



**HANDBOOK FOR CLERKS OF SESSION  
PRESBYTERY OF HUDSON RIVER**

**Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

**Spring 2017**

## TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction.....	1
The Office of the Clerk of Session.....	1
Responsibilities at a Glance.....	2
Session Docket.....	2
Guidelines for Session Minutes.....	3
The How-To's of Session Minutes.....	5
Congregational and Corporation Meeting.....	6
Rolls and Registers.....	7
Parliamentary Law.....	8
Commissioners to Presbytery.....	9
Actions That Must Be Approved By More Than One Council (Governing Body).....	9
Appendix Sample Docket.....	11
Contact Information.....	12

## INTRODUCTION

*Each council shall elect a clerk who shall record the transactions of the council, keep its rolls of membership and attendance, maintain any required registers, preserve its records, and furnish extracts from them when required by another council of the church. Such extracts, verified by the clerk, shall be evidence in any council of the church. The clerk of the Session shall be a ruling elder elected by the Session for such term as it may determine....*  
(G-3.0104)

Welcome to the office of Clerk of Session! You have assumed the office of chief ecclesiastical office of your congregation. That's a big title, and it is an equally big responsibility. Together with the moderator of the Session you plan the meetings of Session, report all communications received (mail, e-mail etc.) as they relate to the Session and congregation, and record. Record...Record...Record!

This handbook builds on the framework of the *Manual for Clerks of Session* created by the Presbyteries of Western Reserve and of Plains and Peaks. It conforms to the current BOOK OF ORDER 2015-2017 (which includes the changes that were made to the New Form of Government in 2011).

Let us first make clear that while the Book of Order currently refers to the *councils* of the church, it also retains the name *Session* for the church council. "*The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is governed by council composed of presbyters elected by the people (F-3.0202). These councils are called the Session, the presbytery, the synod, and the General Assembly.*" (G-3.0101).

The Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Hudson River is always available to respond to questions, to provide professional development opportunities, and to assist you in your work.

## THE OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF SESSION

As noted in the Introduction, the Clerk of Session shall be a ruling elder elected by the Session.

The question is often asked, "Must the Clerk of Session be a current member of the Session?" The answer to that question is "No!" Any ruling elder is eligible to be elected and to serve as Clerk of Session. The only codicil is that if the clerk is not a current member of Session, s/he may not make motions or vote. Session *may* ask the clerk to be its parliamentarian and *shall* give the clerk voice in matters pertaining to the minutes and the clerk's report.

The person chosen to be Clerk of Session needs to be knowledgeable about Session responsibilities, have an understanding of Presbyterian polity, and be willing to learn basic parliamentary procedure. S/He must be able to write a clear record of the proceedings at Session and congregational meetings promptly following the meeting.

When the moderator or elders need a strong lay leader, the Clerk of Session is the "first among equals." This responsibility flows to the clerk not because of any explicit statement in the *Book of Order*, but because the officer who receives the correspondence, keeps the records, and routinely discusses the work of the Session with the moderator and all of the committee chairpersons to form the agenda and refer business, is the officer to whom they would take a

problem. Presbyterian polity does not provide for any other lay officer to carry out these responsibilities.

In spite of the fact that the core functions of the clerks are secretarial, the Session, in electing a clerk should seriously consider the qualifications needed to carry out the very significant "silent" function of being the senior lay officer of the congregation.

