE YOUR RECORDS

The Clerk, as he or she is keeping records, is creating the history of the church for posterity. Please see suggestions below for preserving your records. There are other documents which you, or a person you appoint, may wish to collect and preserve:

Bulletins from major worship services
Formal and informal photographs of former pastors
Interview with your oldest members
Old church artifacts (communion services, bibles…)
Photograph albums, video of important events
Photographs of the church and church property
Tapes of anniversary sermons

Most churches publish a church history at each important anniversary date. Add these to your collection, and each time you publish such a history, **please send a copy of the history to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery**.

The Department of History is a nationally recognized archive for the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is an exciting place to visit and is the place to visit to do research. The records of many of our churches are held in the archives, either in original form or on microfilm. The department will do ecclesiastical research for you on any original books stored with the Department. The Department will not do genealogical research under any circumstances; however, you may send people directly to the Department to do their own research.

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

Many churches keep their current membership on computers for mailing convenience. This is entirely appropriate, but computer membership records **DO NOT** replace the rolls, registers and the minute book, and computer print-outs **are not acceptable** at the annual administrative review of church records.

Financial records can be kept on the computer, but always have a hard copy of each new record.

SESSION'S VITAL RECORDS

RECORDS OF PERMANENT VALUE

Below is a list of records possessing administrative, legal or historical value. It is recommended that these records be stored in a fireproof, waterproof safe **at the church**. They should **never** be removed from the church or stored in members' homes.

Annual Audit
Charter and/or incorporations papers
Church School Minutes and Reports
Congregational By Laws
Congregational Minutes
Rolls and Register Books
Deacons' Minutes and Reports
Financial ledgers final entry
Presbyterian Women's Minutes
Session Minutes

Miscellaneous

Anniversary publications
Blueprints, architectural drawings, and sketches
Histories
Newsletters
Photographs - identified
Property deeds

Manuals and Directories
Ministers' biographies and photographs
Scrapbooks
Worship bulletins

VITAL RECORDS

Examples of records that document the legal and financial position of the local congregation and that are essential for the continuation or resumption of operations following a disaster are considered vital. Such records seldom constitute more than approximately two percent of an office's total list of records. Vital records may be found in both the temporary and permanent categories of records.

Accounts payable
Accounts receivable
Annual reports
Audits
Bank balances
By Laws
Canceled checks
Cash books
Certificate of incorporation
Charter and amendments
Contractual agreements
Deeds
Employees' Directory
Financial statements
Insurance policies and schedules
Invoices
Leases
Mailing lists
Minutes
Purchase orders
Suppliers' directories
Trial balance (monthly)
Wills, bequests

RECORDS OF TEMPORARY VALUE

Any records not possessing permanent value would, of course, automatically fall into the "Temporary" category. The following list presents only a few examples of the many such records. Realistically evaluated, there should be many more records judged "temporary" than "permanent" in most offices.

Few temporary records should be retained beyond **seven** years: an example of an exception would be Workmen's Compensation Reports which should be held ten years before destruction. When in doubt, check with your auditor regarding retention periods for financial records.

Account payable invoices
Accounts receivable ledger
Bank deposits slips
Budgets
Canceled checks
Cash Receipt records
Correspondence re: speaking engagements
Data for updating mailing lists
Employee withholding records
Excerpts from documents retained elsewhere
Expense reports
Invitation
Letters of acknowledgment
Payroll checks
Periodic financial statements
Petty cash records
Receipts of purchases
Requests for information and responses thereto
Routine notices of meetings
Travel plans and arrangements

THE CLERK AND PRESBYTERY

THE SESSION AND PRESBYTERY

The relationship of the session to Presbytery is contained in the Book of Order. A list of specific responsibilities of session to the Presbytery follow.

COMMISSIONERS TO PRESBYTERY

Presbyterian polity is a representative polity. It works only when each church takes seriously its responsibility to elect elder commission to attend the meeting, stay through the end of the meeting, and report to the Sessions.

There are three regular presbytery meetings each year: March, June and October (See "Time Line for Clerks", Page 4)

The number of commissioners to which a congregation is entitled depends upon the size of the congregation (G-3.0301) and also varies according to equalization."The presbytery shall adopt and communicate to the sessions a plan for determining how many ruling elders each session should elect as commissioners to presbytery, with a goal of numerical parity of teaching elders and ruling elders" (G-3.0301). When there are a large number of teaching elders in the Presbytery, the imbalance is addressed by authorizing particular sessions to elect an additional ruling elder commissioner.

Churches are encouraged to elect their commissioners for the entire year, preferably for two or three years. Some churches elect different commissioners for each meeting. It is even possible to elect a commissioner for the first half of a presbytery meeting and another commissioner for the second half.

