

# Manual for Clerks of Session



*of the*  
**Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**  
**in the Presbytery of East Tennessee**

**2021 revised ed.**



# 1. Introduction

Welcome to the office of Clerk of Session!

You have joined a unique and important group of people in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Book of Order states that each governing council of the PCUSA shall have a moderator and a clerk (G-3.0104). The clerks of Presbyteries, Synods, and the General Assembly are called Stated Clerks. Those serving Sessions are called Clerks of Session.

As clerk, you will record a good deal of the history of your church as you write the session minutes. This is a great responsibility. It is important that you keep accurate records of all the proceedings in session meetings and in congregational meetings.

This manual has been prepared to provide Clerks of Session with information and examples to assist them in their work and to ensure that they have easily accessible information about what must be included in the session record books.

This manual has been prepared by the Presbytery of East Tennessee, drawing upon resources from the Presbytery of Western Reserve and the Presbytery of West Virginia, for whose shared resources and examples we express our sincere gratitude.

James McTyre  
Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of East Tennessee  
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## **2. The Office of Clerk of Session**

The Clerk of Session shall be an elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine (G-3.0104). The clerk shall be a Ruling Elder. The clerk may be a current member of the session, or may be an inactive elder. If the clerk is not a member of session, s/he may not make motions nor vote. Session may ask the clerk to be its parliamentarian and shall give the clerk voice in matters pertaining to the minutes and the clerk's report.

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

When the pastor or elders need a strong lay leader, the clerk of session is the "first among equals." This responsibility flows to the clerk not because of any explicit statement in the Book of Order, but because the officer who receives the correspondence, keeps the records, and routinely discusses the work of the session with the pastor and all of the committee chairpersons to form the agenda and refer business, is the officer to whom they would take a problem. Presbyterian polity does not provide for any other lay officer to carry out these responsibilities.

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

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

### **3. Responsibilities at a Glance**

*Not all of these responsibilities are required in the Book of Order, G-3.0104. However, the session of your church will function more smoothly if you take responsibility for seeing that these tasks are done in a timely manner.*

1. Keep a full and accurate record of the proceedings of the session.
2. Keep the roll of session membership and attendance.
3. Arrange for the careful preservation of session records, making recommendation to the session for the permanent safe-keeping of its records.
4. Furnish extracts from the minutes when required by another governing council of the church.
5. Maintain and preserve rolls and registers required of session.
6. Be responsible for the preservation of the records of the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees.
7. Be familiar with the responsibilities of the session as described in the Book of Order.
8. Be sure that the annual statistical form requested by the General Assembly is completed accurately and returned to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery by the deadline noted.
9. Submit the session minute book to the Presbytery for review when requested.
10. Serve as secretary for meetings of the congregation, seeing that the minutes are received by session and are inscribed in the permanent session minute book.
11. Bring official correspondence to the attention of session, and respond as directed by the session.

12. Keep a list of deferred business, including all matters referred to a committee or a staff member for later report to session, and remind the appropriate persons(s) if not reported expeditiously.
13. Be prepared to respond to questions of parliamentary procedure in meetings if requested to be parliamentarian.
14. Receive and submit communications from/to other councils bodies.
15. Assist the moderator in preparing the agenda for session meetings, as requested.
16. Assist in church officer training when requested.
17. In consultation with the moderator, prepare a statement of highlights of session actions and reports following the meeting for information to the congregation (Note: Confidential matters or discussion should not be included.)

## 4. Guidelines for Session Minutes

### ***Minutes of each session meeting should include:***

1. Whether the meeting is a regular or special meeting
2. The name of the church, the place, date and time of the meeting
3. The name of the moderator of the meeting
4. The opening and closing of each meeting with prayer.
5. The names of Ruling Elders present at the meeting, the moderator, and the clerk.
6. The affirmation of a quorum. Sessions shall provide by rule for a quorum for meetings; such quorum shall include the moderator and either a specific number of ruling elders or a specific percentage of those ruling elders in current service on the session.
7. The approval of the agenda. In case of a special meeting, the call to the meeting stating the purpose becomes the agenda.
8. The approval of the minutes of the previous meeting. Any corrections of previous meeting minutes shall be listed.
9. Clerk's report: May include correspondence, announcements, and report of the serving of the Lord's Supper, in addition to listing of baptisms, marriages, changes in membership rolls.
10. Reports of pastor, other staff, the treasurer and committee chairpersons should be summarized in the minutes.
11. Motions made may include the name of the maker, or the name of the committee making the motion. It is not necessary to record the number of votes for or against a motion, unless a written or hand ballot is called for. Simply report that the motion passed or failed.
12. When a previous action of the session is referred to, the page on which it is recorded, or the date of the meeting at which it occurred, should be designated.
13. Attestation by signature of the clerk, and date of signature.