### RESPONSIBILITIES AT A GLANCE

1. Keep a full and accurate record of the proceedings of the Session (G-3.0104)
2. Keep rolls of baptized, active, and affiliate members in accordance with G-1.0401, G-1.0402, G-1.0403, and G-1.0404). (G-3.0204a)
3. Keep the registers of baptisms, of ruling elder and deacons, of installed pastors with dates of service, and such other registers as the Session may deem necessary (G-3.0204b)
4. Arrange for the careful preservation of Session records, making recommendation to the Session for the permanent safekeeping of its records. (G-3.0107)
5. Be familiar with the responsibilities of the Session as described in the *Book of Order*. (G-3.0201 and W-1.4004)
6. Notify the Session or congregation of special meetings, describing accurately the business that will be transacted. (G-1.0501, G-1.0505, G-3.0203)
7. Be sure that the annual statistical report required by the Office of the General Assembly is completed **online** in an accurate and timely manner.
8. Participate in the Annual Clerk of Session Day coordinated by the Presbytery's Stated Clerk. Submit records books and completed checklists for review at that time. (G-3.0108a)
9. Serve as secretary for meetings of the congregation, seeing that the minutes are received by Session and are inscribed in the permanent Session minute book. (G-1.0505)
10. Bring all official correspondence to the attention of Session, and respond as directed by the Session.
11. Keep a list of unfinished business, including all matters referred to a committee or staff member for later report to Session, and, with the moderator, remind the appropriate persons if not reported in a timely manner.
12. Be prepared to respond to questions of parliamentary procedure in meetings. It is strongly recommended that the church have the most recent edition (the 11<sup>th</sup>) of *Robert's Rules of Order* at hand for reference before and during meetings.
13. Assist the moderator in preparing the agenda for Session meetings, as requested.
14. Assist the pastor in church officer training when requested.
15. Work collaboratively with the moderator and the person responsible for church communications (newsletters, website etc.) to bring highlights of meetings to the awareness of the congregation. NOTE: confidential matters should not be included.
16. Moderate the congregational meeting, if requested, during the pastor's salary review. If this occurs a temporary clerk should be appointed to keep the minutes of this portion of the meeting. (N.B.: This is the only time that a portion of the congregational meeting can be moderated by the Clerk of Session. In other situations in which the pastor cannot be present for a congregational meeting, you must have a moderator appointed by Commission on Ministry.)
17. Perform other such duties as appropriately requested by the moderator or Session.

## SESSION DOCKETS

The docket (agenda) for a Session meeting can be the responsibility of either the clerk in consultation with the pastor or the pastor in consultation with the clerk. Your input and frequent contact with other Session members is invaluable. In case of a pastoral vacancy, the moderator named by the presbytery often will rely on the Clerk of Session to formulate the docket.

Session dockets should be made available to Session members *prior to meetings* so that the elders may be prepared to do the business of the church. Included in this information are the date, time, location, agenda or order of business, financial date, and other pertinent information as needed and available.

The value of the docket is three-fold:

- It provides for an orderly process in the handling of Session business.
- It informs the members of issues to be discussed.
- It serves as a reminder of the necessary preparation for a meeting.

The Clerk of Session can take this opportunity to assist the pastor/moderator in handling administrative details and sharing in the ministry of the church.

### Refer to the Sample Docket in the Appendix

## GUIDELINES FOR SESSION MINUTES

Minutes of each Session meeting must include:

- 1 Whether the meeting is a regular or special meeting
- 2 The name of the church, the place, date and time of the meeting
- 3 The name of the moderator of the meeting
- 4 The opening and closing of each meeting with prayer
- 5 The roll, listing elders present, elders absent and any who are excused; the clerk, moderator and other staff present or excused; others present and their identify (use first and last names)
- 6 The affirmation of a quorum (G-3.0203). *Sessions shall provide by rule for a quorum for meetings; such quorum shall include the moderator and either a specific number of ruling elders or a specific percentage of those ruling elders in current service on the Session.*
- 7 The approval of the agenda (in the case of a special meeting, the call to the meeting stating the purpose becomes the agenda)
- 8 The approval of the minutes of the previous meeting (any corrections of or additions to previous meeting minutes shall be listed)
- 9 Clerk's report: may include correspondence, announcements, and report of the serving of the Lord's Supper, in addition to listing baptisms, marriages, and any changes in the membership rolls
- 10 Reports of pastor, other staff, treasurer, and committee chairpersons should be summarized in the minutes. Lengthy reports should be submitted in typed format to the clerk and may be attached to the minutes as Attachment 1, Attachment 2 etc.

- 11 All motions and amendments, if any, and whether they passed or failed. It is *not* necessary to name the person presenting the motion or the person offering a second. Details of discussion are *not* recorded unless the body believes it necessary to give a sense of the action. It is *not* necessary to name those voting in favor, those voting opposed, nor those abstaining.

