

HANDBOOK

FOR

CLERKS OF SESSION

Presbytery of Carlisle
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Revised July 30, 2014

PREAMBLE

The Presbytery of Carlisle is ecclesiastically related to the Synod of the Trinity and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and to its member churches within its geographical bounds. It exercises ecclesiastical jurisdiction under the provisions of the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* and discharges these responsibilities in accordance with this manual. Its actions are always subject to review by the more inclusive governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

I. INTRODUCTION

You have been given a great honor, the honor of serving your Lord and your church as a Clerk of Session in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). If you are a new clerk, welcome. We hope you will enjoy this new position of authority, responsibility and work. Don't let anyone tell you that being a Clerk of Session is an easy job. At times the work may seem overwhelming, but it can be an exciting job with many challenges and rewards. The intent of this handbook is to make your work easier, but do not hesitate to call the clerk in another church or the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery if you need help.

II. THE CLERK OF SESSION

A. Election by Session

The clerk shall be a Ruling Elder elected by the Session for such term as it may determine to be the continuing ecclesiastical officer of the congregation. The clerk may or may not be a Ruling Elder elected by the congregation to serve a current term as an active member of the Session. If not serving as an active member of the Session, the clerk shall have voice but no vote in Session meetings.

B. Roles and Responsibilities

1. The Clerk of Session plays a vital role in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Historically, the clerk has been the person who maintains and preserves accurate records for the Session and the congregation. Church records communicate the history of the faithfulness of the church, its formation, its life and growth, and its mission in the community, the Presbytery, and the denomination. Church records have many historical uses, but they also keep the church alert to its current status. Each year the General Assembly requires a summary in the form of an annual statistical report. Much of that report is dependent upon the clerk's good record keeping. Church records also may be used in civil affairs to trace vital statistics for families associated with the church. That is why names and dates are of vital importance. The clerk shall furnish extracts from official church records when required by another higher Council (*Synod, General Assembly*) of the church, and such extracts, verified by the clerk, shall be evidence in any Council of the church.
2. Record keeping, however, is only a small part of the clerk's job, even though it takes much space in this handbook. The clerk also is expected to be interested in and knowledgeable about Presbyterian polity, or procedures, and where to find answers to questions. The clerk is the Moderator's right hand, the parliamentarian, the secretary and the resource person for the Session and the congregation. In general, the clerk helps to set the tone for all official meetings in the church family. In many churches the clerk may be responsible for a variety of other tasks, depending on the traditions of his or her particular church. It is always helpful for a clerk to write out these particular duties and pass them on to the succeeding clerk, along with other tools of the office, to facilitate a smooth transition.
3. Another role for the clerk is to provide a key lay person contact for the wider church community. If the Pastor is unavailable, for example, the clerk is the one person most likely to be called upon by the Presbytery for information.
4. Finally, the clerk is a servant of the session and the congregation in the fullest New Testament sense, and he or she must be equipped to fulfill that servant role.

III. SESSION MEETINGS

A. Session meetings shall conform to the *Book of Order*, G-3.0203.

B. Before the Meeting

1. Schedule of Meetings

Session should set regular meeting dates in advance so elders can arrange their calendars. The Session shall hold meetings at least quarterly. The Moderator of the Session may call a special meeting of the Session when he or she judges it necessary and shall do so when requested in writing by any two members of the Session. The Session also shall meet when directed to do so by the Presbytery. Reasonable notice of all special meetings must be given when other than routine business is to be transacted.

2. Docket for Meeting

The Clerk of Session with the Moderator is responsible for preparing the docket so that all business is handled in the most efficient manner. The docket becomes the outline for the Session minutes. All deferred and unfinished business should be included. The docket for a special Session meeting shall be limited to those items specifically listed in the call for the meeting and no other business may be conducted.

3. Committee Reports

Written reports, with recommendations requiring Session action, should be in the hands of Session members prior to the meeting to enable the flow of business. Although committee chairs are responsible for this, the clerk may find it necessary to remind chairpersons of pending business and time requirements prior to the next meeting. Historical and informational material should come first in these reports and the recommendations last. Only the recommendations appear in the Session minutes unless the session orders the entire report spread on the minutes.

