



Handbook for Clerks of Sessions



Revised January, 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the office of the Clerk of Session! The *Book of Order* requires that each council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have a moderator and a clerk. Clerks of presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly are called Stated Clerks. Those serving sessions are called Clerks of Session.

As a clerk, you play a very important role in the ministry of your local congregation and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Administration is a ministry! This handbook has been prepared to provide the clerks of session with information and examples to assist them in their ministry. If there is any information that might be helpful for clerks of session and is not included, or if any of the information in this handbook is confusing please let me know.

Much of the information in this handbook is drawn from the *Book of Order* and from various manuals for clerks of sessions throughout the PC(U.S.A.). Special thanks to Mid-Kentucky Presbytery, the Presbytery of the Peaks, The Presbytery of Donegal, and the Presbytery of New Covenant, and their stated clerks, for permission to include some of their information in this handbook. However, I take all responsibility for what is contained in this handbook.

If you need any questions, or need any assistance, do not hesitate to contact me.

Raymond Meester

Stated Clerk, Homestead Presbytery RaymondM@HomesteadPres.org 402.217.3684

OUR PRESBYTERIAN POLITY

A CONNECTIONAL CHURCH

As Presbyterians we are a “connectional” church for we believe that there is one Lord and one church. “There is one body and one Spirit, ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6)

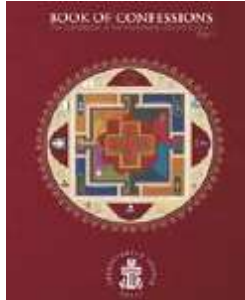
In the Foundations of the *Book of Order*, one reads, “The particular congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) wherever they are, taken collectively, constitute one church, called the church.” (F- 3.0201)¹ This statement was “adopted in 1797 by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America....”

Our connectional system, thus our polity—how we govern ourselves—is based on our theology, our belief, that there is one church of Jesus Christ, and each congregation is a part of the one church of Jesus Christ. This is NOT to say that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the only true church. As Presbyterians, we are part of the larger church.

¹ The four parts of the *Book of Order* are abbreviated by the use of capital letters: F—Foundations of Presbyterian Polity; G—Form of Government; W—Directory for Worship, and D—Rules of Discipline. The four parts appear in that order. Each reference in the text begins with the appropriate letter. The numeral appearing after the letter, and to the left of the decimal, indicates the chapter number. There are four numerals to the right of the decimal. The first two indicates the number of a section. The second two indicate the number of the subsections.

GOVERNED BY OUR CONSTITUTION

We are governed by our constitution which is made up of two parts: 1) the *Book of Confessions*, and 2) the *Book of Order*.



The *Book of Confessions* is made up of twelve statements that guide our theology:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Nicene Creed | 7. Shorter Catechism |
| 2. Apostles' Creed | 8. Larger Catechism |
| 3. Scots Confession | 9. Barmen Declaration |
| 4. Heidelberg Catechism | 10. Confession of 1967 |
| 5. Second Helvetic Confession | 11. A Brief Statement of Faith |
| 6. Westminster Confession | 12. Belhar Confession |

The *Book of Order* is made up of four parts:

1. Foundations of Presbyterian Polity (F)
2. Form of Government (F)
3. Directory for Worship (W)
4. Rules of Discipline (D)



THE COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH

Being one church, our connections are formed through the councils of the Presbyterian Church. These councils are not para-church organizations, but a part of the church. The councils of the church, session, presbytery, synod and General Assembly (GA), exist to help congregations and the church as a whole to be more faithful participants in the mission of Christ.

Each council of the church is charged with fulfilling these responsibilities and power in differing ways.



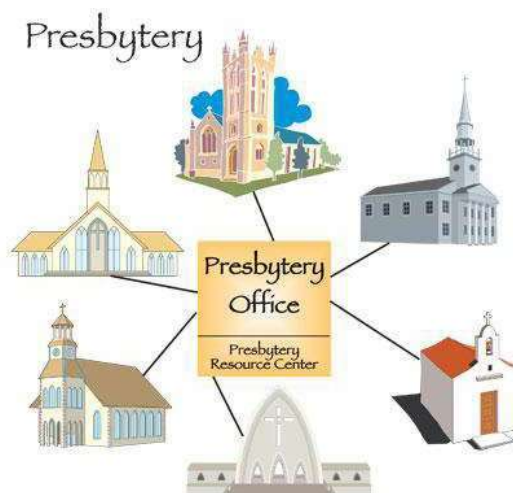
The session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service as ruling elders, together with all installed pastors and associate pastors. (G-3.0201)

The session shall have the responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. (Ibid)

PRESBYTERY

The presbytery is the council serving as a corporate expression of the church within a certain district and is composed of all the congregations and teaching elders within that district. (G-3.0301)

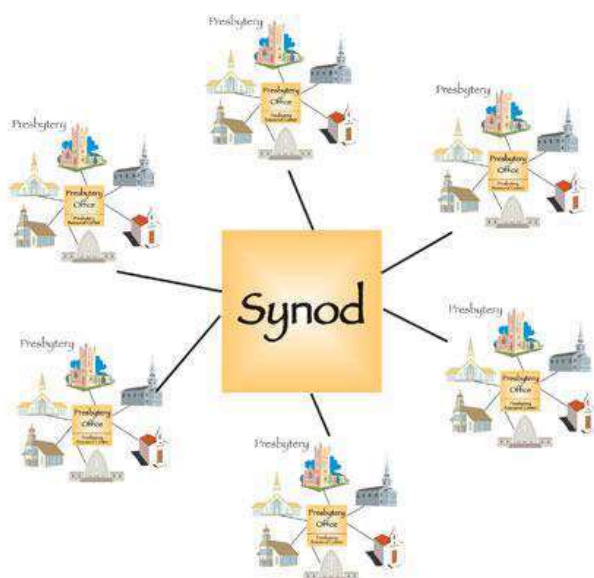
The presbytery is responsible for the government of the church throughout its district, and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness. (Ibid.)



SYNOD

The synod is the intermediate council serving as a corporate expression of the church throughout its region. (G-3.0401)

Synod is responsible for the life and mission of the church throughout its region and for supporting the ministry and mission of its presbyteries as they seek to support the witness of congregations, to the end that the church throughout its region becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. (Ibid.)



Boundaries of Homestead Presbytery



Boundaries of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies





GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly is the council of the whole church and it is representative of the unity of the synods, presbyteries, sessions, and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). (G-3.0501)

The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. (Ibid.)

From The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II: *The Book of Order*, 2015-2017

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CLERK



The *Book of Order* defines the responsibilities of the clerk of session: “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.” (G-3.0104)

1. Maintain and preserve the minutes:
 - a. Session Minutes
 - b. Congregational Meeting Minutes
 - c. Minutes of Joint Meetings of Session with Trustees or Deacons
2. Maintain and preserve the rolls and registers:
 - a. Active Members Roll
 - b. Affiliate Members Roll
 - c. Inactive Members Roll (optional)
 - d. Installed Pastor Register
 - e. Elder Register
 - f. Deacon Register
 - g. Baptism Register
 - h. Marriage Register (optional)
3. The clerk should also maintain the governing documents of the congregation: (The rules of a “higher” document supersedes the rules of the lower document.)
 - a. Articles of Incorporation/Corporate Charter
 - b. *Book of Order*
 - c. Bylaws
 - d. Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised-most recent edition and special rules of order (Special rules of order supersedes Robert’s Rules)
 - e. Manual of Operations

General Assembly Reports

Each year the Annual Statistical Report is to be completed online by the clerk. Instructions are found later in this handbook.

Presbytery Report and Review

There are two responsibilities to the presbytery. One is the annual necrology report, a listing of your church's ruling elders, both active and inactive, who died in the past year. These ruling elders will be remembered at the February meeting of Presbytery. You will find a copy at the presbytery website and you will receive a reminder as to when it is due and to whom to send it. A sample copy is included in the appendix. (Forms are subject to change, so please use the one from the website.)

The second is the annual session minutes review. Clerks will utilize a checklist provided by the presbytery. A sample copy is in the appendix. (Forms are subject to change, so please use the one from the website.) If you do not include a completed checklist, the minutes will NOT be reviewed. Clerks will receive information each year on the process

WRITING MINUTES

G-3.0107 of the *Book of Order* states that: "Each council shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings." Because the *Book of Order* provides no additional information, we use *Robert's Rules of Order (RONR)*, as it is our parliamentary authority.



Minutes are an historical record and a legal document. For example, if a session needs to change the signatory on a bank account, the bank may require a copy of the minutes authorizing the action. When a church buys or sells property, the attorneys may require the minutes authorizing the purchase. It is important for minutes to be accurate and contain the necessary details.