When appropriate, include the following:

- 12 The administration of the Lord's Supper must be reported at the next succeeding regular meeting. When the sacrament has been administered to those unable to attend public worship, the name of the person officiating and the name of those assisting should be noted.
- 13 Baptism shall be reported at the next regular meeting and recorded in the minutes as well as on the register. Adults baptized are noted giving the full name, including the maiden name of married women (if relevant). For children baptized the name of the child, date of birth, and the names of the parents *or* the one rightly exercising parental responsibility. This may be part of the clerk's report, the pastor's report, or that of the appropriate committee.
- 14 The full name of applicants for church membership (in the case of married women, include maiden name), and the manner of their reception:
  - a. By profession of faith
  - b. By re-affirmation of faith
  - c. By certificate of transfer, giving the name and location of the church from which the certificate/letter was received
- 15 The full title and location of the church to which a certificate of transfer is granted and the full name of the person transferred with the date of transfer
- 16 Job descriptions for employed personnel, both clergy and non-clergy, as they are approved
- 17 Name of the elder(s) elected to be commissioners to meetings of the Presbytery
- 18 Reports that the commissioner who attended the meeting of the Presbytery gave to the Session.
- 19 In case of a sale, mortgage, gift or lease of property, the Session records should show:
  - a. Name, address and legal description of the property (tax map #)
  - b. Name of buyer/lessee
  - c. Sale price
  - d. Loan amount purpose and terms, including the name of the lender
  - e. Lease terms and liability insurance
  - f. *Concurrence of Presbytery and date it granted approval*

Be sure the following are included *each year*:

- 20 Approval and copy of the annual budget
- 21 Approval of the distribution of the church's benevolences
- 22 Date of required annual review of the pastor's terms of call or contract
- 23 Any changes in terms of call or contract presented to and approved by the congregation
- 24 Ordinations and/or installations (if any), which should be reported at the next succeeding meeting.
- 25 A report that property and liability insurance has been obtained (G-3.0112); include copy of the church's current certificate of insurance
- 26 Include copy of the required annual full financial review by either a public accountant or a committee of members versed in accounting procedures (G-3.0113)

Follow the directions of the Presbytery's Stated Clerk to prepare for the required annual review of church records.

### THE "HOW-TO'S OF SESSION MINUTES

The method of recording Session minutes is somewhat dependent on local circumstances and the expectations of the Session and its Moderator. The following are suggestions:

- 1 Clerk takes notes for the minutes during the meeting either by hand or by computer.
- 2 Clerk transfers notes to full minutes as soon as possible.
- 3 Emails or copies and distributes the minutes to the Session *before* the date of the next regular meeting.
- 4 At the next meeting the minutes are either approved as submitted or corrections or additions are added.
- 5 Clerk (or someone designated by the clerk) copies the minutes onto acid-free paper and enters the same into the official minutes notebook.
- 6 Do *not* use erasure, whiteout, footnotes, or marginalia.
- 7 If there is blank space following page entries, draw a line through that space.
- 8 Minutes must be signed (in ink) by the clerk.
- 9 Minutes of the annual congregational meeting must be signed *by both* the clerk and the moderator.

Each clerk needs to work out the best ways for handling the preparation of the minutes. One suggestion is to prepare a template for use in taking the minutes during the meeting. This template would include the list of ruling elders' names (to aid in taking the roll) and major category headings with blank spaces for writing in the information. If the meetings do not follow a regular format, the usefulness of a template is limited.

An alternative is to use a checklist. Some clerks use a template file and a laptop computer and take notes on the computer during the meeting. A good, rather complete agenda makes this approach more feasible. The template and/or the checklist have an additional benefit in that it will help you and the moderator to remember what needs to be done. This can be carried further by the clerk and the pastor meeting in advance of the Session meeting with the purpose of including more details in the template or checklist. When typing the minutes, it is suggested that a template be established and the information be typed into the appropriate places. This helps ensure that items are not missed.