4. Resources for Meeting

The clerk is responsible for all papers and documents necessary to help the Session in reaching its decisions. It will be helpful to have the following at each meeting:

- a. *Book of Order*, a current edition.
- b. *Robert's Rules of Order*, newly revised edition- 11th edition.
- c. Church bylaws.
- d. Current-year Session minutes.
- e. List of all referred and unfinished business.
- f. Church officers and staff list.

g. Committee membership lists.

h. Church membership rolls.

C. During the Meeting

1. Moderator

The Pastor of the church shall be the Moderator of the session and the session shall not meet without the Pastor except as provided in the *Book of Order*, G-3.0104.

2. Attendance

All persons attending a meeting of the Session, including the names of the Moderator, the clerk, Ruling Elders present, and Ruling Elders absent, shall be recorded in the minutes. The Session may invite members of the congregation to attend and observe its meetings if it so desires, without restricting its right to meet in executive session whenever circumstances indicate the wisdom of doing so.

3. Quorum

The New Form of Government gives the Session the right to establish its own quorum. The quorum that is established needs to be in the minutes of the Session and included in the church's operating manual. G-3.0104.

4. Prayer

All meetings of the Session shall be opened and closed with prayer as provided in the *Book of Order*, G-3.0105.

5. Minutes

The clerk is responsible for keeping a full and accurate record of the proceedings for all Session meetings. The minutes never should reflect the clerk's opinion, favorable or unfavorable, on anything said or done.

6. Parliamentarian

The clerk may be asked to advise on matters of parliamentary procedure. Except where the *Book of Order* provides otherwise, Session meetings shall be conducted according to *Robert's Rules of Order*.

7. Decisions

Session meetings may be informal with many decisions reached through consensus. Nevertheless, all recorded motions must be worded exactly as the maker intended and as

formally voted upon by the session. The clerk can require that all motions be in writing and may find it necessary to help members of the Session word their motions. Questions to ask about Session actions are:

- a. What exactly is going to be done?
- b. Who is going to do it?
- c. When will it be completed or reported?
- d. What is the dollar cost?
- e. Where will the money come from?
- f. Is the action compatible with the *Book of Order*, the *Book of Confessions*, and church bylaws? Incompatible actions are out of order and therefore are null and void.

8. Voting

The Session consists of Pastors, Co-Pastors, Associate Pastors, and Ruling Elders in active service. All members present are entitled to vote. Proxy voting is not permitted.

C. After the Meeting

1. Minutes

Immediately prepare minutes of the Session meeting in final form to be read, corrected and approved by the Session at its next meeting prior to being entered into the session minute book. The minutes of each Session meeting shall be attested by the clerk or Moderator when entered into the Session minute book. If Session minutes are duplicated and distributed to Ruling Elders, they must be fully aware that the minutes are not official until approved by the Session.

2. Rolls and Registers

Make all necessary entries in the rolls and registers.

3. Correspondence

Complete or dictate all necessary correspondence related to the actions of the Session. Within the church, all communication is from clerk to clerk or from clerk to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery. The clerk's signature (not the Moderator's or a secretary's signature) authenticates any document coming from the Session.

IV. CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

A. Meetings of the congregation shall conform to the *Book of Order*, G-1.05.

B. Before the Meeting

1. Annual Meeting

The congregation shall hold an annual meeting and may hold other meetings as necessary.

2. Calling a Meeting

Meetings of the congregation shall be called by the Session whenever it deems such a meeting is necessary and as otherwise provided in the *Book of Order*, G-1.0502.

3. Notice of Meeting

Adequate public notice of the call to a meeting of the congregation shall be given. Congregations, by rule and inclusion in the church's operating manual, shall establish the time and method of public notice. G-1.0502

- C. During the Meeting

1. Moderator

The Pastor of the church shall be the Moderator of all meetings of the congregation except as provided in the *Book of Order*, G-1.0504.

2. Secretary

The Clerk of Session shall be the secretary for meetings of the congregation. If he or she is unable to serve, the congregation shall elect a secretary.