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised In Brief has important advice for clerks:

Frequently, secretaries make unneeded work for themselves by putting far more into the minutes than is required or appropriate. The most frequent mistakes are trying to summarize the reports offered and arguments made in debate, and including all of the amendments and other secondary motions. In fact, in standard form the minutes should generally include only what was *done*, not what was *said*." (pp. 148-149)

The first mistake is to summarize reports. The content of reports do **NOT** need to be in the minutes. For example, a clerk may want to record:

The Worship Committee is working with the pastor in changing the order of worship to reflect our reformed understanding of worship, and will report back to the Session for final approval. They are working with the music staff and choir in creating the Christmas Eve Service. The Rev. Big Winded will be the pulpit supply for the Sunday between Christmas and New Year's Day, as the pastor will be taking his last week of vacation.

That is too much. All that needs to be recorded is: “The Worship Committee reported.” (The committees should keep copies of their reports.) RONR states, “When a committee report is of great importance or should be recorded to show the legislative history of a measure, the assembly can order it ‘to be entered in the minutes,’ in which case the secretary copies it in full in, or attaches a copy of it to, the minutes.” [RONR (12th ed) 48:5(5)] The session can choose to record any or all parts of a report, if they feel it needs to be included in the minutes. That decision is up to each session.

Do NOT move to receive, adopt, or approve a report. RONR rules that to receive a report is out of order!

The second mistake that many clerks make is to include arguments made in debate, to include what was said and who said it. What was said and who said it is not be recorded. (It can come back to bite you!) Minutes are a record of what was done at a meeting, not what was said. No one’s opinions, favorable or not, should be recorded!

The last common error is to include the amendments to a motion, if there were any amendments. Do not include any of the amendments that were made. Again, too much! If the motion was amended, simply record the wording of the final motion as it was amended, and that it was adopted or lost “as amended.” Note that if a motion was lost, the wording of the motion is to be recorded and it should be recorded that it lost.

The first paragraph should include:

1. Name of the church, and whether a session or congregational meeting.
2. Kind of meeting: regular (stated) or special (called).
3. Date and time.
4. Place, if it is not always the same, or if different from the usual location. Some like to include the location of the meeting each time. If the meeting is by electronic means, it should be noted if it was a meeting by Zoom, telephone conference call, etc.
5. State that the moderator and the clerk of session were present, or the persons who substituted for them.
6. Minutes of previous meeting approved. See the section “Correcting Minutes” for more information.
7. State that a quorum was present.
8. Approval of agenda. Do not include the agenda; just state the agenda was approved “as presented” or “as amended.”
9. Meeting was opened with prayer.

For an example of the first paragraph, please see the sample minutes in the appendix.

The next paragraph should state attendance, whether members were present or absent. A session can decide to have excused absences. It is not necessary to include names of others, such as guests, unless there is some significance or the session desires to include the name of guests.

“The body of the minutes should contain a *separate paragraph for each subject matter....*” [RONR (12th ed.), 48:4]

Go to the sample minutes in the appendix to see an example of how the minutes should record reports.

Go to the sample minutes in the appendix to see an example of recording a motion made by a committee.

When recording a motion, it is not necessary to record that it “was made, seconded, and carried,” or to use any abbreviations such as “MSC.” (Be careful using any abbreviations in your minutes. Do readers know what the abbreviations mean?) The proper way is to record the wording of the motion and how it was disposed. RONR suggests that the verbs “adopted” or “was carried” be used when the vote is affirmative or “lost” or “was rejected” if the motion lost.

The term “Old Business” is not to be used. Rather, it is, “Unfinished Business.” “The expression “old business” is to be avoided, since it may incorrectly suggest the further consideration of matters that have been finally disposed of.” [RONR (12th ed.) 41:21n5]

The last paragraph should state the time of adjournment and that the meeting was closed with prayer. Whether there was a motion to adjourn or not, your minutes need only state, “The meeting adjourned at 7:18 P.M. with prayer.”

The clerk should sign at the bottom of the minutes. Please do not add, “Respectfully submitted,” as it “represents an older practice that is not essential in signing the minutes.” [RONR (12th ed.) 48:7] With the signature, it should be recorded when the minutes were approved. The moderator’s signature must be included with congregational meetings.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE INCLUDED IN CERTAIN MOTIONS AND/OR REPORTS

In Presbyterian polity, there needs to be specific information included in the motions and/or reports to the session, and recorded in the minutes. Do not approve, adopt, or receive the report. Simply report to the session and record in the minutes. The numbers in the list below refer to the document, “Line by Line Tips: Session Records’ Review Checklist” found in the appendix. The Tips will inform you as to what information needs to be included in the motion to approve and/or what is to be reported to the session and recorded in the minutes. Following this listing are other considerations for motions.

Baptism – 14 and 15

Budget Approval – 27

Budget-Presented to Congregation – 36

Commissioners to Presbytery – 16 and 17

Election of Clerk of Session – 26

Election of Treasurer – 25

Election of Officers: Elders and/or Deacons – 35

Financial Report – 9

Financial Review – 28

Insurance Review – 29

Lord’s Supper – 10-12

Lord’s Supper to Shut-ins – 13

Membership Reception and Transfer (See below)

Minutes Review – 19

Officers – Training and Examination – 20 and 21

Officers – Ordination and/or Installation – 22

Pastor’s Salary-Approval – 37

Pastor’s Salary-Review – 23

Statistical Report – 24

RECEPTION AND TRANSFER OF MEMBERS

The motion is to include the full name of the person, and how they will be received: profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or certificate (letter) of transfer. (To understand the differences, see the section Rolls and Registers.) When by certificate of transfer, include the name and city of the church releasing the member. When transferring members to another church, include the name of the church to which a certificate of transfer is granted and the full name of the person transferred with the date of transfer, together with names of baptized children, if applicable.

The dating of actions that is to be recorded in the rolls and registers is: the date of the session meeting when received by reaffirmation of faith or transfer; when dismissing by transfer, or removing from the rolls (except death). When joining by profession of faith, it is the date when they make their profession of faith, which is when they are publicly received during a worship service. When removing due to death, it is the date of death.

PROPERTY TRANSACTIONS

In case of a sale, mortgage, gift or lease of property, the minutes must show:

1. Name, address, and legal description of the property
2. Name of buyer/lessee
3. Sale price
4. Loan amount purpose and terms, including the name of the lender
5. Lease terms and liability insurance
6. Concurrence of Presbytery, if required.

PAGINATION AND PRINTING OF MINUTES

Pages are to be paginated consecutively using the same numbering system on each page. If the numbering system is 1, 2, 3, etc., do not insert pages between 2 and 3 and number them 2a, 2b, 2c, etc. Do not restart the numbering system with each new year. If the last page of the December 2018 minutes is 345, the first page of the January 2019 minutes is to be 346.

Print on both sides of each sheet. If you do leave a large space, or a blank page, draw a line through the space or page and indicate, “This space (page) left intentionally blank.” Blank pages should also be numbered, using the same numbering system.

CORRECTING MINUTES



If minutes are corrected when they are approved, record that the minutes were approved “as corrected,” without specifying the corrections. Wait until after the minutes are approved before inserting them into your permanent minutes book.

Minutes can be corrected after being approved, even years later, “by means of the motion to Amend Something Previously Adopted, which requires a two-thirds vote, or a majority vote with notice, or the vote of a majority of the entire membership, or unanimous consent. In such a case the content of the original minutes must not be altered, although it may be advisable for the secretary to make a marginal notation indicating the corrected text or referring to the minutes of the meeting at which the correction was adopted. The minutes of the latter meeting must include the full text of the motion to Amend Something Previously Adopted, which necessarily includes all information required to construct an accurate record of the actions taken at the earlier meeting.” [RONR (12th ed.), 48:15]

ACTIONS REQUIRING PRESBYTERY APPROVAL

There are some actions that a session or congregation may take that require the prior approval of the presbytery. Among them are:

- Loans that use the church or its property as collateral for a mortgage, and all sales of property. These also require the prior approval of the congregation.
- Lease real property that is used for purposes of worship; or lease any real property for more than five years.
- Changes of church location or church name.
- Changes in the annual terms of call for the pastor.
- Dissolutions of pastoral relationships and calls for new pastors.
- Appointment of a moderator of session, or temporary pastoral relationship.
- Session meeting when a pastor (or moderator) is ill or cannot attend for any reason.
- All waivers from the *Book of Order* concerning limitations of service on the session or board of deacons.

ROLLS AND REGISTERS

ROLLS

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 oversee the maintenance of the Rolls (*Book of Order*, 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, and must be recorded in the minutes.

When a session receives a request for transfer from a member whose name had been deleted from the rolls or had been placed on the inactive roll, the session should restore the member to the roll on reaffirmation of faith and then transfer the member.

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

Baptized Member

- 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 217th 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 (*Book of Order*, G-1.0401).