Session minutes are to be kept in a book designated solely for that purpose. This book should be a loose-leaf binder of good quality and acid free paper. Pages should be numbered consecutively, but *do not* purchase pre-numbered pages. Having a separate numbering device allows you to include other items that cannot be copied on pre-numbered sheets. Also, be sure to copy front to back.

After the minutes have been approved by the Session, they should be placed in the official minute book and signed by the clerk. If you use a computer, it is not necessary that minutes actually be typed into the minute book. Remember that ink jet printer ink will run if it gets wet. Printed pages from ink jet printers can be photocopied onto the minute book pages or other acid-free, substantial paper. Laser print on good acid-free paper can be used. A good quality three-ring binder is sufficient for a minute book. You do not have to use the expensive and

difficult-to-use Westminster Binders.

Electronic storage, in place of paper storage, **is currently not acceptable** because there is no way to attest by signature to the accuracy and correctness of the documents and due to technological changes.

It is recommended that minutes should be interesting, with enough information so that our grandchildren will know what happened in this church years before. One of the primary reasons for the emphasis on precise, accurate record keeping is the role that the minutes play in recounting the history of the congregation, often retrievable in no other way.

Additionally, the minutes of a meeting should never reflect the clerk's opinion, favorable or otherwise, on anything said or done.

The moderator, co-pastors, associate pastors, and all active ruling elders should receive and approve the minutes of all Session meetings.

The *Book of Order* (as well as *Robert's Rules of Order*) specifies that ownership of these records resides with the body that constituted them. In other words, the Session has ownership and the clerk has responsibility for preserving these records on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (G-3.0107).

Keeping the book(s) in a fireproof file cabinet or safe is highly recommended

### **CONGREGATIONAL AND CORPORATION MEETINGS**

Minutes of all congregational and congregational/corporation meetings shall be included in the Session record book along with Session minutes in chronological order.

Minutes of these meetings shall include:

1. Indication of whether the meeting is "regular" or "special called"
2. If it is a special called meeting the minutes shall include the call to the meeting, which will serve as the agenda (NOTE: *No other business may be conducted at special meetings other than what was identified in the call to the meeting*)
3. Name of the church, date, time, and place of the meeting
4. Name of the moderator or presiding officer
5. Presence of a quorum (decided by the rule of the congregation found in its by-laws)
6. Opening and closing of the meeting with prayer
7. Record of all actions, whether adopted, not approved, or postponed to a later date
8. If the congregation does not approve the minutes before adjournment, Session may approve the minutes at its next scheduled meeting.

A congregational meeting may be called only by Session, by presbytery, or by Session on written request of one-fourth of the members of the congregation on the active roll (G-1.0502).

Check the congregation's by-laws for what constitutes "due notice" for a congregational meeting (G-1.0502).

Check your congregation's by-laws for the quorum of the congregational meeting (G-1.0501).

What business may be done 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. The business to be transacted shall *be limited to items specifically listed* in the publicly announced call for the meeting. No other business may be transacted at this meeting. You will find a careful listing of such business in G-1.0503 of the *Book of Order*. **The budget is adopted by the Session, not the congregation.** However, Session must inform the congregation of the budget.

The salary of the pastor or pastors must be approved annually by the congregation and reported to presbytery for its approval. The Committee on Ministry will provide this form.

The congregation approves the pastor's salary for recommendation to presbytery (G-2.0804).

Members must be present to vote. Proxy voting is not permitted in church meetings (G-1.0501).

Corporation meeting minutes must be signed by the one presiding and the secretary (who may or may not be the Clerk of Session, depending upon church bylaws).

## ROLLS AND REGISTERS

The ROLLS of the church should contain information about those who are members of the local church. It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to maintain or to oversee the maintenance of the Rolls (G-3.0104, G-3.0204a).

Names of members shall be placed upon, removed, or deleted from the rolls of the church only by order of the Session.

