

POV Guide for Session Clerks

The following notes are intended as a guide for clerks of session in maintaining and recording the actions of sessions. These notes are hoped to be reasonably complete and cover most activities of session. When a particular item is required to appear in the minutes, a citation from the "Form of Government" of the **Book of Order** is given or a citation from **Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised**¹. Those source documents should be consulted to ascertain the underlying requirement. In many instances the requirement is to accomplish a broad goal rather than to record the derived activity listed below.

One may view the session's minutes as an extension of the Acts of the Apostles, recording the continuing proclamation of the Good News to the world [see Luke 1:1-4]. In that sense, parliamentary procedure provides the form by which Presbyterians choose to document our being the Church of Jesus Christ in and to the world [c.f. G-3.0200].

The months for doing annual tasks listed in the last several sections of these notes are for illustration only. A particular congregation may wish to space the tasks listed differently or work on a different fiscal calendar; June through May for example, rather than January through December. Similarly the names of committees are only illustrative. A particular session may choose to have different committees perform these tasks, create temporary task forces, or work as a committee of the whole. The Clerk of Session with the Pastor/Moderator should modify this list according to the local customs of the particular congregation using the most recent editions of the **Book of Order** and **Robert's Rules of Order**. One bit of advice: record the minutes as soon as humanly possible so nothing is forgotten.

I. Include in the Minutes for each meeting

A. *The body that is meeting and kind of meeting Stated or Special [RRoONR §47]*

For example:

1. Stated Congregational Meeting
2. Special Congregational Meeting
3. Stated Session Meeting
4. Special Session Meeting
5. Joint Meeting of Session and Board of Deacons [G-6.0405]

B. *Date, time, and place of meeting. [RRoONR §47]*

C. *Name of the moderator and elders present, elders excused or absent. [RRoONR §47]*

1. Include the names of Deacons present for joint meetings of Session and the Board of Deacons.
2. Also include the names of guests or observers. This is particularly important when members are interviewed or when a job action is taken by the Session.

D. *Opening and closing of the meeting with prayer [G-9.0301b]*

E. *Reading and approval of minutes of the previous meeting and disposition [RRoONR §47]*

¹ *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 10th Edition (Scott Foresman, 2000). The **Book of Order** [G-9.0302] specifies that the most recent edition shall be used except where the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) provides otherwise.

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1. The minutes of congregational meetings may be read and approved as the last item of business of that meeting. Alternately the Session shall read, correct, and approve the minutes and the clerk shall make a copy available to the congregation. [G-7.0307]

F. All main motions, substantial secondary motions, points of order, and appeals [RRoONR §47].

1. Main motions need to include the wording as passed and who made the motion and if the motion was amended. The name of the person seconding need not be recorded.
2. It is a good practice to record the substance of any discussion. Imagine Acts 11:1-18 without the discussion of Peter's vision. 'Peter moved to accept that the Gentiles at Caesarea received the Holy Spirit. The motion was approved unanimously by voice vote. The meeting ended with prayer.'
3. Clerks are expected to record the **action** of the body regardless of their opinion on matters discussed. Try to steer away from judgment comments in the minutes or recording the whole discussion. Rather choose your words well, be succinct, and remember, this is the record for future generations.
4. All votes taken shall be recorded with the method (secret ballot, show of hands, ...) and the results of the vote when tallied or the names if a roll call vote is taken.

G. Significant reports received should be entered and spread upon the minutes. Other reports received may be summarized.

Examples would include: The annual budget [G-10.0102i], a pastor's terms of call, overtures sent to presbytery, and policies adopted by the session/congregation.

H. Time meeting is adjourned [RRoONR §47]

I. Signature of Clerk of Session [G-7.0307]

1. The clerk shall sign the minutes of all meetings [RRoONR §47].
2. For Congregational meetings, the moderator shall also sign the minutes [G-7.0307].

II. Items for the Clerk's Report to session

A. Significant correspondence received and disposition, such as: Requests for transfer, letters from presbytery, and letters from other churches.