Active Member

- 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. How a member is to be received is to be recorded in the minutes and in the roll.
- There are three ways in which a person is received as an active member.
 1. “Public profession of faith, made after careful examination by the session in the meaning and responsibilities of membership; if not already baptized, the person making profession of faith shall be baptized.” (*Book of Order*, G-1.0303a) When a person joins the church for the first time in their life, they are received under profession of faith. If the person has not yet been baptized, they are to be baptized upon joining the church. The baptism should also be indicated on the roll. Whenever an adult is baptized, they are to be received as an active member.
 2. “Certificate of transfer,” when a person is a member of another Christian church at the time of transfer” (*Book of Order*, G-1.0303b). If a person is currently a member of another Christian church, a request is sent to that church asking for a letter or certificate of transfer.
 3. “Reaffirmation of faith,” for persons previously baptized in the name of the triune God and having publicly professed their faith” (*Book of Order*, G-1.0303c). This is for a person who has previously been a member of another church, but their membership has lapsed, or they currently are not a member of any church, or their church of membership refuses to transfer their membership.

Affiliate Members

- An Affiliate member is one who is an active member of another church of any denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the church of active membership is located and is attending your congregation for a relatively short period of time. An example is a student who is attending a college in your community.

Inactive Member (This is an optional roll)

- An “inactive roll” is no longer required, but the Session can choose to have it.
- One practical use for the inactive roll is when the session contacts those who have become inactive (after the session has counseled with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership, *Book of Order*, G-3.0201c). Some members who have become inactive

may be more willing to be an “inactive” member, than to be completely removed from the rolls.

REGISTERS

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 the *Book of Order*, G-3.0204b, which states, “There shall be registers of baptisms authorized by the Session, of ruling elders and deacons, of installed pastors with dates of service, and such other registers as the Session may deem necessary.” It is recommended, but not required, for the Session to keep a register of marriages and deaths.

- Register of Infant and Adult Baptisms
- Register of Elders
- Register of Deacons
- Register of Pastors
- Register of Marriages (**Optional**)
- Register of Deaths (**Optional**)

All registers may be kept in the same binder, or in the binder with the rolls. You may use the Westminster Binder and pages available through Cokesbury Book Stores 800.672.1789, or www.cokesbury.com. The use of the Westminster Binders and pages is not required.

CREATING YOUR OWN ROLLS AND REGISTERS

If you want to create your own forms for rolls and registers, the following are recommendations. Please see the section “Preservation of Records” concerning paper and binding recommendations.

The name of the church, including location, should be clearly and permanently displayed on the cover of the roll/register book.

1. The roll/register should be typewritten, produced on a computer, or neatly handwritten and alphabetized.
2. Rolls and registers must be kept current at all times.
3. Membership rolls should be kept both chronologically and alphabetically.
4. Membership rolls are: active, baptized, and affiliate. Optional rolls are inactive, friends, and/or participants.
 - a. The roll of **active members** shall contain: name of person, date received, how received (letter of transfer, reaffirmation, profession of faith). There should also be a space which indicates their current status, if it has changed (transfer to, deleted, death, etc.). The roll may also include gender, date of birth, and race/ethnicity. The additional information is valuable for presbytery reports.
 - b. The roll of **affiliate members** shall contain: name of person, date received, church of primary membership, date deleted. The roll may also include gender, date of birth, and race/ethnicity. The additional info is valuable for presbytery reports.
 - c. The roll of infant baptisms shall contain: full name of child, date of birth, place of birth, date of baptism, each parent’s full name (include mother’s maiden name, if applicable), name of person(s) presenting child for baptism (if different from the parents), and name of minister who officiated.

- d. The roll of adult baptisms shall contain: full name of person, date of baptism, place of baptism, and name of minister who officiated.
- e. The roll of inactive members (this is OPTIONAL) shall contain: name of person, date removed to inactive, date of removal from inactive, and cause of removal from inactive (restored to active, deleted, transferred, death).
- 5. Registers of elders, deacons, and ministers. Optional registers are of trustees, deaths, and marriages.
 - a. The registers of Elders and of Deacons both contain: full name of person, name of church in which ordained, date of ordination, date of installation, terms/dates of service, and any remarks (date of death, removal from service, general remarks, etc.).
 - b. The register of Ministers shall contain: full name of Minister, category of Minister (Pastor, Associate Pastor, Co-Pastor, Interim Pastor, Stated Supply, Parish Associate, or Commissioned Pastor), date of ordination, date of installation or commissioning, and terms/dates of service. Pastors, associate pastors, and co-pastors are installed. Commissioned pastors are commissioned.
 - c. The register of Trustees (optional) shall contain: full name of person, date of election, terms/dates of service, and any remarks (date of death, removal from service, general remarks, etc.).
 - d. The register of marriages (optional) shall contain: the full name of each spouse, date of wedding, place of wedding, wedding license number and county where issued, name of minister who officiated, and the names of two witnesses.
 - e. The register of deaths shall contain: full name of deceased, date of death, date and place of service, place of interment/inurnment (optional), and name of minister who officiated.

Adapted from **A Manual for Clerks of Session** produced by the Presbytery of the Peaks; copyright 2001 Reuel Lanhier Howe, Jr.

PRESERVATION OF RECORDS

You do not need to use the Westminster binders. You can order the binders and the filler sheets online at cokesbury.com. (Do a search for “Church Record-Keeping” at the Cokesbury website.)

The records can be kept in a three-ring binder. Avoid using vinyl binders as the text of the front and back pages can transfer or stick to the covers. Vinyl binders also give off a gas that degrades records. If you do use a vinyl binder, place a blank sheet as the first page and the last page of the binder, right behind the front cover of the binder, and right before the back cover of the binder.

When a notebook is full, consider having them hard bound, by using a Westminster binder or have them professionally bound. Another option is to store the pages in an acid free box.

Digital records are not adequate for permanent storage. To create and access records digitally is fine. Storing records digitally is not adequate. If you use a database, it is recommended that you print the records onto acid-free paper at least annually, if not more frequently.

Minutes, rolls, and registers should be printed on acid-free paper. See the document “Preservation supply vendors,” in the appendix, for a listing of vendors for acid free paper and boxes.

PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS), located in Philadelphia, is an agency of the PC(U.S.A.), and provides services for the preservation of historical church records. They hold original records of permanent value on deposit in an environmentally controlled archival storage area

with specialized fire detection and security systems. Session minutes and registers are of chief importance, but they also hold minutes of other church boards or committees, including deacons, trustees, women's associations and youth groups. Congregations can deposit records at **no charge**. The services of the PHS are funded, in part, by the per capita. Churches retain ownership of the records and may request their return at any time with written authorization from the clerk of session. If a church needs information from their records, PHS staff will research the church's records for no charge. An example is if the church needs a date of a baptism or wedding. (Please be aware that the Society's staff provides only limited research services.) Others requesting research may need to pay a fee.

The Presbyterian Historical Society provides in-house digitization services for PC(U.S.A.) congregations at a subsidized rate. Paper documents are scanned into digital pdf documents. Records are made text searchable whenever possible. The Society also can produce microfilm facsimiles.

Grants are available to digitize official records. Congregations qualifying for grants are:

- PC(U.S.A.) congregations of 250 members or less
- At least 50 years old
- Interested in the preservation of its history
- Looking for financial assistance to digitize church records

Find more information about the grants at [Preservation Grant for Churches](#).

For more information about the Presbyterian Historical Society and their services, go to [the Presbyterian Historical Society](#) or call them at 215.627.1852.

In the appendix you will find "Retention Schedule for Congregations," which advises how long a congregation should retain various records.

Many office copiers have the ability to scan documents to produce pdf documents. You may need additional software to make the documents text searchable.

PER CAPITA

General Assembly, and most presbyteries and synods, have a per capita apportionment used for ecclesiastical expenses and missions of the various councils. Per Capita is a fundamental way in which all of the nearly 10,000 congregations and mid councils of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) connect, participate and share in the work and mission of the wider church. The per capita figures for Homestead Presbytery can be found at [Pertinent Data Page](#).

The per capita is based on the membership statistics reported annually by the sessions to the General Assembly via the Annual Statistical Report. If a congregation does not file the report, GA uses the figures from the last year the numbers were reported. The Presbytery is required to

pay the per capita owed to the Synod and the General Assembly. If a congregation decides not to pay some or all of their per capita, the other congregations of the presbytery are paying the per capita for them. In other words, the congregations that pay their per capita are subsidizing the congregations that do not pay any or all of their per capita!

For more information about the per capita, go to [per capita](#). On that website you will also find a link “[Resources](#),” that provides resources to interpret the per capita for the members of your congregation.

APPENDIX

PRESBYTERIAN RESOURCES

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) consists of two parts: Part one is *The Book of Confessions*, and part two, the *Book of Order*, consisting of the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, Form of Government, Directory for Worship, and Rules of Discipline.

Click on this link to download [The Book of Confessions](#). Click on this link to download the [Book of Order](#).