Session shall maintain the following membership Rolls: Baptized Members; Active Members; and Affiliate Members

### Baptized Member

- 1 A Baptized member is one who has received the Sacrament of Baptism but has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; and/or one who was baptized in any church and is currently worshiping regularly . The 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly issued a "clarification of meaning" that baptized members are children who have been baptized in a Christian church but who have not been received as Active Members (G-1.0401).
- 2 Record the name, date of baptism (if known), church where the baptism occurred. *Names should be removed from this roll when profession of faith is made, or when the person moves from the community.* It is important to maintain an accurate baptism register because it can serve as a legal backup for birth certificates, especially when there has been an infant baptism.

### Active Member

- 1 An Active member is one 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 the particular church, and participates in the church's work and worship.
- 2 Record the name, date received into membership, and method of reception. Record date of removal from the particular roll and whether by death, transfer to another church, placement on inactive role (if you have such) or removal.

Affiliate Members

- 1 An Affiliate member is one who is an active member of another church of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the church of active membership is located and so is attending your congregation for a relatively short period of time.
- 2 Record the name, date of affiliation, name and location of home church, date of renewal (if applicable), and date of return to home church.

Other Participants are persons who are not members of, or who may have ceased active participation in the Presbyterian Church (USA) but who are welcome and may participate in the life and worship of this church and receive its pastoral care and instructions (G-1.0404). It is up to the Session whether or not they want to keep a list/lists of people in this category.

An “inactive roll” is no longer required but may exist if the Session so chooses.

Roll books usually provide double pages for a chronological roll by date of reception into membership with columns for name, how received, name of church from which member transferred it that is the manner of reception, date of deletion from the active roll and the reason – by death or transfer, in which case the name and location of the church to which the member is transferring is listed.

\*\*\*\*\*

REGISTERS are historical records and need to be carefully maintained. It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to maintain or oversee the maintenance of Registers as required in G-3.0204b...which states *There shall be registers of baptisms authorized by the Session, or ruling elders and deacons, of installed pastors with dates of service, and such other registers as the Session may deem necessary.* It is recommended that the Session also require a register of marriages.

**Register of Infant and Adult Baptisms** shall include name, parents’ names, and date of birth of those being baptized.

**Register of Elders** shall include each elder’s name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.

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

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

**Register of Marriages** shall include marriages of members of the church, all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the church, and all marriages performed on church property.

All registers may be kept in the same binder, or in the binder with the rolls.

**PARLIAMENTARY LAW**

Parliamentary law is not really law as such, but a collection of customs and conventions used to

make decisions. It encompasses common sense and courtesy, is a model for effective conflict resolution, and – when used correctly – will provide accuracy, efficiency, impartiality, objectivity, and uniformity. It helps us transact our business decently and in order. The heart of *Robert's Rules of Order* is protection of the minority as using parliamentary process ensures that all are heard and the rights of each member honored.

Many pastors are thoroughly familiar with the *Book of Order* and *Robert's Rules of Order* and can function as their own parliamentarian. Others need some assistance or an occasional reminder. In the latter case, the clerk should function as parliamentarian or as a resource to the pastor. The relationship between pastor and clerk can work well if both are sensitive, open, and honest.

Some items that are strictly Presbyterian are as follows:

- Motions that come from a committee do not require a second.
- Session minutes are the property of the church. Members of the congregation (as well as nonmembers) should not have access to the minutes without the permission of the Session. The Clerk of Session may provide a summary of any desired information.

### **COMMISSIONERS TO PRESBYTERY**

Presbyterian polity is a representative polity. It works only when each church takes seriously its responsibility to send their pastor and elect ruling elder commissioners who attend the meeting, stay until the end of the meeting, and report to the Session. Times and dates of presbytery meetings are published annually on the presbytery website ([www.hudrivpres.org](http://www.hudrivpres.org)).

Each Session is responsible for electing ruling elders as commissioners to presbytery (G-3.0202a). The number of commissioners depends upon the size of the congregation. Most congregations are entitled to one commissioner per presbytery meeting though a few large congregations may be entitled to more than one commissioner. If you are not sure of the number of commissioners for your congregation, please check with the Stated Clerk.