For example: A letter received from the General Assembly Council Chair thanking the congregation for General Mission giving was referred to the Stewardship committee to share with the congregation.

B. Report of members received by the congregation in worship and baptisms performed. [G-10.0102b]. Also record in the register [G-10.0302a].

Elder Doe moved that the congregation receive John and Jane Smith as new members by letter of transfer and that their child Jeff Smith receive the Sacrament of Baptism as part of a regular worship service on June 14, 1998.
An alphabetical roll, while not specifically required, is recommended to aid in finding members in the chronological roll.

C. Report that the Lord's Supper is celebrated at least quarterly, optionally including the number of persons who received the sacrament [G-10.0102d, W-2.4012a].

1. The Worship ministry team moved that the Holy Communion shall be celebrated on the first Sunday of every month during Ordinary Time, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord, Transfiguration, Passion/Palm Sunday, Maundy

Thursday, All Sundays of Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity, All Saints, and Christ the King. Approved by voice vote.

2. The Clerk reported that the Lord's Supper was celebrated on Sunday, June 7th, 1998 with 78 persons participating. Reverend John Smith officiated. (A table recording all of the celebrations for the year, as part of the annual report, may also be used.)

D. Report when a pastor or new officers have been ordained or installed. Also record in the register. [G-10.0302c.]

Having been elected by the congregation and following a period of instruction on the office of Elder by the Session, John Smith, Jane Doe, and Chris Long were examined. Smith, and Long have previously been ordained. Elder Miller moved that the examination be arrested and that Doe be ordained and all the candidates be approved for installation. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously by voice vote.

E. Report the results of the annual examination of the minutes and rolls of session by presbytery [G-9.0407c., G-10.0301, and G-11.0103x].

The Clerk reported that the Minutes of Session and Register were examined and approved with out exception by the Presbytery on Tuesday, May 19, 1998.

III. Other regular reports

A. Report of the treasurer. [G-10.0401c.]

B. Report of commissioner(s) to presbytery. [G-10.0102p.(1).]

C. Opportunities for evangelism and equipping members to articulate their faith. [G-10.0102a & f.]

For example, the report of the Christian Education committee.

D. Participation in mission of the whole Church. [G-10.0102c & h.]

Report of stewardship and mission interpretation committee

E. Report of pastoral care provided by pastor, elders, deacons, and members. [G-10.0102e.]

1. Deaths in the congregation and funerals performed [G-10.0302b(8)] (also record in the Register).
2. Approval of celebration of Holy Communion at weddings, weddings in the Service of the Lord's Day, or if a marriage is unwise. [W-4.9003, W-4.9002b, and G-10.0302c(1)] (also record in the Register).

F. Regular training of members of session. [G-10.0102k.]

G. Report on marriages of church members, marriages conducted by the pastor(s), or marriages performed on church property. Also record in the register [G-10.0302c.(1)].

H. Review the minutes of the board of deacons and/or the board of trustees when separate from the session [G-10.0102m].

IV. Early each year

A. Approve sending the annual report to Presbytery [G-10.0102 p(7)]. (Please, please, please, submit your statistical report and information by the end of January.)

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- B. Session Elect a Clerk**
- C. Session Elect a Treasure [G-10.0401].**
- D. Session Elect Presbytery Commissioners and report their names and contact information to the presbytery office.**
- E. Set dates for communion throughout the year [W-2.4012].**
- F. Receive the report of Audit Committee or outside auditor [G-10.0401d].**
- G. Hold annual joint meeting with Deacons, if applicable [G-6.0404 & G-6.0405, G-10.0102m]. If you do not have deacons, the elders are then also responsible for those duties [G-6.0402a, G-6.0407]. It would be appropriate for the session in that case to determine how they will fulfill these duties in addition those outlined for elders [G-6.0304].**
- H. Record minutes of congregational meeting [G-7.0307] and if a separate corporation exists [G-7.0401], the minutes of the corporate meeting [G-7.0403c.]. Minutes are to be signed by both the Clerk and the Moderator.**
- I. Review the Presbytery of Ohio Valley's Annual Review of Session Minutes and Records checklist so you may be attentive to what needs to be in your minutes and records for the coming year.**
- J. Risk Management: Be mindful that each year your church needs to file with the Indiana Secretary of State a renewal of incorporation. You need to do this for tax purposes and to be a recognized legal entity. Also review your insurance and make sure it is up to date with coverage to replace at today's market value your property, building, and contents. After you have installed your new elders, make sure they have signed the POV Sexual Misconduct Statement, and make record of it in the session minutes. The Statement is good for one term of office. Submit the annual incorporation and proof of insurance form to the Presbytery office so we may know in case of disaster or untoward events.**