You can also order print copies from the PC(U.S.A.) Store at: [PC USA Store](#) and search for *Book of Order* or *The Book of Confessions*.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) website can be found at [PC\(U.S.A.\)](#) The url is: PCUSA.org

The website of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies can be found at [Synod of Lakes and Prairies](#). The url is lakesandprairies.org. The online directory of the pastors, churches and committees of Homestead presbytery can be found at [Directory](#). You will need a passphrase. If you do not have the passphrase, please contact the presbytery office at 402.474.0612.

RECORDS PRESERVATION SUPPLY VENDORS

The following vendors provide archival-quality storage supplies.

GAYLORD BROTHERS
PO Box 4901
Syracuse, NY 13221-4901
800.962.9580
www.gaylord.com

LINECO
517 Main Street
Holyoke, MA 01041-2604
800.322.7775
info@lineco.com www.lineco.com

HOLLINGER METAL EDGE
6340 Bandini Blvd.
Commerce, CA 90040
800.862.2228

TALAS
330 Morgan Ave
Brooklyn, NY 11211
212.219.0770
www.talasonline.com

9401 Northeast Dr.
Fredericksburg, VA 22408
800.634.0491
info@hollingermetaledge.com
www.hollingermetaledge.com

UNIVERSITY PRODUCTS
517 Main Street
Holyoke, MA 01040
800.628.1912
info@universityproducts.com
custserv@universityproducts.com
www.universityproducts.com

LIGHT IMPRESSIONS
2340 Brighton Henrietta Town Line
Road Rochester, NY 14623
help@fdmbrands.com
www.lightimpressionsdirect.com

SAMPLE MINUTES

(The text in red ink is commentary on the sample minutes.)

CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Session of Grace Presbyterian Church, Freeport, Illinois was held on February 7, 2020, with the moderator Rachel Arends in the chair and the clerk of session Bob Schmidt present. The meeting was called to order in the church library at 7:00 p.m. with prayer by Margaret Hamilton. A quorum was present and the agenda was approved as amended. The minutes of the January 3, 2020 regular meeting were approved as printed.

ROLL CALL

P – Renee Atwater	P – Jean Ferard	P – Bob Schmidt
P – Doug Brown	P – Margaret Hamilton	P – Bill Nederhoff
A – Charles Dickens	A – Abraham Lincoln	A – Jane Walters

REPORTS OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

Treasurer: Monica Stevens, treasurer reported that the expenses for January 2020, totaled \$12,253, receipts were \$10,989. **Do not receive a treasurer's report.**

Clerk of Session: Bob Schmidt reported that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was celebrated during the morning worship on Sunday, January 12, 2020. Debra Ann Lukens did receive the sacrament of baptism during the morning worship on January 12, 2020.

Pastor: Rachel Arends reported that the Lord's Supper was served to 6 homebound members in January, with elder Jean Ferard.

The Education Committee, Buildings and Grounds Committee, Fellowship Committee, and Financial Committee reported. **Again, do NOT receive these reports.**

The Worship Committee moved that the Worship Committee investigate the sound system in the sanctuary, whether it should be updated or replaced, to consider the addition of an assistive listening devices, and receive bids for various options, and to report back to the Session at its May meeting. The motion was adopted as amended.

Personnel Committee moved that since 2020 will be the tenth year that Pastor Arends has been pastor, that the church offer her an additional week of vacation in 2020, and a \$5,000 gift to go towards a trip for her and her family. The motion lost. **If a motion fails, it must be recorded in the minutes.**

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

There was no unfinished business. **Unfinished business" refers to business that was carried over from the previous meeting. Do NOT use the term "Old Business."**

NEW BUSINESS:

The motion was adopted that worship during the summer months, beginning with Memorial Day weekend, and ending Labor Day weekend, will be at 9:30 a.m.

The moderator announced that the next meeting is March 6, 2020 and the meeting was adjourned at 8:34 PM with prayer by Doug Brown.

Date Approved: _____

Bill Nederhoff, Clerk of Session

It is not necessary to add, “Respectfully submitted.” Do not sign until after the minutes are approved. If the moderator does not announce when the next meeting will be, the clerk should add, “Next meeting is” at the end of the meeting minutes and before the signature.

SAMPLE MOTIONS AND REPORTS

The following are examples of motions and required reports. The motions and reports do not need to be worded exactly this way, but they give you an idea of the information that should be included.

Baptism

For the baptism of an infant: “Session approved the motion that Rachel Ann Smith, born December 14, 2020, in Auburn, Nebraska, receive the Sacrament of Baptism during the morning worship on January 3, 2021. Rachel is the daughter of James Arthur Smith and Melodie Ann (Green) Smith.”

For the baptism of an adult: “The motion that James Arthur Smith receive the Sacrament of Baptism during the morning worship on January 3, 2021, and that he be received as a member upon profession of faith, carried.”

At the next session meeting following January 3, 2021, it is to be reported to the session and recorded in the minutes: “During the morning worship on January 3, 2021, Rachel Ann Smith and James Arthur Smith received the Sacrament of Baptism.”

Budget Approval

“The Finance Committee presented a recommended budget for 2021, which was approved by the session as amended. It is included as Attachment A.”

Commissioners to Presbytery

“Session approved the election of Joe Smith as primary commissioner to Homestead Presbytery, Ann Jones as first alternate, and Fred Johnston as second alternate for 2021.”

After each presbytery meeting, the commissioner is to report to the session. “Joe Smith reported on the February 20, 2021 meeting of Homestead Presbytery.”

Election of Clerk of Session

“Ernest Parker was elected clerk of session for a three-year term, class of 2023.”

Election of Treasurer

“Helen Worth was elected church treasurer for 2021, for a one-year term.”

Election of Officers: Elders and/or Deacons

“The Nominating Committee presented the slate of nominees for session, class of 2023: John Best, Nancy Weber, and Donald Ackerman. An opportunity was given for nominations from the floor. There being no other nominations, the nominees were elected by the congregation.”

Financial Review

“The Auditing Committee has examined the accounts, reviewed procedures of counting and accounting under the current **Book of Order G-3.0113 Finances**, reconciled receipts and disbursements with bank deposits and bank balances, and has found the balances displayed correctly, presented fairly, with proper procedures, and records properly kept, except: I-9 missing from the personnel file of one staff member, some invoices were not properly approved, and one line item in the budget had an over expenditure before session gave approval.”

Insurance Review

“Session reviewed the church’s insurance coverage and found them to be adequate. The insurance coverage is included in Certificate of Insurance as Attachment B.”

Lord’s Supper

“Session approved that the Lord’s Supper for 2021 will be celebrated on the following dates: January 10, February 14, February 17, March 28, April 1, April 2, April 4, April 11, April 18, April 25, May 2, May 9, May 16, May 23, May 30, June 13, July 11, August 8, September 12, October 3, November 7, and December 24, 2021.”

At the first session meeting following each celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the celebrations should be reported: “The Lord’s Supper was celebrated on January 10, 2021.”

Lord’s Supper to Shut-ins

“Pastor Smith reported that he took the Lord’s Supper to eight shut-ins during the month of November. Janet Johnston accompanied the pastor.”

Membership Reception and Transfer

“Session approved the motion that Ernest Parcel and his wife Susan Parcel be received as members by transfer from First Presbyterian Church, Coldwater, Kansas, and Art Heeren be received by reaffirmation of faith, and Paul Aswegan be transferred to St. Paul United Methodist Church, Akron, Ohio.”

Minutes Review

“The clerk reported that the minutes were reviewed by Homestead Presbytery and were accepted with exceptions. The exceptions include: no record of a financial review, no record that the newly elected officers were trained and examined, not all celebrations of the Lord’s Supper were reported to the session, and no record of the terms of office for the clerk of session and treasurer.”

Officers – Ordination and/or Installation

“The motion carried that the ordinations and installations of John Best, Nancy Weber, and Donald Ackerman, be scheduled for Sunday, January 14, 2021.”

Officers – Training and Examination

“Pastor Nelson reported that she led a class for the newly elected elders and deacons which met four times. Session then examined them and the examination was sustained.”

At the first session meeting following the ordinations and installations, it shall be reported to the session: “The clerk reports that John Best was ordained as an elder and installed to the session, and Nancy Weber and Donald Ackerman were installed onto the session.”

Pastor’s Salary-

The congregation approved the terms of call of Pastor Rachel Smith for 2021:

Base	\$21,000
------	----------

Housing	\$42,000
Benefits	<u>\$23,310</u>
Total Salary & Benefits	\$86,310
Auto/Travel	\$2,000
Con Ed	\$1,500
Books/Journals/Prof Exp.	<u>\$1,000</u>
Total Expenses	\$4,500
Total	\$90,810

Pastor's Salary-Review

“Session reviewed the terms of call for Pastor Jeff. Session believes these terms are adequate as it exceeds the presbytery minimum, and is within the range for church size and length of service as reported by the Board of Pensions.”