Session may elect a commissioner who may serve for the entire year or different commissioners for each meeting of presbytery.

If your congregation has a ruling elder serving as a Presbytery officer or on another presbytery committee/commission/team that gives them a vote, this person *may not serve* as your ruling elder commissioner but will vote in their other capacity.

The docket and the supporting reports for each presbytery meeting are posted on the presbytery's website and should be viewed prior to the meeting.

Commissioners are expected to report to Session about the meeting (G-3.0202a) including significant actions taken by the presbytery, a summary of issues deliberated upon, policy decisions made, implications of presbytery actions for the congregation, concerns and opportunities open to the congregation through presbytery, and raising of consciousness of the congregation's participation in the total ministry through the PC(USA).

## **ACTIONS THAT MUST BE APPROVED BY MORE THAN ONE COUNCIL (GOVERNING BODY)**

---

Because the connectional system is one of the hallmarks of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), there are a number of actions that require approval beyond the Session. Among them:

1. Application to presbytery to enroll an “inquirer” under care of presbytery and the enrolled inquirer accepted as a “candidate”: Session and presbytery (G-2.0605)
2. Loans that use the church or its property as collateral and all sales of property: congregation and presbytery (ecclesiastical and corporate) (G-1.0503, G-4.0206a).
3. Any lease of its real property used for purposes of worship, and all leases of church property or a period of more than five years: Session and presbytery (G-1.0503, G-4.0206b).
4. All changes of church location, worship place(s), or church name: Session, congregation (name change), and presbytery (ecclesiastical and corporate) (G-3.0303b)
5. All changes in terms of call for the pastor: congregation and presbytery (G-3.0804)
6. Dissolutions of pastorate and calls for new pastors: congregation and presbytery (G-2.09, G-2.08)
7. Hiring stated supply, temporary supply, or interim pastor: Session and presbytery (G-1.0504)
8. Session meeting when pastor is ill or is out-of-town: pastor grants permission and appoints a member of presbytery as moderator pro tem (G-1.0504). This person must be a teaching elder who is a member of the presbytery or a person authorized by the presbytery.
9. All waivers from the *Book of Order* terms of election (G-2.0404): congregation and presbytery
10. All changes of pastoral leadership (G-2.0504a & b, G-2.0801): Session and/or congregation and presbytery.

**APPENDIX -- SAMPLE DOCKET**

**Your Presbyterian Church  
Stated Session Meeting  
April 24, 2017  
Docket**

- 1) Call to order, declaration of quorum, and opening prayer
- 2) Approval of the docket and minutes of stated meeting of March 4, 2014
- 3) Communication
- 4) Clerk's report
- 5) Narration:
  - a) Session Class of 2019 ordained and installed at the 11:00 a.m. worship service on March 9, 2017.
  - b) Lord's Supper observed during both the 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. worship service on March 2, 2017
  - c) Membership of Sam Jones transferred to the First Presbyterian Church, Kansas City, Missouri, March 9, 2017
  - d) Ellen Smith died on March 13, 2017
  - e) Timothy Brown married Jane Doe on March 8, 2016, at Your Presbyterian Church, Reverend Perfect officiating
  - f) Frederick Bradley and Rebecca (Purdy) Bradley accepted by transfer of membership from the first Methodist Church, Kansas City, Missouri, on March 16, 2016, along with their baptized children, Edith born July 1, 2012, in Kansas City, Missouri and Frederick born August 12, 2015, in Kansas City, Missouri.
- 6) Session Committee Reports
- 7) Old and New Business:
  - a) Report from Commissioners to meeting of the Presbytery of Hudson River on April 12, 2016
  - b) Audit Committee Report
- 8) Motion for adjournment and closing prayer

I want to thank you for doing this important job. If you have any questions as you do it, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached as follows:

**Susan G. De George**, Stated Clerk  
Hudson River Presbytery  
655 Scarborough Road  
Scarborough, NY 10510  
914-941-2100 ex 16 (office phone)  
914-941-2263 (fax)  
[susandegeorge@hudrivpres.org](mailto:susandegeorge@hudrivpres.org)