(**Recommendation**: in order to assure continuity and understanding of presbytery business, it is best to elect commissioners for extended periods. An alternative would be to elect a commissioner and an alternate for each meeting, with the alternate becoming the commissioner at the next meeting

Each commissioner is required by the Book of Order to report to the session about the meeting:

- Significant actions taken by the presbytery.
- A summary of issues deliberated upon.
- Policy decisions made.
- Implications of presbytery action for the congregation.
- Concerns and opportunities open to the congregation through presbytery.
- Raising of consciousness of the congregation's participation in the total ministry of Jesus Christ.

Calls for each Presbytery meeting are sent directly to each church and to each Member at Large.

NOMINATIONS TO PRESBYTERY UNITS AND STANDING COMMITTEES

Presbytery is always looking for particular skills and interest among the members of our congregations. The Presbytery is also committed to find racial/ethnic minority members of our churches with skills and interest in serving on a presbytery committee. Suggestions for those willing to serve should proceed through the Nomination Committee and be brought to the Presbytery Nominating Committee. Please share the gifts of your congregation with your Presbytery.

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 the presbytery to the church, addressed to the Clerks of Session. The report is sent early in December. **It is important for the clerk to locate this report. If it has not arrived by Christmas, please call the stated clerk's office immediately**. The report is due in the Presbytery office not later than the first week of 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, send a copy of the organizational financial report to the chair of each of the congregations' organizations with the request that they be returned no later than the first week in January.

Early in December, work with your treasurer on the definition of expenditures which you will find in the workbook.

During December begin 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 call the Presbytery Office with an estimated delivery date. Presbytery will take the reports up until the time we must balance the totals. **We cannot receive reports after this time**.

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 moderator.

PER CAPITAL APPORTIONMENT PAYMENTS

The per capita apportionment is adopted by Presbytery when the budget is approved at the November Stated Meeting. An invoice is sent to each church treasurer in December. The per capita payment is due in January; however payments may be set up on a payment plan.

The per capita apportionment for the coming year is figured upon the previous year's reported membership x the total per capita adopted by General Assembly, synod, and presbytery. The Per Capita apportionment is used for ecclesiastical expenses, those mandated by the Book of Order.

ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE CALL

Each year the session is required by the Book of Order to review the adequacy of the salaries of all pastoral staff. If session wishes to make any change in the terms of call as they were last approved by presbytery, the change in terms of call must be brought to the congregation for approval, contingent upon the approval of presbytery which, finally, approves all terms of call and all changes in terms of call. The Statistical Packet each clerk receives in December contains a form upon which to report changes in terms of call. As soon as the congregation has approved new terms of call for its pastor(s), the forms must be returned to the Presbytery Office for recommendation to Presbytery. Please be sure that this form is returned each year.

MINIMUM COMPENSATION FOR PASTORS

Each fall, Presbytery adopts minimum terms of call for all installed pastors. **ALL** terms of call must meet this minimum standard for Presbytery to approve the call. The minimum terms of call are published in the minutes of the September meeting.

COMMUNICATION WITH PRESBYTERY

Official communication between session and presbytery is from clerk of session to the stated clerk of presbytery

Petitions to Presbytery or General Assembly

- A member of the congregation may ask session to petition the presbytery.
- A session may petition or overture presbytery or synod or General Assembly through the presbytery. Session cannot overture synod or General Assembly directly.
- Suggestions for writing petitions or overtures may be found at the end of this section.

Overtures Sent down to the Presbyteries from the General Assembly

- Each year the General Assembly sends to the presbyteries the overtures to amend the Book of Order adopted by the previous General Assembly.
- If a majority of presbyteries approve, the Book of Order is amended.
- The Presbytery usually votes on the overtures at the March Stated Meeting. The Overture Committee, composed of the most recent Commissioners to General Assembly, makes an *Informational Report* on proposed changes to the Presbytery.
- Ruling elder and teaching elder commissioners cannot be pledged by session to vote in a particular way. It is useful, however, for session to spend time studying and discussing the overtures so that the elder commissioners will have guidance when they vote on the overtures.