Statistical Report

“Session approved the Annual Statistical Report to be submitted to the General Assembly. It is attached as Attachment A.”

CONGREGATION RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULE

Minutes	permanent
Registers	
Annual reports	
Reports	
Bylaws/charters	
Incorporation records	
Annual budgets	
Annual audits	
Annual financial statements	
Subject correspondence	
Manuals/handbooks	
Newspapers/newsletters	
Brochures/promotional materials (1 copy)	
Photographs	
Scrapbooks	
Architectural drawings, plats, plans,	
Wills, bequests	
Legal/judicial cases	
Loan agreements	satisfaction + 20 years
Property appraisals, records of sale	20 years after sale
Contracts	active + 3 years
Personnel records/employee records	employment + 7 years
FICA / W-2 records	7 years
Accounts payable invoices	3 years
Accounts payable	7 years
Accounts receivable records	3 years
Bank deposit slips	3 years
Bank statements	7 years
Canceled checks	7 years
Cash receipt records	3 years
Data for updating mailing lists	1 year
Mailing lists	active
Periodic financial statements	2 years
Expense reports	7 years
General/routine correspondence	3 years
Invitations	1 year
Petty cash records	7 years
Receipts of purchases	7 years
Meeting notices	1 year
Travel plans/arrangements	1 year
Resource files	active

From the [Presbyterian Historical Society](#)

NECROLOGY REPORT
Homestead Presbytery

TO: Clerks of Sessions of Homestead Presbytery
FROM: Raymond Meester, Presbytery Stated Clerk
SUBJECT: Necrology Report to Presbytery for the year 2020
NAME OF YOUR CHURCH: _____
CITY: _____

Please list below the names of elders in your congregation who died during 2020. If you would rather send me an email with the same information (elder name, date of ordination date, date of death), feel free to do so. The email is listed on the bottom of this sheet. Make sure you include the name and city of the church within the email. Since the report is to be made at the February Stated Meeting of Homestead Presbytery, please return this report ***NO LATER THAN FEBRUARY 1.*** Thank you!

Name of Elder	Date of Ordination	Date of Death
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Please return this form to:
raymondm@homesteadpres.org

Office of Stated Clerk
Homestead Presbytery
840 S 17th St.
Lincoln, NE 68508-3411

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ANNUAL ONLINE STATISTICAL REPORT

PLEASE NOTE: The session needs to approve the report as early as possible after the first of each year. This is a session report and DOES NOT require approval at a congregational meeting.

The Annual Statistical Report can be completed ONLY online. There are no paper forms.

Where can I find the website for reporting?

Go to <http://oga.pcusa.org/stats/> and click on “Go to the Online Statistics Entry System.”

Where can I find my user name and/or password?

If you do not have your user name or password, contact the stated clerk:

raymondm@homesteadpres.org 402.217.3684

My user name and password are not working.

The user name for a church is the church’s PIN number. You will need to add leading zero’s if your PIN is fewer than five numbers. Example, if your PIN number is 4123. The user name would be 04123.

Please be sure to enter the leading “0.” All of the characters in the user name (PIN) are numbers.

The passwords are case sensitive. The letter O and number zero 0 can look the same, as well as the letter I or l and the number one 1. If you have either one of these characters, and your password does not work, try the other. Many passwords end with “!” Be sure to include it.

If you attempt to log in a number of times and the system will not allow you to log in, the system will lock you out for security reasons. GA staff monitor this frequently, so wait for a few hours and try again. If that does not work, contact the presbytery stated clerk.

After you log in, you should see the home page.

The screenshot shows the 'Church Statistics' web application. At the top, it says 'Gresham' and 'Pin: 04392 Synod/Presb: Homestead'. Below this is a message: 'Press the Statistical Questions tab to enter your statistics.' There are four tabs: 'Church' (highlighted), 'Clerk', 'Statistics Questions', and 'Supplemental Questions'. On the right side, there is a 'Tasks' menu with links: 'Home', 'Edit Mailing', 'Edit Physical', 'Change User Password', 'Reports', and 'Logout'. The main content area shows a 'Church Report' section with a 'PDF' button. Below this, there are fields for 'Name' (Gresham), 'Address 1' (PO Box 125), 'Address 2', 'City/State/Zip' (Gresham, NE 68367-0125), 'Primary Phone' (402-735-7369), 'Website' (gresham.homesteadpres.org), 'Location' (Gresham, NE), 'Secondary 1' (400 Pine St), 'Secondary 2', 'City/State/Zip' (Gresham, NE 68367), and 'Email' (swwait@stewireless.com). At the bottom, there are links for 'Help', 'Accessibility Statement', and 'Privacy Policy', and a copyright notice: 'Copyright © 2019 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'.

When I log in there is no tab labeled “Statistics Questions.”

In most cases, this is an issue with the browser you are using. We suggest using Firefox for best results.

What is the deadline date for entering statistics?

February 1. The presbytery stated clerk can permit some extensions, so please contact the stated clerk if you need more time.

Do I have to enter everything at one time?

No. Hitting the ‘Accept’ button on the bottom of a page saves the data for that page. You may exit and return to enter additional pages at a later time. However, once you have clicked on “Accept,” you cannot go back to that particular page. If you hit the “Accept” by mistake, please contact the stated clerk.

How do I print a copy of my report?

A copy of this report is to be included in the minutes, when the session approves it. You have two options. On the main screen when you first log into the program, above your church address area you will see a button that says “PDF.” Pressing this will create a copy of your current year report as a PDF.

The screenshot shows the 'Church Statistics' web application. At the top, it says 'Gresham' and 'Pin: 04392 Synod/Presb: Homestead'. Below this is a message: 'Press the Statistical Questions tab to enter your statistics.' There are four tabs: 'Church' (selected), 'Clerk', 'Statistics Questions', and 'Supplemental Questions'. On the right side, there is a 'Tasks' menu with links: Home, Edit Mailing, Edit Physical, Change User Password, Reports, and Logout. The main content area shows a 'Church Report' section with a 'PDF' button. Below this, there are two columns of information: 'Mailing' and 'Physical'. The 'Mailing' column includes: Name: Gresham, Address 1: PO Box 125, Address 2: (blank), City/State/Zip: Gresham, NE 68367-0125, Primary Phone: 402-735-7369, Website: gresham.homesteadpres.org, and Location: Gresham, NE. The 'Physical' column includes: Secondary 1: 400 Pine St, Secondary 2: (blank), City/State/Zip: Gresham, NE 68367, and Email: swwait@stewireless.com. At the bottom, there are links for Help, Accessibility Statement, and Privacy Policy, and a copyright notice: Copyright © 2019 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The other option:

After logging into the program, on the right side, click on the option “Reports.” On the next window, click on “Individual Church Report.”

Church Statistics

[<< Return to Menu](#)

Tasks

[Home](#)

[Individual Church Report](#)

[Church Download Report](#)

[Logout](#)

[Help](#) |
 [Accessibility Statement](#) |
 [Privacy Policy](#)

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You'll need to work through a series of options. Choose the year you want to view in the Year Drop Down Box. Then click on "View Report."

[< Return to Report Menu](#)

Year:

Your report will appear.

[<< Return to Report Menu](#)

Year:

1 of 1

2019 Church Statistical Report

Church	Gresham	PIN	4392
Presbytery	Homestead		
Address	PO Box 125, Gresham, NE 68367-0125		
Phone	402-735-7369	Fax	
Email	wwwait@stewireless.com		
Web Site	gresham.homesteadpres.org		

Membership			
Prior Active Members	38	Adjusted membership	38
Gains		Losses	
Certificate		Certificate	
Youth Professions		Deaths	
Professions & Reaffirmations		Deleted for any Other Reason	
Total Gains	0	Total Losses	0
Total Ending Active Members	38		

Baptisms		Average Weekly Worship Attendance	
Presented by Others		Female Members	
At Confirmation		Friends of the Congregation	
All Other		Ruling Elders on Session	
		Do you have Deacons?	No

Age Distribution of Active Members		People with Disabilities	
25 & Under		Hearing Impairment	
26 - 40		Sight Impairment	
41 - 55		Mobility Impairment	
56 - 70		Other Impairment	
Over 70			
Total Age Distribution	0		

Christian Education

Birth - 7 Grade 7

Click on the export button:  which appears in the gray bar near the top. It will open a drop-down box. Select a format. I suggest selecting the PDF option for a clean copy of your report. By selecting the Word format, you can easily insert it into church minutes.

Who do I contact if I have a problem?

Call the presbytery stated clerk first: 402.217.3684. You can email the staff at General Assembly (GA): OGARecords@pcusa.org for additional help. However, if you contact the GA, most of the time they will refer you to the presbytery stated clerk.

Where can I find a copy of the workbook?

There is no longer a workbook being produced. Help can be found with PDFs that have been created related to the questions and definitions being asked. Click on this link for the [PDF forms](#).