V. Each Fall (September – November)

- A. Approve members to lead Church School classes [G-10.0102f].**
- B. Review composition of Session, Board of Deacons, and Trustees (as applicable) regarding ethnicity, age, sex, and disabilities with regard to the make-up of the congregation [G-10.0301].**

This is useful information for the nominating committee to have so that they can be aware of any under representations in the officers [G-4.0403]. The nominating committee shall provide a balanced slate [G-14.0201]. However, the congregation may make additional nominations from the floor and elect its own officers [G-1.0306]. If the make up of the session and board of deacons after election does not give fair representation from among its men and women to persons of all ages, racial ethnic members and disabled persons, then the session shall apply to the presbytery for a waiver [G-14.0202a.(1)].
- C. Ask Church Nominating Committee to report by next session meeting.**
- D. Annual Review of staff compensation [G-10.0102 m].**

Pastor, Secretary; Janitor; Church Music Director; Treasurer, ...
- E. Challenge the membership to exercise responsible Christian stewardship of money [G-10.0102h].**

F. Set the date of annual Meeting in November for election of elders and deacons, and review the pastor's terms of call, giving adequate notice of the meeting [G-7.0302a].

1. Public notice of congregational meetings shall be given on two successive Sundays [G-7.0303b, but see G-14.0205c when calling a pastor].
2. That public notice was given as required should be noted in the congregational meeting minutes as part of the opening paragraph. This could become significant if the meeting is later challenged.
3. The congregation may vote not to have a board of deacons [G-6.0407].
4. If a small church and sufficient leadership cannot be found, request waiver from rotation of officers [G-14.0202a.(3)].

G. Review the Active and Inactive rolls [G-5.0502 & G-10.0102s]. Also record on the Rolls.

1. In a large church the rolls might be divided so that a portion is reviewed each quarter or month.
2. Any Active Member who does not meet the Session's definition of participating in the work and worship of the congregation must be contacted and encouraged to resume active participation. A visit or phone call by an elder is the best way of doing this. Alternately the clerk may write a letter to such persons.
 - a) Offer to discuss any difficulties;
 - b) Invite their participation in the work and worship of the congregation;
 - c) Offer to assist them in finding a new church home, and
 - d) Warn that failing to respond to the letter within a year will result in transfer to the Inactive Roll (meaning loss of voting privileges).
3. After a year, and a vote of the Session, send a second letter informing those who have not resumed participation in the work and worship of the congregation of their being placed on the Inactive Roll explaining the loss of privileges to vote or hold office. This is a two-year period of discipline. A different elder should make a contact as described above. After two years on the Inactive Roll, the person may be removed from the roll of the church. This does not mean physical deletion from the rolls, but that they no longer receive mailings from the congregation nor may have voice or vote at meetings. They may attend worship and receive communion.

VI. Each Winter (December – January)

A. Record minutes of annual congregation meeting [G-7.0307].

B. Instruct and examine candidates for the office of elder and deacon after having been elected by the congregation [G-14.0205]. Even if the person has been previously ordained, the session is still required to examine the elders-elect before they install them to office. Set a date for their ordination and installation [G-10.0102 I]. Record ordinations in the Register (Churches with a separate Board of Trustees should record dates of service of Trustees in the Register.)

C. Solicit budget requests for the coming year from all committees or ministry teams.

D. Approve annual budget [G-10.0102 h]

E. Update rolls of Active and Inactive members [G-10.0102 s].

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F. Start preparing for making your annual report to the presbytery and filing statistical report.