3. Quorum

The congregation is made up of all members on the active roll of a particular church. Before the meeting opens, a quorum as required by the church bylaws must be present. The quorum for a meeting of the congregation shall be by rule and inclusion in the church's operating manual, *Book of Order*, G-1.0501. A quorum must be continuous in order for business to be conducted.

4. Prayer

All meetings of the congregation should be opened and closed with prayer.

5. Minutes

The clerk is responsible for keeping a full and accurate record of the proceedings for all meetings of the congregation. Minutes of special congregational meetings shall include the purpose of the call, and the business to be transacted shall be limited to items specifically listed in the call for the meeting. If the congregation does not approve the minutes of a

congregational meeting before adjournment, the Session shall read, correct, and approve the minutes of that congregational meeting at its next scheduled meeting. The minutes of each meeting of the congregation, whether regular or special, shall be attested by the Moderator and by the clerk and shall be entered into the minute book of the Session.

6. Business

The annual meeting may consider such business as electing officers, hearing reports of the Session along with plans for the coming year, hearing reports from the board of Deacons and other organizations of the church, and transacting other business as is appropriate. It shall review the adequacy of the compensation of the Pastor or Pastors upon report by the Session. Business to be transacted at meetings of the congregation shall include and shall be limited to those matters provided in the *Book of Order*, G-1.0503. The budget is adopted by the Session, not the congregation; however, the Session must inform the congregation of the budget and should present the budget, invite comment, and solicit suggestions prior to adopting a budget. Both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting.

7. Voting

All members on the active roll who are present at a congregational meeting are entitled to vote. Teaching Elders (Pastors) are members of the Presbytery, not individual congregations; therefore, they are not entitled to vote at congregational meetings. Proxy voting is not permitted in meetings of the congregation.

V. INCORPORATION AND TRUSTEES

A. Incorporation and Trustees

Incorporation and trustees of a church shall conform to the *Book of Order*, G-4.0101. If the board of trustees is separate from the Session, it is accountable to the Session and their power as trustees shall not infringe upon the powers of the Session.

B. Corporate Business

1. Both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting as provided in Section IV of this handbook and the *Book of Order*, G-1.0503.
2. Where the church charter and/or bylaws require that corporate business be conducted in a separate corporate meeting of the congregation, the provisions of Section IV of this handbook and the *Book of Order*, G-4.0101, shall apply, except as follows:
 - a. Such a meeting of the church as a corporation shall be called by the trustees at their discretion, or when directed by the Session or by the Presbytery.
 - b. The trustees shall designate from among members on the active roll of the church a presiding officer and a secretary for such a meeting. The secretary may or may not be the Clerk of Session.

- c. Minutes of each such meeting shall be attested to by the presiding officer and the secretary and entered into the minute book of the trustees.

3. Voting

Voting by proxy shall be permitted with respect to a corporate matter only where civil law specifically requires that voting by proxy shall be permitted as to that particular corporate matter.

VI. SESSION RECORDS

A. Preparation

1. The Clerk of Session is responsible for the official records of the Session and the congregation. The ownership and control of these official records resides with the Session. The Session Minutes and Registers shall be kept at the church in a safe and secure place, preferably a safe or fire proof file cabinet.
2. Some clerks have a secretary who assists in the preparation of the Session minutes and the rolls and registers. The clerk must supervise the secretary in the preparation of these official records. The accuracy of these records is the clerk's responsibility, not the secretary's responsibility.

B. Minutes

1. Each Session shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings, which shall conform to the *Book of Order*, G-3.0107 and G-3.0204.
2. The clerk shall maintain the minutes for the Session and shall submit them annually for review as designated by the Presbytery.