You are not done yet!

Go back to the home page, and click on “Supplemental Questions.” There will be one page of questions. This page is NOT mandated by the GA, but it provides the GA with important information for the ministry of the PCUSA.

SESSION RECORDS REVIEW CHECKLIST

City & Church Name _____ Clerk of Session _____

GENERAL CONTENT OF SESSION RECORDS

Yes/No (1)

1. All pages are numbered consecutively. (2)
2. Minutes are free from extensive corrections. (3)
3. Minutes printed on both sides; blank pages and areas indicated “left intentionally blank, or lined out”
4. At least one stated session meeting was held per quarter (G-3.0203).
Record date of one meeting in each quarter and the page number:
1st Qrt: Date: _____ Page: _____ 2nd Qrt: Date: _____ Page: _____
3rd Qrt: Date: _____ Page: _____ 4th Qrt: Date: _____ Page: _____
5. The annual congregational meeting was held for the year (G-1.0501). (5) _____
Record date and page number of the congregational meeting: Date _____ Page _____

SESSION MINUTES CHECKLIST

Page number in Minutes to be filled in by the Clerk of Session BEFORE the Review

Recorded item	Reference	Page Number(s): List ALL applicable pages
6. The first paragraph includes: name of council, date, time, place of meeting, indicate stated or special, name and clerk, meeting opened with prayer, quorum indicated, agenda approved, and minutes of previous meeting approved.	G-3.0203 G-0105 <i>Robert's Rules of Order</i>	
7. Names of ruling elders present	Required by presbytery	
8. Closed meeting with prayer	G-3.0105	
9. Financial reports of all congregational funds, at least annually	G-3.0205	
10. Prior approval of the Lord's Supper	G-3.0201b W-3.0410	
11. Report celebration of the Lord's Supper	G-3.0201b	

12. Lord's Supper celebrated at least quarterly	G-3.0102b W-3.0409	1 st QRT: Date _____ Page # _____ 2 nd QRT: Date _____ Page # _____ 3 rd QRT: Date _____ Page # _____ 4 th QRT: Date _____ Page # _____
13. Lord's Supper taken to sick/ shut-ins, names of members accompanying the pastor	W-3.0414	
14. Approval of Baptism	G-3.0201b W-3.0403	
15. Report administration of Baptism	G-3.0201	
16. Election of Commissioners to presbytery	G-3.0202	
17. Report of Presbytery Commissioner(s)	G-3.0202	
18. Signature of Clerk	G-3.0107	

Items to be Recorded Annually in Session Minutes

19. Report of Presbytery review of Minutes	G-3.0108a	
20. Training of newly elected elders and deacons	G-2.0402	
21. Examining newly elected elders & deacons	G-2.0402	
22. Scheduling and approving ordination and installation of officers & report after the ordination and/or installation	G-2.0402	
23. Report of annual review of pastor's compensation	G-2.0804	
24. Session approval of annual statistical report & attached to minutes.	G-3.0202f	
25. Election of Church treasurer	G-3.0205	Page number _____ Date of election _____ Length of term _____

26. Election of Clerk of Session	G-3.0104	Page number _____ Date of election _____ Length of term _____
27. Session approval of budget	G-3.0205	
28. Annual financial review/audit	G-3.0113	
29. Insurance Review	G-3.0112	
30. Annual review of membership roll	G-3.0201c	
31. If members were deleted from roll, did session seek to restore them to active participation, and did session provide written notice to member before deleting	G-3.0204a	
32. Session composition with regard to racial ethnic, women, men, age groups, and how this corresponds to composition of the congregation.	F-1.0403 G-3.0103	

CONGREGATIONAL MINUTES CHECKLIST

33. The first paragraph should include: name of council, date, time, place of meeting, indicate stated or special, name of moderator, name of clerk, meeting opened with prayer, quorum indicated, agenda approved, and minutes of previous meeting approved.	G-3.0203 RONR	
34. Closed each meeting with prayer	G-3.0105	
35. Election of elders, deacons, trustees	G-1.0503	
36. Presentation of budget to congregation.	G-3.0205	

37. Review of Pastor(s) Terms of Call and any changes in the terms of call approved by the congregation	G-1.0503	
38. Congregational meeting minutes signed by clerk and moderator.	G-1.0505	

Church Rolls and Registers (Complete this page only if the Rolls and Registers will be reviewed.)

Recorded Item	Reference	Included Yes or No
39. Roll of Active Members	G-3.0204a	
40. Roll of Baptized Members	G-3.0204a	
41. Roll of Affiliate Members, if any,	G-3.0204a	
List of Ruling Elders and Deacons, with ordination date	G-3.0204b	
List of Pastors, Associates, with dates of service	G-3.0204b	
Record baptisms with date of birth and name of parents	G-3.0204b	

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CHECKLIST

Each clerk is to review their own minutes prior to the review, using the Session Records Review Checklist. The numbers refer to the “Records Review Checklist-Tips” document.

Please note that some items should be included in each and every meeting. Others are to be recorded when done, and others recorded annually. Enter the page number for each item where it is found in your minutes. **You must list a page number for every instance the item is recorded in your minutes.** For example, if you had twelve meetings during the year, you should have twelve page numbers for the first item, “First Paragraph.” If the checklist is not fully completed and included, the minutes will not be reviewed. Send all of your minutes in one document. Do not send a separate document for each meeting. If we receive more than one document for your minutes, they will not be read. Of course, the checklist can and should come as a separate document.

Please do not be anxious if not everything has been completed by the session or included in the minutes. No person or session is perfect. These are the minutes of the session, not your minutes. The moderator should be aware of the things the session needs to do.

Normally the rolls and registers are reviewed every three years. You will be informed if we need to review your rolls and registers.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Stated Clerk, Raymond Meester:
Cell: 402.217.3684 email: RaymondM@HomesteadPres.org

LINE BY LINE TIPS FOR SESSION RECORDS REVIEW CHECKLIST

Minutes are the official written record of a meeting. Meeting minutes serve as legal documents that may be examined by not only more inclusive councils of the church, but also the secular courts. All of the items in the checklist are to be recorded in the minutes. For further information on each item, refer to the reference for that item. The references are to the *Book of Order*. Concerning reports, please see the explanation under “Minutes” in this handbook.

1. The clerk of the session shall indicate with a “yes” or “no” on the short line as to whether the particular item was completed.
2. All pages, including attachments, should be paged consecutively and with the same numbering system. Do not attach or insert pages with a different numbering system.
3. If corrections are made, please follow the instructions found in this handbook.
4. Session must meet at least quarterly. List the date of one meeting per quarter and the page number. (The page number of the first page for each meeting is sufficient.)
5. There shall be one annual congregational meeting per year. Again, fill in the date and the first page number of that meeting’s minutes.
6. All of these items should be included in the first paragraph of the minutes. Example:

CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the session of Grace Presbyterian Church, Anytown, Nebraska, was called to order with prayer at 7:03 PM, September 10, 2019. The moderator, Darlene Morris, was in the chair and the clerk of session was present. A quorum was present. The agenda was approved as amended. The minutes of the August 6, 2019, meeting were approved as printed.

- 7 List all current members of the session and indicate if they were present or absent.
9. Most churches have these reports as part of the annual report to the congregation. These financial reports should be included in the minutes of the congregational meeting. The session can choose to include the entire annual report in the minutes.
10. Approval of celebrations of the Lord’s Supper needs to be prior to its celebration. You need to include the dates of the celebrations. Session can at one meeting schedule all of the celebrations of the Lord’s Supper for the year, or can schedule a certain Sunday of each month. If there is a tradition of celebrating it on the same Sunday each year, it would be best to record that in the minutes of the first meeting of the year. Or, session can give approval prior to each celebration. If a date is changed, session must give prior approval to the change.
11. Each celebration of the Lord’s Supper is be reported at the following session meeting. An example would be, “The Lord’s Supper was celebrated during the morning worship on July 28, 2019.” Again, include the date it was celebrated. It is not necessary to report how many participated in the sacrament, who officiated, or who served.
12. The Lord’s Supper is to be celebrated at least quarterly. Pick a date from each quarter. Record the date it was celebrated and the page number in the minutes where it was recorded.
13. Do not include to whom the sacrament was taken. Record which church member(s) (it does not need to be an elder or deacon) accompanied the pastor and the dates. If your church has

made provision for elders and/or deacons to take the Lord's Supper to those absent, homebound, or hospitalized, as described in W-3.0414, please indicate that you do so on the check list.