G. Set the date of congregational meeting in January to make financial reports, giving adequate notice of the meeting.

1. A separate meeting is not required by the **Book of Order** but may be required by the congregation's bylaws.

H. Plan opportunities for designated giving for coming year [G-10.0102 h&i].

1. For example: The Stewardship committee moved that the following special offerings be received: January - Souper Bowl Sunday, February - Camp Scholarships, April - One Great Hour of Sharing, May - Witness offering, June - Blanket Sunday and Tools of Hope Sunday, September - Peacemaking, November - PW Thank Offering, December - Joy Offering.

I. Elect for the coming year: treasurer, committee chairs, clerk, and commissioner to Presbytery [G-10-0102p(1)].

1. Session members might want to submit first and second choices to the moderator who in would recommend assignments for the coming year. The Session would then receive, modify and adopt the assignments.

VII. Preserving your permanent records

1. The records of your church are an important testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit in your community. As such, you will want to take care of these records.
2. A heavy weight, Acid-Free paper with high cotton content should be used for important permanent records such as minutes and annual reports. Reports made on other paper should be photocopied onto Acid-Free paper (Most photocopier papers are Acid-Free.). Inserting other kinds of paper (especially newsprint) may damage adjacent pages as they deteriorate.
3. Do not use glue, tape, Post-it Notes® (some of the adhesive remains on the page even after the paper tag is removed) on permanent records. The glue will accelerate deterioration of the paper.
4. Do not curl or fold the paper or use staples, paper clips or other paper fasteners. These accelerate the deterioration of your records.
5. Do not consider electronic media (computer hard drives, floppy disks, CD-ROMs, etc.) a permanent form of record storage. Studies have shown that electronic media ages much quicker (tens of years) than paper (hundreds of years). Furthermore, the software and hardware used to create electronic records may not be available years from now. [For example: paper punch tapes and 8-inch floppies were state of the art in the early 1970's, and already are obsolete. Where as paper records last hundreds and perhaps thousands of years.]
6. Keep the Minutes and Rolls & Registers in sturdy binders with the name of the church on the outside so they will not be accidentally lost. Keep the minutes neat and well organized for your great grand children to read when they are Clerk. Draw a line or two through any large unused portions of pages, such as at the end of reports photocopied into the official minutes, to thwart improper entries.
7. Minutes, Rolls and Registers, and other official records for which the Session no longer has a current need shall be deposited with the Department of History, 425 Lombard St., Philadelphia, PA 19147, phone 215-627-1852 [G-9.0406].

VIII. References

A. The Holy Scriptures consisting of the Old and New Testaments

B. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Part I, The Book of Confessions

Contained are eleven statements of what we believe as Christians that have been adopted by the Church starting with the Nicene Creed.

C. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Part II, The Book of Order

Paragraphs are numbered with a letter designating which section of the Book of Order, a dash separating the chapter number, and a period separating the paragraph number. Page numbers are not used so that passages may be discussed similarly to Bible chapter and verses.

1. Form of Government

This section of the Book of Order defines how we are to function together as a Church within our stated beliefs.

2. Directory for Worship

This section defines and recommends how we are to worship God within our stated beliefs. Note the use of descriptive language in this section gives Sessions great freedom in designing worship services.

3. Rules of Discipline

This section defines how we deal with conflict and discipline members who have not lived within our stated beliefs.

D. Roberts Rules of Order Newly Revised

The Book of Order mandates the most recent edition. However for most meetings, a summary will suffice.

E. Companion to the Constitution

Helps congregations and officers better understand constitutional provisions and issues. Available from Presbyterian Distribution Service: 1-800-524-2612.

F. Presbyterian Polity for Church Officer

Explains the system of Presbyterian governance, from sessions to the General Assembly.

G. Parliamentary Procedures in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

This brief summary of parliamentary procedure is available from Presbyterian Distribution Service: 1-800-524-2612

H. Risk Management for Churches - A self-directed Audit.

Christian Ministry Resources, P.O. Box 2301, Matthews, NC 28106. Telephone orders: 1-800-222-1840