C. Rolls and Registers

1. Each Session shall maintain rolls of members as defined by the *Book of Order*, G-1.04, and registers as provided below.
2. The names of members shall be placed upon, removed, or deleted from the rolls of the church only by order of the Session whenever the Session is fully satisfied that such action is justified. When making changes in the status of members, as ordered by the Session, do not obliterate any name from any roll or register; these are historical documents.
3. Rolls and registers shall conform to the *Book of Order*, G-1.04.
4. The clerk shall maintain the membership rolls and registers for the Session and shall submit them annually for review as designated by the Presbytery.
5. Membership Rolls

The church rolls record every member who has ever belonged to a particular church. These rolls must be kept current. Many churches keep their current membership in a card

file or on a computer for convenience, but these records do not replace the official church rolls, which shall be kept in the Session rolls in the registers book and the minute book.

a. *G-1.0401 Baptized Member*

A baptized member is a person who has received the Sacrament of Baptism, whether in this congregation or elsewhere, and who has been enrolled as a baptized member by the Session but who has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Such baptized members receive the pastoral care and instruction of the church, and may participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

b. *G-1.0402 Active Member*

An active member is a person who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into membership of the church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of this church, and participates in the church's work and worship. In addition, active members participate in the governance of the church and may be elected to ordered ministry (see G-2.0102). Active members shall regularly, after prayerful consideration, recommit themselves to the disciplines and responsibilities of membership outlined in G-1.0304. The Session shall have responsibility for preparing those who would become active members of the congregation.

(1) The Chronological Roll has numbers down the left side of a double page and 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 when a member marries, transfers, dies, or otherwise is removed from the roll.

(2) The Alphabetical Roll groups church members according to the first letter of their last names. This roll is cross-indexed with the Chronological Roll using the membership number assigned at the time the member joined the church.

c. *G-1.0403 Affiliate Member*

An affiliate member is a member of another congregation of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the congregation of membership is situated, has presented a certificate of good standing from the appropriate council or governing body of that congregation, and has been received by the Session as an affiliate member. An affiliate member may participate in the life of the congregation in the same manner as an active member except that an affiliate member may not vote in congregational meetings or be elected to ordered ministry or other office in the congregation.

6. Deletion from Rolls- G-3.0204a

There shall be rolls of baptized, active, and affiliate members in accordance with G-1.0401, G-1.0402 and G-1.0403. The Session shall delete names from the roll of the congregation upon the member's death, admission to membership in another congregation or presbytery, or renunciation of jurisdiction. The Session may delete names from the roll of the congregation when a member so requests, or has moved or otherwise ceased to participate actively in the work and worship of the congregation for a period of two years. The Session shall seek to restore members to active participation and shall provide written notice before deleting names due to member inactivity.

7. Registers

a. Marriages

Include all marriages of members of the church and all marriages performed on the church property.

b. Baptisms

Include all infants and all adults baptized by the ministerial staff of the church, and all infants and all adults baptized on the church property.

c. Ruling Elders

Include all members of the church ordained and installed as Ruling Elders in the church, and all members of the church ordained as Ruling Elders in some other church.

d. Deacons

Include all members of the church ordained and installed as Deacons in the church, and all members of the church ordained as deacons in some other church.

e. Pastors (Teaching Elders) and “Certified” Christian Educators

Include all Pastors, Co-Pastors, Associate Pastors, Interim Pastors and Certified Christian Educators serving the church, with dates of service.

D. Examination

1. Session minutes and records shall be submitted at least once each year to the Presbytery for its general review and control as provided in the *Book of Order* G-3.0108 and Standing Rule #22 of Carlisle Presbytery
2. In the spring of each year the Stated Clerk will publish a schedule for the examination of Session records from each church for the period January 1 through December 31 of the preceding year. These examinations are usually held on three consecutive Saturday mornings at three different locations in the Presbytery beginning at 9:00 AM.
3. The Clerk of Session or some other individual thoroughly familiar with the Session records should arrive promptly by 9:00 AM in order to begin the examination of all records together as a group effort. Plan to arrive no later than 9:00 AM and be prepared to remain and participate in the examination for about two hours until the examination of records has been completed.
4. Both the Session minute book and the Session registers must be presented for examination so that the rolls and registers can be checked against the minutes. The records will be

approved, approved with exceptions, or not approved, and advisory comments will be provided.