ACTIONS WHICH MUST BE APPROVED BY MORE THAN ONE GOVERNING BODY

ACTION	REQUIRED ACTIONS
Application to presbytery to take an “inquirer” under care of Presbytery	Session Committee on Preparation for Ministry Presbytery
All loans which use the church or its property as collateral and all sales of property	Session and Trustees Presbytery
All leases of church property for a period of more than 5 years	Session Presbytery

All changes of church location or church name	Session Congregation, ecclesiastical & corporate Presbytery, ecclesiastical & corporate
All changes in terms of call for the pastor(s)	Session Congregation Presbytery
All proposals for merger, dissolution, yoking Congregations	Session Congregation Presbytery
All dissolutions of a pastorate and calls for new pastors	Congregation Presbytery
Appointment of moderator of session: stated supply or interim pastor in the case of a vacant pulpit	Session Committee on Ministry
Call special session meeting	Two members of session, in writing
Call a special congregational meeting	Session, or Presbytery, or Session when requested in writing by 1/4 active members of the congregation
Session meeting when the pastor is ill or is out town	Pastor grants permission and appoints a Member of Presbytery as moderator *pro-tern*
All waivers from the Book of Order terms of election (G-2.0610)	Congregation Presbytery

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING OVERTURES

I. Definition:

An overture is a request by a presbytery or synod to the General Assembly to take action or express an opinion. A **session** may not overture the General Assembly except through a petition to presbytery to do so. An **individual** may not overture the General Assembly except through a governing body.

A. An individual may propose an overture to session or from the floor of presbytery if that person is a commissioner to presbytery.

B. A session may propose an overture to presbytery.

C. A presbytery or a synod may propose an overture to the General Assembly.

II. All Overtures must contain:

A. The name of the presbytery or synod.

B. The meeting place.

C. The date of the meeting and type of session (i.e. regular or special).

D. The special action requested (the action should include a specific date for the proposed change, report, or action. If at all possible, the best date for a change affecting the statistical records is January1 or July 1.)

E. The signature of the Stated Clerk.

III. What Kind of Overture Are You Writing?

A. Does the overture amend the Constitution? (See the deadline dates for submission attached.)

B. Does the overture propose change of synod or presbytery boundaries? If so:

1. The names of all ministers, licentiates, and candidates being transferred are to be included in the overture with the effective dates of change.

2. In the case of change of presbytery boundaries, the overture needs to be accompanied by synod approval of the overture in a similar overture from the synod.

3. Detailed survey information concerning the boundary change must be attached to the overture.

C. Does the overture propose a particular action or stand of the General Assembly? If so what kind of position? (See attached papers for the definition of policy statements, resolutions, study documents.)

IV. What Preparation is Necessary for Writing an Overture?

A. **Time**:

- For the stated clerk to work with the drafters.
- For a preliminary draft to be checked with the appropriate unit of the General Assembly or with the Office of the Stated Clerk.
- For the appropriate committee of the presbytery to review it, make recommendations for amendment or for adoption.

B. **History**: Why is “it” the way “it” is? Has anyone else ever tried to change “it”? (Check the Journal of the General Assembly, and check your annotated copy of the Book of Order. Important information will be found in the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution.)

C. **Theology**: What is your theological rational behind the overture?

D. **Polity**: What in the Constitution affects the overture and how is the Constitution affected by the overture?

E. **Rationale**: What are the reasons for the overture?

F. **Strategy**: What is the best way in which to obtain a favorable response from the General Assembly? (Sometimes means other than an overture can accomplish the end you wish more quickly and more efficiently)

1. In the case of a programmatic overture:
    - In what unit should the requested action be lodged?
    - Cost of requested action and source of funds?
    - Is the overture practical?
    - Is the overture timely?

2 In case of an overture to amend the Book of Order:

- Is the overture specific to one situation only? If so the requested amendment can usually be taken care of by governing body by-laws.
- Note deadline dates for overtures to amend Book of Order
- Is the overture practical?
- Is the overture timely?
- Is the overture in conflict with other parts of the Book of Order?

V. Can an overture be changed by the Governing Body considering it?

Yes, each governing body must adopt the overture as its own, with amendments as necessary. Please note that it is no longer necessary to circulate overtures adopted by the presbytery in order to seek enough support for the General Assembly to send it down unchanged (G-18.0000). The only benefit to be gained from circulating an overture is to request other presbyteries to adopt a similar overture.

VI How is an Overture Processed?

A. An overture is always sent clerk to clerk. The overture, if it involves constitutional change will be referred to the Advisory Committee on the Constitution for opinion and then be referred directly to the committee of the General Assembly to which the overture is referred, along with the opinion. The Committee will bring its recommendation to the floor of the General Assembly. All cases which do not involve constitutional change or interpretation of the constitution will be referred directly to the appropriate General Assembly Committee.

If the overture proposes boundary change, it will be referred directly to the General Assembly Committee on Presbytery and Synod Boundaries for opinion prior to referral to the General Assembly Committee.

B. An overture must be accompanied by the name and address of the “overture advocate” the person the governing body has chosen to represent its point of view before the General Assembly Committee. This person must have a hearing before the committee.