



# CLERK OF SESSION

## PART 1: BASIC TRAINING



# WELCOME TO BASIC TRAINING FOR CLERKS OF SESSION!

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Welcome to the office of Clerk of Session! You have joined a unique group of people by serving in this vital office in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This training has been prepared to help you learn the basics. In this module, you'll learn:

- ✓ Who can serve as a Clerk of Session
- ✓ How to use your Book of Order
- ✓ The responsibilities of the clerk
- ✓ How to take Minutes
- ✓ About the Church Rolls of Membership and Register
- ✓ Proper records retention
- ✓ And we'll explore some common questions

*“An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.” Proverbs 18:15 (ESV)*



# WHAT IS A CLERK OF SESSION?

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Clerks are servants of Christ's Church who follow His example of humility and service.

*“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45*

A Clerk of Session is the officer on the Session responsible for the minutes, records, and rolls of the congregation. The clerk, when not also serving as an active elder, has voice on matters pertaining to the minutes and the Clerk's Report but does not have a vote.

Clerks who are also serving a term as an active ruling elder on the Session have full voice and vote.



# WHO CAN SERVE AS A CLERK OF SESSION?

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A Clerk of Session must be a Ruling Elder, though it is not necessary for him or her to be in active service. The clerk shall be elected by the Session to a term determined by the Session. The terms may be unlimited unless your Church Bylaws or Operations Manual state otherwise. **G-3.0104**

While it's not constitutionally prohibited, the Clerk of Session **should not** be directly related to the Moderator (usually the Pastor). This may create a conflict of interest.



# SESSION MEETINGS

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There are two types of meetings:

1. **Stated Meeting** - This means that it is a regularly scheduled meeting. You may hear it called a “regular meeting” or a “business meeting”.
  - ✓ At a stated meeting, the Session may consider any business or items for action that fall within its responsibilities (the responsibilities of a Session are listed in G-3.0201).
2. **Special Meeting** - A Session meeting may also be a “special” meeting, sometimes referred to as a “called meeting”. A special meeting is called for a specific reason at a date and/or time that is outside of your normal meeting schedule.
  - ✓ When a special meeting is called, the reason for the meeting must be stated when the members are notified and only business pertaining to the reason for the special meeting may be considered.
  - ✓ The moderator may call a special meeting when necessary, if requested in writing by at least two members of the Session, or if directed by the Presbytery.



Note: Congregational meetings may also be stated or special.

# SESSION MEETINGS

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The moderator of the Session shall be the pastor of that congregation.

- ✓ If the moderator is unable to preside over a Session meeting, he or she may invite another minister who is a member of the same Presbytery to preside.
- ✓ If the congregation is without a pastor, the Presbytery will assign a moderator.

A Session (or congregation) cannot meet without its moderator. Informal gatherings or straw polls conducted without the moderator are out of order.



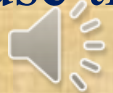
# USING THE BOOK OF ORDER

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## Getting to know the Church Constitution:

**The Book of Confessions** is Part 1 of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA). It contains faith statements and expositions of how we, as Presbyterian Christians, have understood and interpreted the Bible in the history of our denomination.

**The Book of Order** is Part 2 of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA). It contains the mandates, directives, and guidance as we order the mission and ministry of Christ's church. It's important that you know how to use the Book of Order.



# USING THE BOOK OF ORDER

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The Book of Order is divided into four sections:

- 1) **Foundations of Presbyterian Polity** – foundational principles, designated “F”
- 2) **Form of Government**, - constitutional requirements, powers, designated “G”
- 3) **The Directory For Worship**, - direction regarding worship, designated “W”
- 4) **Church Discipline** – concerned with church discipline & trials, designated “D”





# USING THE BOOK OF ORDER

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The index will help you to locate information.

Citations appear in the following format:

## **G-1.04 Categories of Membership**

The membership of a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA) includes baptized members, active members, and affiliate members.

### **G-1.0401 Baptized Member**

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



# USING THE BOOK OF ORDER

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When using the Book of Order, pay careful attention to the way items are worded. In the Book of Order:

1. SHALL and IS TO BE/ARE TO BE signify practice that is **mandated**,
2. SHOULD signifies practice that is strongly recommended,
3. IS APPROPRIATE signifies practice that is commended as suitable,
4. MAY signifies practice that is permissible but not required.



# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CLERK

The responsibilities of the Clerk are described in **G-3.0104** in the Book of Order.

The primary duties of a Clerk of Session are to maintain, preserve and share the minutes of a congregation, including:

- ✠ Session Minutes
- ✠ Congregational Meeting Minutes
- ✠ Minutes of Joint Meetings of Session with Trustees and/or Deacons



# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CLERK

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The Clerk also maintains the **Rolls and Registers** of a congregation, which include the:

- ✠ Roll of Baptized Members
- ✠ Roll of Active Members
- ✠ Roll of Affiliate Members
- ✠ Roll of Inactive Members (optional)
- ✠ And the register containing Installed Pastors, Ruling Elders, Deacons, Baptisms, Funerals, and Marriages.



# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CLERK

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The Clerk of Session should also have a working knowledge of:

- ✠ The Book of Order
- ✠ Robert's Rules of Order
- ✠ Church Bylaws, Operations Manuals, etc.
- ✠ How to send and receive communications\* on behalf of session, including Letters of Transfer

**\*Note:** The clerk often receives important news and information from the Presbytery on behalf of the Session. It is important that the clerk share this information with the moderator and Session.



# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CLERK

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There may be other responsibilities that vary by church such as:

- ✚ Contributing newsletter articles
- ✚ Assisting the moderator in keeping track of reports and motions for the agenda
- ✚ Creating a meeting agenda (in consultation with the moderator)
- ✚ Serving as the keeper of the church's bylaws, manuals and policies



# ANNUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

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The Clerk of Session is also responsible for the following reports to Presbytery and/or the Office of the General Assembly (OGA):

- ✠ Annual Session Minutes Review of Previous Year's Minutes, Rolls, and Register (Presbytery)
- ✠ Necrology (Presbytery)
- ✠ Clerk's Annual Questionnaire (Presbytery)
- ✠ Annual Statistical Report (OGA)

You'll receive a letter and/or email with information about these reports each year.



# TAKING MINUTES

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Taking minutes is an essential function of any clerk and it's important. These records are legal documents and should be written carefully and accurately.

## General Principles

- Focus on **actions/motions**, recording some discussion can be helpful but it shouldn't be the primary focus of the minutes
- Don't editorialize with your own comments or thoughts
- Simply state the record

## Recording of Motions

- Record the *final* wording of main motions, and what happened to them (passed, failed, postponed, etc.)
- Record even failed points of order or appeals





# WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE MINUTES

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All minutes shall include:

- ✠ The location of the meeting (church name)
- ✠ The date
- ✠ The type of meeting (stated or called)
- ✠ The name of the moderator
- ✠ The name of the clerk
- ✠ The time you begin and time you adjourn
- ✠ That the meeting was opened and closed with prayer (G-3.0105)



# WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE MINUTES

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## ⚪ Declaration of quorum

- It's your job to declare a quorum. It's also your job to know what the quorum is for your session (varies by each church, and should be in your bylaws or manual).

## ⚪ When appropriate, election of clerk and/or treasurer

## ⚪ Attendance, including guests

## ⚪ Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting

### G-3.0204

- If corrected, don't include the changes, just note that they were corrected



# WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE MINUTES

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⚠ Summaries of Oral Reports of: (written reports may be attached to the minutes instead)

- Clerk's Report
  - Should contain correspondence, announcements, and report of the serving of the Lord's Supper, in addition to listing of baptisms, marriages, and any changes in membership rolls.
- Treasurer's Report
- Pastor's Report (or other staff)
- Reports of Committees and Commissions



# WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE MINUTES

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## The minutes shall also include:

- ✠ Election of Elder Commissioners for Presbytery meetings **G-3.0202**
- ✠ Reports of Elder Commissioners from Presbytery meetings **G-3.0202**
- ✠ Approval of Communion dates **G-3.0205, W-2.4012**
- ✠ Approval of Baptisms and dates **G-3.0201b, W-2.3011**
- ✠ Examination of new members and the manner in which they were received (transfer, reaffirmation, or Baptism **G-3.0201c**)
- ✠ Removal of members by transfer, inactive, request, or death



# WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE MINUTES

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## Annual Events for the Minutes:

- ✠ Election, Training, Examination and Installation/Ordination date for incoming Ruling Elders **G-2.0402**
- ✠ Approval of the Budget **G-3.0205**
- ✠ Report of annual review of compensation for pastor and all other staff **G-2.0804**
- ✠ Session review of the Clerk's Annual Statistical Report. **G-3.0202f**



# WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE MINUTES

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## Annual Events for the Minutes Continued:

- ✠ Full Financial Review or Audit **G-3.0113**
- ✠ Review of Insurance **G-3.0112**
- ✠ Review of Church Membership Rolls **G-3.0204**
- ✠ Review of the work of the Trustees, Deacons, Committees, and all other Church Organizations **G-3.0201c**



# MINUTES: TIPS & TRICKS

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- ✚ You'll want to have a copy of the Session Records Review Checklist as you're completing the minutes; this will help you make sure you've got everything you need come review time.
- ✚ Complete a first draft the minutes as soon after the meeting as possible (while the details are fresh in your mind).
- ✚ Send your draft of the minutes to the Moderator for proof-reading before sending to the Session.
- ✚ Sample Minutes, the Records Review Checklist, and many other resources are available from the Stated Clerk.



# FINALIZING THE MINUTES

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- ⚠ Minutes of Session are signed by the Clerk of Session or the Moderator. Minutes of a congregational meeting are signed by the Clerk or Moderator.
- ⚠ The pages in the official Minutes of Session Book are numbered (beginning to end). This is to prevent the insertion of counterfeit pages.
- ⚠ Blank pages (including the reverse side of a page) or large blank spaces should be labeled “Page Intentionally Left Blank” or “Balance of Page Left Blank”. Again, this is to prevent the insertion of counterfeit pages.





# THE CHURCH ROLLS

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The Rolls Contain the Official Membership Record of your Church.

- ✠ Rolls can only be changed by an action of the Session, but the Clerk maintains them and keeps them up to date.

## **There are 3 rolls required by the Book of Order:**

1. Baptized Members – Those who have been baptized but have not made a public profession of faith (often infants and children who have not completed confirmation).

- In the Roll of Baptized Members, record their name, date, and church where their baptism occurred.
- Remove people from this roll once they make a public profession of faith or once they leave the church.

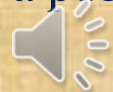


# THE CHURCH ROLLS

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2. Active Members – A baptized person who makes a profession of faith and commitment to their local church.

- Record their Name, Date received, Method of Reception (Baptism/Profession, Reaffirmation, Transfer), Date of Removal and Method of Removal (transfer, death, request of member, lack of activity).
  - Unless a member moves, the period of inactivity prior to removal must be at least 2 years, and the session “shall seek to restore members to active participation and shall provide written notice before deleting names due to member inactivity”.
  - If a person joins your church as an Active Member that has previously baptized children (at another church), the names of the children are placed on your Baptized Roll until they make a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ.



# THE CHURCH ROLLS

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3. Affiliate Members – an active member of another church (like a college student or snowbird). May have “affiliate membership” in your church as well, giving them dual membership at the same time.

- Record their Name, Date of Affiliation, Home Church, Date of Renewal and Date of Return to Home Church

4. Inactive Members - This is no longer a requirement, but many sessions still opt to keep an inactive roll.



# THE CHURCH REGISTER

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## Registers Required by the Book of Order:

### Baptisms

- Register of Infant and Adult Baptisms shall include name, parents' names (if applicable), and date of birth and date of baptism of those being baptized.

### Ruling Elders

- 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.



# THE CHURCH REGISTER

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## Deacons

- 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.

## Pastors

- 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.



# THE CHURCH REGISTER

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## Marriages

- Prior to 2011, The Book of Order required sessions to maintain a register of marriages. Beaver-Butler Presbytery strongly encourages sessions to keep this record.
- 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.



# PRESERVING YOUR RECORDS

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- Your Minutes of Session, Rolls and Register must be stored in the prescribed Westminster Minutes of Session Binder and the Westminster Church Register Binder. These are available from Cokesbury. These binders use special acid free paper and are archival quality. You'll bring **BOTH** of these binders to the Presbytery Records Review each year.
- Your binders should be stored in a fireproof container.
- **Create backup records.** Store backup records electronically **and** on different media formats. These can be stored at the church **and** additional copies may be stored in another location.
- You may also make photocopies of the records. Caution: vinyl binders are bad for long term storage. They give off a gas that degrades the paper records.
- The Presbyterian Historical Society has many resources regarding the preservation of your records. <https://www.history.pcusa.org> 