14. Approval must be made prior to the celebration of the Sacrament. Include the full name of adults being baptized including the maiden name of married women, if applicable. When adults are baptized, they are also joining the church by profession of faith, so a reception of membership needs to be approved and recorded with the baptism, and their names recorded as being received. In the case of infant or children baptism, include the full name of the child, date of birth, place of birth, date of baptism, place of baptism, and the names of the parents or the one rightly exercising parental responsibility, and include maiden names, if applicable.
15. The report that baptism was celebrated must be recorded in the minutes after it was celebrated. Include the date of the baptism in the record. All of the information required in 18 does not need to be repeated.
16. Ruling elder commissioners to the presbytery are to be elected by the session prior to the presbytery meeting. Elder commissioners to presbytery do not need to be currently serving on the session. The *Book of Order* states:

Sessions have a particular responsibility to participate in the life of the whole church through participation in other councils. It is of particular importance that sessions:

 - a. elect, as commissioners to presbytery, ruling elders from the congregation, preferably for at least a year, and receive their reports. (G-3.0202)

A session could elect a primary commissioner and a few alternates, such as a first alternate, second alternate. If the primary commissioner cannot attend, the first alternate could attend without having to act on it in a session meeting, and on down the list until you find someone able to go. The governance of the PCUSA is that of parity, equal numbers of teaching elders (ministers of word and sacrament) and ruling elders.
17. The report should be made at the next session meeting following a presbytery meeting. It is not necessary to record in the minutes any of the report, unless deemed pertinent. The commissioner could submit a written report. Do not act to receive, adopt, approve, etc., the report.”
18. Clerk of session should sign at the end of the minutes after they have been approved. If someone else acted as clerk pro tem, the clerk pro tem should sign the minutes for that meeting, and add “pro tem” following “Clerk of Session.” Record when the minutes were approved on a line alongside of or below the signature.
19. Clerk reports to session and records in the minutes that presbytery reviewed, note if approved with or without exceptions, if there are exceptions list all the exceptions. Indicate which minutes were approved, by page numbers and the date of the first meeting and the date of the last meeting that were reviewed, and the date the records were reviewed.
20. It is to be reported to the session, and recorded in the minutes, that the newly elected elders and deacons received training. Elders and deacons, who have been previously ordained, are not required to be trained. However, session may require such training. If the session does not require the training of previously ordained officers, please include that in the report. Do not include any detail about the content of the training.

21. The session is to examine newly elected elders and deacons, and such examination is to be recorded in the minutes. Elders and deacons, who have been previously ordained, are not required to be examined. However, session may require such an examination. If the session does not require the examination of previously ordained officers, please include that in the report. Record only if the candidates were approved or not approved. Do not include any detail about the examination.
22. Report and record in the minutes that session approved a date to ordain and install officers prior to the ordination and installation. Include full names and the date. At the first session meeting following the ordination/installation, record in the minutes the fact that the elders and deacons were ordained and/or installed. Again, record the full names and the date.
23. Session is to review the adequacy of the compensation of the pastor, and it is to be recorded in the minutes. Record the terms of call, including base salary, housing allowance, SECA offset, etc. If the pastor is not an installed pastor, this information does not need to be recorded.
24. This refers to the annual statistical report that is completed online. This report must be approved by the session. A one-page report can be downloaded from the web, printed, and then included in the minutes as an attachment. Instructions for printing the report can be found in this handbook.
25. Session is to elect the treasurer, and should elect the treasurer for a particular term, whether one year, two years, etc. The treasurer should not be elected for “a life sentence.” Indicate the date of election, length of term, and page number in the minutes of that election. If the treasurer was elected in a previous year, and continues to serve that term, indicate the same information, even if it is recorded in a previous year’s minutes.
26. The same information as for the treasurer (25), above. A clerk of session need not be an active member of the session, but must be a ruling elder. If the clerk is not a member of the session, the clerk has no voice or vote unless granted by the session.
27. The session, not the congregation, approves the budget. (However, the congregation must approve the terms of call of the pastor.) The full budget is to be recorded in the minutes of the session, either within the minutes, or as an attachment.
28. Report to the session and record in the minutes that a financial review or audit was performed, who performed the audit, when the audit was performed, what years were reviewed or audited, and the recommendations and/or results of that review or audit.
29. Session is to review whether there is adequate property and liability coverage, including coverage for the officers. Include the types of coverage and the limits of coverage. Best practice is to attach the certificate of insurance to the minutes, which can be obtained from your insurance carrier. If the certificate is attached, there is no need to include the types of coverage and limits in the minutes themselves.
30. No need for details, other than any additions or deletions to the membership rolls, which require session action. The Book of Order (G-3.0204a) directs:

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.

31. Record that session did seek to restore members to active participation and that anyone deleted due to lack of participation was given written notification.
32. Compare the composition of the session to the composition of the congregation in terms of demographics: ages, race, gender, etc. The information entered in the annual statistical report can provide the needed information for the congregation. Does the session represent the diversity of the membership? For example, you might have a number of young adults in your congregation, but none on the session. Or the congregation may be made up of 75% women, but only 25% of the session are women. Indicate if there are any of these disparities between the congregation and the session. Concerning birthdates, most members are open to sharing their full birth date, if you explain why you need the information. If they will not provide the information, guess.
33. See 6 above. If the minutes of a previous congregational meeting were approved by the session, the congregation does not approve the minutes. However, it should be reported to the congregation that the minutes were previously approved by the session, and that report recorded in the minutes.
35. Record who were elected to what office, and the terms of service, i.e. to which class. Also record if the floor was opened for nominations, which is required.
36. Record that the budget was presented to the congregation. The congregation does not act to receive or approve the budget.
37. Any changes to the terms of call must be approved by congregational vote. If nothing is changed, it is still best to list the terms of call, so that there be no misunderstanding. Be sure to include any housing allowances in the action.
38. Add a line alongside of or underneath the signatures indicating when the minutes were approved. Minutes of a congregational meeting can be approved by the session at the next session meeting and the approval recorded in the session minutes. If the minutes are approved by the session, this is to be reported to the congregation at the next congregational meeting. The minutes are to be signed by the session clerk or clerk pro tem, and the moderator of the congregational meeting.
39. 39-44. The reviewers will not know if the rolls and registers are accurate. They will be looking for whether the required rolls and registers are included, and any evidence of activity on rolls and registers, and if they appear to be up-to-date. If the rolls were reviewed, please include that in a report to the session. See the Rolls and Registers in this handbook for the information that is to be included.

Serving as Clerk of Session

Some tasks and tips for clerks of session

Introduction

Have you agreed to serve as clerk of session and now find yourself wondering what you have done? Read on to learn about your responsibilities as put forth in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) . . . and other duties you might be asked to do.

The first thing to know is that the *Book of Order* is your handbook. Although it says little about clerks, you will want to become familiar with it, either in print form or online at the denominational Web site, www.pcusa.org. The *Book of Order* has four sections: the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, the Form of Government, the Directory for Worship, and the Rules of Discipline. For clerks, the important section is the Form of Government. You won't need to go to the Rule of Discipline unless a case regarding a member of the congregation is brought before the session. If that happens, confer immediately with the stated clerk of your presbytery.

Two Officers

According to the *Book of Order*, two officers govern the session: the moderator and the clerk (G-3.0104). But don't let this power go to your head. Other officers are elected by the session or may be mandated by the incorporation statutes of the state. The moderator is ordinarily the clergyperson installed as pastor of the congregation. The clerk "shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine" (G-3.0104). Your tenure can be a year or forty years, but you are elected for a specific term. Some sessions elect the clerk for one year at a time; others, for longer terms, such as three or five years. "Clerk for life" is not a specific term, however.

Some sessions elect a clerk from those ruling elders on the session, while other sessions select someone not currently on the session. If you are currently serving on the session, you have voice and a vote. If you are not on the session now, you do not have a vote and should refrain from speaking except to ask for clarification for the minutes. If you have pertinent information from past minutes or records for the matter under discussion, you may request the floor from the moderator in order to offer that information. As one who has served under both condi-



Your tenure can be a year or forty years, but you are elected for a specific term.

tions, I recommend a clerk who is not currently serving on the session. You have plenty to do to record the meeting faithfully without trying to formulate a comment or decide how to vote.

What Do Clerks Do?

The basic duties of the clerk of session can be found in the Form of Government (G-3.0104). However, that short list is a bit misleading and is certainly an understatement. So here you will find a bit more information about what those responsibilities actually entail.

The clerk shall record the transactions of the session. No doubt, you expected this responsibility. After all, "clerk" is another word for "secretary." You may even have accepted this office because you enjoy taking minutes. (Yes, some of us actually do.) Note the word "transactions." You need not record every statement pro and con during a discussion. Technically, all that is required are any motions before the session, the votes taken, and whether or not they passed. Generally the vote is not recorded, except when voting on a call of a pastor. However, it is good practice to note a unanimous vote if the topic is controversial. For the sake of historians in the future, you might want to add a bit more. But the minutes of the session are not a gossip rag, so keep personalities out of the recording and certainly do not add comments of your own (good or bad) about the business reported.