***When appropriate, include the following:***

14. The administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper must be reported at the next succeeding regular meeting. When the sacrament has been administered to those unable to attend public worship, the name of the minister officiating and the name of the elder or elders assisting should be noted. (This may be part of the clerk's report or the report of the worship committee.)
15. The administration of the Sacrament of Baptism at the next succeeding regular meeting, giving the full name of adults; the record of infants baptized, noting the name of the child, date of birth, and the names of the parents or the one(s) rightly exercising parental responsibility.
16. Names of those joining the church, date of joining.
17. The name of the church to which a certificate of transfer is granted, the name of the person transferred and the date of transfer.
18. Record the job descriptions for employed personnel, both clergy and non-clergy, as they are approved.
19. Name of elders elected to be commissioners to meetings of the Presbytery, and the exact period for which elected.
20. Record that commissioner(s) to presbytery reported to session. The report may be summarized.
21. In case of a sale, mortgage, gift or lease of property, the session records must show:
  - Name, address and legal description of the property
  - Name of buyer/lessee
  - Sale price
  - Loan amount purpose and terms, including the name of the lender
  - Lease terms and liability insurance
  - Concurrence of Presbytery



***Be sure the following is included each year:***

22. Approval of the annual budget
23. Record the annual review with each pastor of the adequacy of compensation.
24. Record the recommendation to be made to the congregation for changes in the terms of call for each pastor.
25. Note the annual review by the personnel committee (or other responsible body appointed by the session) of the adequacy of compensation of all paid staff.
26. Note whether new officers have received training and been examined.
27. Report the ordination and/or installation of elders and deacons at the next succeeding meeting.
28. Report the recognition of trustees (if any) at the next succeeding meeting.
29. Report that property and liability insurance has been obtained.

***Clerk's Annual Report***

30. A copy of the annual Statistical Report to the General Assembly of the PCUSA.
31. Record the date of the latest renewal of the articles of incorporation with the state. This must be renewed every five years.
32. Report in the minutes where records of the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees are kept.

## 5. Nuts & Bolts of Session Minutes

The method of recording session minutes is somewhat dependent on local circumstances. The following is the suggested procedure used by the majority of churches:

1. Clerk takes notes for the minutes at meeting.
2. Clerk writes the minutes and types or arranges for them to be typed.
3. Makes copies and distributes before the next meeting.
4. At the next meeting, the minutes are either approved as correct or corrections are made and the corrections are noted in that meeting's minutes.
5. Clerk types or arranges for someone to type approved minutes in the session permanent minute book.

### **Note:**

- Do not use erasures, whiteout, interlineations or footnotes; or insert in the records separate sheets of paper with written or printed matter on them.
- The minutes of congregational meetings, the annual report of the church treasurer or treasurers, and the annual statistical report required by General Assembly are to be included.

## **6. Congregational and Corporation Meetings**

Minutes of these meetings should be included in the session minutes book in one chronological order and should include:

1. Indication of whether the meeting is "regular" or "special"
2. If a "special meeting," the minutes shall include the call to the meeting, which will serve as the agenda
3. Name of the church
4. Date, time, and place of the meeting
5. Name of the moderator or presiding officer
6. Presence of a quorum
7. Opening and closing of the meeting with prayer
8. Record of all actions, whether adopted or lost
9. When applicable, action by the congregation on any change in each pastor's compensation, with terms of call specified
10. Minutes of the meeting of the congregation or corporation at which the annual financial reports are made should include:
  - Report of a full financial review of the financial records.
  - A complete report of income and expenditures for the year.
11. Provide the complete, itemized proposed budget adopted by the session for the coming year.
12. Details of the status of loans from General Assembly, Synod, or Presbytery, if any are outstanding.
13. If the congregation does not approve the minutes before adjournment, session may approve the minutes at its next scheduled meeting.
14. The clerk should sign the minutes, with the date of the approval.