# RECORDS RETENTION

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Minutes	permanent
Registers	permanent
Annual reports	permanent
Bylaws/charters	permanent
Incorporation records	permanent
Annual budgets	permanent
Annual audits	permanent
Annual financial statements	permanent
Subject files: correspondence, minutes, or other records surrounding subject matter of continuing administrative or legal value, or comprising information on the mission, vision, and actions of the congregation	permanent
Manuals/handbooks	permanent
Newspapers/newsletters	permanent





# RECORDS RETENTION

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Loan agreements	satisfaction + 20 years
Property appraisals	20 years after sale
Records of sale	20 years after sale
Personnel records	employment + 7 years
Contracts	active + 6 years
Accounts payable	7 years
Bank statements	7 years
Canceled checks	7 years
Donations (regular, weekly)	7 years
Expense reports	7 years
FICA / W-2 records	7 years
Payroll records	7 years
Petty cash records	7 years
Receipts of purchases	7 years



# RECORDS RETENTION

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Accounts payable invoices	3 years
Accounts receivable records	3 years
Bank deposit slips	3 years
Cash receipt records	3 years
General/routine correspondence	3 years
Travel plans/arrangements	3 years
Periodic financial statements	2 years
Data for updating Mailing lists	1 year
Invitations	1 year
Meeting notices	1 year
Reference/Resource materials	While active



# CHURCH DISCIPLINE

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In the event that a complaint is filed with the Clerk of Session against a member of the church, including Ruling Elders (but not Ministers), the Session serves as the judicial commission.

If a complaint is filed or if you feel you may need to exercise church discipline, contact the Stated Clerk for assistance.



# CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

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- ⚔ Minutes of all congregational meetings shall be included in the Session Minutes binder along with Session minutes in one chronological order. They shall be numbered accordingly.
- ⚔ The installed Pastor shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the congregation.
- ⚔ The Clerk of Session shall serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If the Clerk of Session is unable to serve, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting.



# CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

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✠ The business of a congregational meeting may **only** include the following:

- electing ruling elders, deacons, nominating committees and trustees;(always allow for nominations from the floor: **G-2.0401**)
- calling an installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor;
- changing existing installed pastoral relationships (approving changes to the terms of call of a pastor or requesting, consenting to, or declining to consent to dissolution;
- buying, mortgaging, or selling real property;
- requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption to officer term limits as permitted in the Constitution (**G-2.0404**).
- approving a plan for the creation of a joint congregational witness, or amending or dissolving the joint congregational witness (**G-5.05**).



# COMMON QUESTIONS

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## **Q. Does the Pastor have a vote on the Session?**

A. Yes, the Pastor is a member of the Session and has voice and a vote.

## **Q. What if we are unable to elect officers?**

A. If your church is unable to elect officers, you may request the Presbytery's Ministry and Vocation Committee grant approval to waive the constitutional rotation of officers. Your congregation will need to approve this plan during a congregational meeting first.

## **Q. Do we need permission to lease church property?**

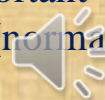
A. Presbytery permission is required if you lease any portion of your church building, or any property owned by the church at all for more than 5 years. This includes leasing gas rights and renting an unused manse). *G-4.0206*

## **Q. Do you have other questions or need resources?**

A. We're here to help! Just contact the Stated Clerk or call The Presbytery Center.

## **Q. Are there additional learning opportunities?**

A. YES! There is an additional training video with a more in-depth explanation of the important topics covered here AND the Presbytery hosts a Leadership Training Event every year (normally in March) that includes training seminars for Clerks of Session.



# CONTACT US

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## Beaver-Butler Presbytery Office

### Physical Address

134b South Main Street  
Zelienople, PA 16063

### Mailing Address

P.O. Box 279  
Zelienople PA, 16063

### Phone

(724) 452-7515

### Office Hours

Monday – Thursday from 9:30am to 1:00pm

### Website

[beaverbutler.org](http://beaverbutler.org)



# NEED TO CONTACT THE STATED CLERK?

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**Rev. Randall K. Clow**  
**Stated Clerk**

Mailing Address\*

New Bethlehem Presbyterian Church  
183 New Bethlehem Church Road  
Aliquippa, PA 15001

Phone

(724) 378-3751

Email

[statedclerk@beaverbutler.org](mailto:statedclerk@beaverbutler.org)

\*You may also send mail to the Presbytery Office in Zelienople.