The minutes should indicate the type of meeting (stated, called or special, or adjourned), the name of the body (for example, Session of First Presbyterian Church, Baldwin,

Some Ideas for Recording Session Transactions

- Ask the maker of a motion that is substantive to give it to you in writing.
- Read minutes of previous meetings as a guide. If you feel they are not adequate, read the minutes of a meeting of your presbytery. Another source for the basic format for recording minutes can be found in *Robert's Rules of Order* (I.41).
- Distribute the minutes before the next meeting of the session to allow time for them to be reviewed thoroughly. And don't take corrections personally.
- Don't forget to sign the minutes after they have been entered into the official book.
- The records of the congregation held by the clerk are to be examined annually by the presbytery (G-3.0108). Keep up to date with minutes and membership rolls.

Illinois), the date and place, the time it convenes and adjourns, the presider's name, and the names of those present. Each session meeting is opened and closed with prayer by mandate of the *Book of Order* (G-3.0105), and that is to be noted in the minutes as well.

The clerk keeps the congregation's rolls of membership and attendance. Perhaps this is a surprise to you. Yes, you are responsible for keeping the membership rolls accurate and up to date. I once heard about a new clerk who had opened the membership rolls book and found that nothing had been recorded for the previous thirteen years. Not a good idea!

Maintaining the membership rolls means that letters requesting transfers of membership will come to you to be directed to the session for action. Either you or the church office will issue the letter of transfer after it has been approved by the session.

As new members join, they are listed on the rolls, indicating how they joined (transfer of membership, reaffirmation of faith, or profession of faith). You may be responsible for writing the letter of transfer. Do so promptly. The death of a member is also recorded in the membership rolls. For specifics on types of membership and the information recorded about the membership, see G-1.04.

Baptisms are also entered into the records book, so be sure the pastor obtains all the information needed when meeting with the family. Some hints to make this task easier are:

- Provide forms to be completed by new members and parents of children who are baptized. This will save you hours of searching for such information as the maiden name of the mother or the name of the church to request a transfer. Check with the stated clerk of your presbytery or other clerks of session for sample forms.
- Keep the membership records up to date, rather than entering all the information at the end of the year. You have enough to do then as you prepare the report that goes to the General Assembly (GA) in February.
- As soon as the GA report form is available online, begin to gather the information, which will come from a variety of sources. Filing your report early is encouraged.

The clerk shall preserve the records carefully. Where are the official records stored? Not under your bed, I trust, although I have heard such rumors. More information on the permanent safekeeping of records is found in G-3.0107. According to Margery Sly of the Presbyterian Historical Society, the best way to preserve these records is to put them on microfiche. Records that you no longer need to keep for handy reference can be taken to the Presbyterian Historical Society or one of the seminaries of the denomination for storage in a temperature- and humidity-controlled environment. For more information or if you have specific questions about storage, contact the reference desk at the historical society, 215-627-1852 or refdesk@history.pcusa.org.

The clerk shall furnish extracts from the records when required by another council. This responsibility is the final one listed in G-3.0104. You are not likely to be called on to do this unless the information is requested as evidence by a higher council.

Recommendations Regarding Records

- Find out what the previous clerk did regarding storage. Today is not too late to start on the right road.
- If your congregation has a historian, work with that person to see that the history of your congregation is properly sorted and preserved.
- Check out the Web site of the Presbyterian Historical Society at www.history.pcusa.org.



Use your good sense about what to report to the session. Certainly correspondence from higher councils must be reported. If in doubt, confer with the moderator.

And What Else?

The clerk shall be secretary of meetings of the congregation. Because clerks are elected to serve as an officer of the session, the Form of Government (G-1.0505) specifically appoints the clerk as the secretary for any congregational meeting. While this task probably does not surprise you, you may not be aware of the specifics when it comes to approving the minutes of a congregational meeting. Here are the options:

1. You read the minutes before the adjournment, and the congregation approves them on the spot. (This is not as overwhelming as you might think. For routine meetings, such as the election of officers, develop a template based on the previous meeting for this purpose and fill it in as the meeting takes place. You can't imagine how this impresses the congregation as well.)
2. If that does not happen, the minutes can be approved by the session, and that action is reported to the congregation the next time it meets. In that case, you are to have copies of the minutes available. The congregation may ask to have the minutes read, and additional corrections can be made. (I don't know about your congregation, but I can't imagine anyone requesting that the minutes be read at one of our congregational meetings.)
3. While the clerk signs the session minutes, the clerk and moderator both attest to the accuracy of the minutes of a congregational meeting by signing those minutes.

The minutes of congregational meetings are entered into the session minutes book.

Tasks That Are Not Specified in the Form of Government

As with every office or job, you will likely discover some expectations that no one told you about. Perhaps you have already discovered some of them.

Meeting docket. Some moderators prefer to set up the agenda or docket for the meeting themselves. Others are happy to let the clerk take care of it. In either case, when the moderator

and clerk communicate about the docket before the meeting, meetings run more smoothly and the clerk can be more helpful to the moderator during the meeting. Generally, it is the clerk's task to distribute the docket to the session. With e-mail, the clerk can easily send this along with the other materials for the meeting.

Correspondence. Occasionally the session will instruct the clerk to write a letter. A common request is to thank a ruling elder or deacon who has resigned for his or her service and to acknowledge that the resignation was acted upon. Use church letterhead and write the letter as soon as possible. Mail of all sorts will come to the church addressed to the clerk.

Hints for Survival That You Won't Find in the Form of Government

- Set up a list of agenda items done annually. See the sample in the appendix. Begin with the minutes from the previous year. This will help you remember such things as approving the dates for the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper annually . . . if you don't forget to look at your list.
- Review the minutes of a year ago before a stated meeting. This is especially important if you are still developing an annual chart.
- Always review the minutes of the previous meeting before determining the docket for the next meeting. Look for baptisms that have been approved and must now be entered as having taken place. Is there unfinished business?
- Get any checklist for the annual review of the minutes and membership records used by your presbytery. The first year I took the records for review was the first time I saw this very helpful sheet. Now I use it to be sure that the membership records are complete and that the session has complied with all requirements, such as the annual meeting of the deacons with the session.
- Sit next to the moderator at the meeting. You want to be close enough to whisper a reminder, such as "No one has seconded that motion." Or you might even give a nudge and say, "Let's move this meeting along."
- Keep your sense of humor. This is a joyous task, not drudgery.

Some of it, junk mail, can go right to the recycling bin. Use your good sense about what to report to the session. Certainly correspondence from higher councils must be reported. If in doubt, confer with the moderator.

Parliamentarian. Although the moderator of the session will be thoroughly acquainted with the *Book of Order* (having been required to pass an ordination test on it) and is the officer who rules on points of procedure, she or he may turn to you for assistance. Take some time to become acquainted with the *Book of Order* and with *Robert's Rules of Order*. At least know your way around the two sources so you can research an answer quickly.

Other tasks. You know that most job descriptions include “and other tasks as determined by.” Well, the moderator may have some of those tasks in mind, or they may crop up from time to time in particular session business. One such task may be to moderate the session meeting or the congregational meeting when the call of the pastor(s) is reviewed.

Additional responsibilities will come your way when your congregation is without a pastor. When that happens, become very friendly with the presbytery committee on ministry.

Truly, when the moderator and clerk communicate and work well together, serving as the clerk of session is a joy and an honor. As I said to the moderator who asked me to be clerk nine years ago, “Why, I can’t think of anything more interesting than to be at session meetings without a committee responsibility!” I think he almost dropped the phone, but I continue to find it interesting and challenging, even a kind of spiritual discipline. I pray that this will be true for you too.

About the Writer

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Checklist for the Clerk

Note: This is a sample for you to adapt to your particular congregation.

Every month	Report significant correspondence, baptisms performed, and communions celebrated since previous meeting. Approve minutes of previous meeting. Approve planned baptisms. Report weddings performed by clergy or in church building by other clergy. Keep membership book up to date with new members, transfers, baptisms, deaths, and weddings. Distribute minutes and other materials pertinent to the meeting to the session.
January	Begin working on the statistical report for the General Assembly, so session can approve it before it is submitted. Elect commissioners to the presbytery. Prepare list of times to celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper for approval by session or get the list from the pastor or appropriate committee. Schedule a congregational meeting to elect deacons, ruling elders, auditing committee, and members-at-large for the nominations committee.
February	Submit statistical report to the General Assembly. Send list of presbytery commissioners to the presbytery.
March	Prepare a report for the annual report of the congregation, if requested. Serve as secretary for the annual meeting of the congregation.
April	
May	Sign the confirmation certificates. Although not a requirement for sessions, many clerks provide the nominating committee with a statement about the composition of the session and board of deacons and how it matches the composition of the congregation (see G-3.0111).
June	Elect officers of the corporation.
July	No session meeting.
August	No session meeting.
September	Approve list of church school teachers and any changes in curriculum.
October	Prepare minutes and membership rolls for presbytery annual review.
November	Attend annual meeting with board of deacons.
December	