## 7. 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 to oversee the maintenance of the Rolls.

Rolls are subordinate to minutes. Rolls are, essentially, shorthand lists of actions taken by session.

1. Names of members shall be placed upon, removed, or deleted from the rolls of the church only by order of the Session.
2. Session shall maintain the following membership rolls.
  - a) Baptized Members
  - b) Active Members
  - c) Affiliate Members
3. Baptized Member (G-1.0401)
  - a) 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.
  - b) Record the name, date of baptism, church where Sacrament of Baptism occurred. Names should be removed from this roll when profession of faith is made, or when the person moves from the community.
4. Active Members (G-1.0402)
  - a) 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.

- b) Record name, date received into membership, and method of reception. Record date of removal from the particular role and whether by death, transfer to another church, placed on inactive roll, or removed.
- 5. Affiliate Members (G-1.0403)
  - a) An Affiliate Member is one who is an active member of another church of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the church of active membership is located. Affiliate membership must be renewed every two years.
  - b) Record name, date of affiliation, name of home church, date of renewal, date of return to home church.
- 6. Roll books usually provide double pages for a chronological roll by date of reception into membership with columns for name, how received, name of church from which member transferred if that is the manner of reception, date of deletion from the active roll and reason—by death, inactivity, or transfer, in which case the name of the church to which the member is transferring is listed.
- 7. Pages may be provide in the same binder for an alphabetical listing of members along with the membership number that is assigned in the chronological roll.
- 8. Pages also may be provided for Baptized and Affiliate member rolls in the same binder.

## ***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.

1. Session shall maintain the following registers:
  - a) Marriages
  - b) Baptisms
  - c) Elders
  - d) Deacons
  - e) Pastors
2. 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.
3. Register of Infant and Adult Baptisms shall include name, parents' names, and date of birth of those being baptized.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. Register of Pastors shall include the names of pastors with dates of service.
7. All registers may be kept in the same binder, or in the binder with the rolls.

## **8. A Full Financial Review**

The Form of Government requires the following (G-3.0113):

A full financial review of all financial books and records shall be conducted every year by a public accountant or committee of members versed in accounting procedures.

Reviewers should not be related to the treasurer(s). Terminology in this section is meant to provide general guidance and is not intended to require or not require specific audit procedures or practices as understood within the professional accounting community.

This report may be a simple statement such as: "We have reviewed the financial statements of the various Funds of \_\_\_\_\_ Church and affiliated organizations for the year ending December 31, \_\_\_\_\_, as set forth in the \_\_\_\_\_ Annual Report of \_\_\_\_\_ Church. During the course of our review, nothing came to our attention that would require modification of these financial statements.'

## 9. A Sample Template for Session Minutes

Minutes of the  
Session of \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church, City Name, TN  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_, Time: \_\_\_\_\_, Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Meeting: (stated, called, adjourned, recessed)

Members Present: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, Moderator; \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk.

Opening Prayer was offered by the Moderator. The meeting was called to order.

The Clerk advised the Moderator that a quorum was present. The Moderator declared a quorum.

A Christ Candle was lit. The Moderator led the session in a Bible study about the responsibilities of church leadership.

The Clerk presented the minutes of the (session/congregational) meeting of \_\_\_\_\_ . The minutes were (corrected and) approved.

The Clerk reported correspondence received: \_\_\_\_\_.

The Clerk reported changes to the rolls: \_\_\_\_\_

Commissioners to higher governing councils reported.

The Pastor reported on his/her ministries and shared special prayer concerns. The Pastor led the session in prayer.

Committees and other entities reported the following: (describe).

Unfinished Business: The Clerk reminded the session of the following matter of business, unfinished from the previous meeting: \_\_\_\_\_.

New Business: The Clerk received items of New Business to be placed on the docket for the next meeting of session.

The Moderator led the session in a closing prayer.

The meeting was adjourned at: \_\_\_\_\_.



## 10. HELP!

The Presbytery of East Tennessee wants to assist you in your ministries as a Clerk. Contact your Stated Clerk or look for the helpful websites listed below.

- Visit the presbytery's website, [www.presbyteryeasttn.org](http://www.presbyteryeasttn.org),
  - look under Resources -> Clerks and Minutes.
  
- Contact the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, James McTyre
  - Phone: (865) 688-5581
  - Email: [james@presbyteryeasttn.org](mailto:james@presbyteryeasttn.org)