E. Safekeeping

1. Session records are the property of the Session. The clerk is responsible for the safekeeping and preservation of all official records of the Session, which include but are not limited to the minutes of all Session meetings, both regular and special, the minutes of all congregational meetings, all church rolls and registers, the records of the board of Deacons, and the records of the Board of Trustees. It is important that official records be protected from loss, theft, and fire or water damage. Records should be stored in a secure, temperature and humidity-controlled environment at the church and not at some person's home.
2. All official records of the Session that no longer are required for frequent reference are to be deposited for preserving and servicing with the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia. (See the *Book of Order*, G-3.0107) This is a free service. Contact the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery for more information.

VII. REPORTS TO PRESBYTERY AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

A. Annual Review of Terms of Call

Each year the Session is required by the *Book of Order*, G-2.0804 to review the compensation of all pastoral staff. All Terms of Call must meet the minimum standard terms of call adopted annually by the Presbytery. Any changes Session proposes to make in the Terms of Call must be brought to the congregation for approval and are contingent upon the final approval of the Presbytery. Annually, the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery sends to each Session the adopted minimum Terms of Call and 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 call forms must be returned to the Committee on Ministry, through the Stated Clerk for review and approval.

B. Annual Reports to General Assembly

Each Session reports through the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, statistical information to the General Assembly. This is now done "online". Instructions, passwords etc. will be provided by the Stated Clerk at the December meeting of the Presbytery. Data required in the Annual Reports to General Assembly must be approved by the Session, and the annual statistical report of the Session must be included in the Session minutes. In addition, directory information on the church's officers and staff also is required. Report forms distributed at the December meeting of the Presbytery are due by a deadline established by the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, usually no later than the February meeting of the Presbytery. If the report is not received by the deadline, the previous year's membership is reported to the General Assembly.

C. General Mission Pledge

The Administration Committee of the Presbytery annually in the Fall requests a pledge for general mission giving from each congregation. This pledge must be approved by the Session, but it does not require the approval of the congregation. Pledges usually are requested by December 31 so that the Presbytery can report to the Synod of the Trinity and the General Assembly. Any changes made by the local church may be reported later as amendments.

D. Per Capita Apportionment

The per capita apportionment for the coming year is established by the Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly in the preceding year, based on the number of active members published in the most recent General Assembly statistical report. For example, the number of members on the active roll of the church as of December 31, 2013 would be reported in 2014 and would be multiplied by the per capita apportionment adopted in 2014 to determine the total amount of per capita apportionment to be paid by the church in the year 2015.

E. Other Annual Reports

Each church is required annually by March 15 to submit to the Presbytery reports on the value of church properties, the types and amounts of insurance coverage carried by the church, and the types and amounts of church debt.

F. Nominations to Presbytery

Presbytery is looking for particular skills and interest among the members of its local churches. Clerks, Pastors, Sessions and Nominating Committees are encouraged to forward information to the Nominating Committee of the Presbytery about individuals from the local church who should be considered for service at the Presbytery level. Recommendations should include the person's name, address, name of the church, a brief description of the person's work in the church, and the title of the Presbytery group or committee for which the person should be considered.

VIII. COMMISSIONERS TO PRESBYTERY

A. Election by Session

Presbyterian polity is a representative polity, which works only when each church takes seriously its responsibility to elect Ruling Elder commissioners, who attend the meeting, stay until the end of the meeting and report back to the Session. The number of commissioners depends upon the size of the congregation. Prior to the first Presbytery meeting of each new year the clerk will be notified by the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery regarding any change in the number of Ruling Elder commissioners to which the congregation is entitled. Sessions are encouraged to elect their Ruling Elder commissioners for the entire year, preferably for two or three years, in order to assure continuity and understanding of Presbytery business. An alternative would be to elect a commissioner and an alternate for each Presbytery meeting, with the alternate becoming the commissioner at the next meeting. *See Standing Rule #15 of Carlisle Presbytery.*

B. Preparation for Meeting

There are four stated meetings of the Presbytery each year in February, May, September and December. The docket and business papers are posted on the Presbytery's website two weeks prior to a Presbytery meeting. These documents should be reproduced and distributed immediately to all commissioners. Informational and promotional papers are distributed at the Presbytery meeting. These documents should be distributed by commissioners to the appropriate people in the congregation when the commissioners return to their churches.

