

SESSION MANUAL

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Revised by Kyle Walker, Stated Clerk of Grace Presbytery

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PREFACE:

Quotations from the Book of Order

Whenever the Book of Order is quoted, *the text will be in italic font*. Numbers following the letter F are sections in the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity. Numbers following the letter G are sections in the Form of Government. Numbers following the letter W are sections in the Directory for Worship. Numbers following the letter D are sections in the Rules of Discipline.

Disclaimer

This document does not render legal, accounting, or other professional services or opinions. If accounting or legal advice is needed, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

About the Author

Gerry Tyer is a retired minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA). He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Georgia (Philosophy), a Master of Divinity (Biblical Studies) and a Master of Theology (Counseling) from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Ministry (Worship and Mission) from Boston University. Gerry was the pastor of churches in West Collingswood (New Jersey), St. Paul (Minnesota) and Columbus (Ohio). For twenty years he served as the Executive Presbyter for the Presbytery of Tampa Bay (Florida). After Gerry retired in 2011, he was asked to serve as the Interim Synod Executive for the Synod of the Sun. Gerry is the author of *Seven Keys to an Effective Presbytery*. Gerry served as the Stated Clerk of Grace Presbytery (Dallas, Texas) through 2022. Gerry's hobbies include golf and teaching polity. He is married to Maxine Tyer, a retired mathematics teacher. They make their home in Dallas, Texas.

CHAPTER 1: FUNDAMENTAL DOCUMENTS

Book of Confessions

The Book of Confessions contains twelve **creeds, confessions of faith, catechisms, theological declarations, and statements of faith**. *In these statements the church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do. These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions. They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Reformed Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers.* [Book of Order, F-2.01]

Even though the confessions are important, *these confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him.* [F-2.02]

Book of Order

The Book of Order consists of four parts: Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, Form of Government, Directory of Worship, and Rules of Discipline.

The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity gives the foundations on which Presbyterianism is built: The Marks of the Church are *Unity ... Holiness ... Catholicity ... and Apostolicity of the Church*. [F- 1.0302a-d] The Notes of the Reformed Church indicate the true Church is present whenever *the Word of God is truly preached and heard, the Sacraments are rightly administered, and ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered*. [F-1.0303] The Great Ends of the Church are *the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world*. [F-1.0304]

The Form of Government describes how Presbyterians govern themselves, including how congregations are organized, what church membership means, the various “ordered ministries” of the church (Deacons, Ruling Elders and Ministers of Word and Sacrament), the four governing bodies or councils of the church (Session, Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly), ordination requirements, how pastoral relationships with churches are formed or dissolved, and the relationship between the church and civil authority, etc.

The Directory of Worship provides guidance concerning public and private worship, the theology behind our worship practices, how to order Sunday worship and other special services (including the Lord’s Supper and Baptism, weddings, funerals, ordinations, etc.)

Church Discipline provides a framework of due process to address errors made by the councils of the church (remedial cases), and to exercise authority over wrongdoing by individual Presbyterians (disciplinary cases). *Church discipline is not punishment; rather, it is the exercise of authority given by Christ, both to guide, control, and nurture the church’s members and for the correction and restraint of wrongdoing. The purpose of the discipline is to honor God by making clear the significance of membership in the body of Christ, to achieve justice and compassion for all participants involved, to correct or restrain wrongdoing in order to bring members to repentance and restoration where possible, to restore peace and unity in the body of Christ, and to secure the just, speedy, and economical determination of proceedings*. [D-7.0101]

Corporate Bylaws

The State of Texas permits churches to be incorporated as nonprofit religious corporations. The Book of Order says, *where permitted by civil law, each congregation shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained*. [G-4.0101] In order to form a Texas nonprofit religious corporation, a Certificate of Formation¹ must be filed with the Secretary of State. Corporate Bylaws² define the nature and governance of a corporation. The Bylaws describe the purpose, formation, authority, powers, duties, membership, meetings, officers, trustees, property, fiscal year, and seal of the corporation.

¹ Formerly called Articles of Incorporation in Texas. A sample Certificate of Formation is available upon request.

² Sample Bylaws are available upon request.

Manual of Administrative Operations

A session Manual of Administrative Operations is required by the Book of Order: *Each council [session] shall develop a manual of administrative operations that will specify the form and guide the work of mission in that council.* [G-3.0106] The Manual of Administrative Operations³ defines how a session organizes the ministry and mission of the church. It describes *practices required by the Constitution but left to councils [sessions] for specific implementation.*

Session Policies

Sessions must adopt and periodically review various policies: *All councils shall adopt and implement the following policies: a sexual misconduct policy, a harassment policy, a child and youth protection policy, and an antiracism policy. Each council's policy shall include requirements for boundary training which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse prevention training for its members at least every thirty-six months.* [G-3.0106]

Other policies are helpful to avoid “reinventing the wheel” each time an issue arises: Building Use Policy, Wedding Policy, Personnel Policy, Financial Policy, etc.⁴

Roberts Rules of Order

Parliamentary law is not really law as such, but a group of conventions, customs, common sense, and courtesy. *Roberts Rules of Order* gathered these into a formal guide to parliamentary procedure. However, sometimes “Bob’s Rules” are used when informality is appropriate. Nevertheless, whenever debate is required, the formality of *Roberts Rules of Order* protects the rights of everyone. Parliamentary procedure enables the session to be a deliberative assembly, to seek the will of God, and to witness to our faith in Jesus Christ. It is never an end in itself, and parliamentary gamesmanship is never appropriate.

Proxy voting is not permitted in Presbyterian meetings. [G-1.0501] The reason is Presbyterians believe the Holy Spirit speaks God’s will to assemblies of Christians (rather than single individuals). Therefore, if people are not present at the assembly, they cannot hear the debate and listen for the whisperings of the Holy Spirit. Thus, proxy voting is not allowed.

The will of the majority shall prevail, but the rights of the minority shall always be protected. Parliamentary principles balance individual conscience with the will of the majority. It takes seriously (1) the right to know (due notice); (2) the right to speak (rules of debate); (3) the right to vote (membership); and (4) the right to hold office (fair representation).

CHAPTER 2: THE SESSION

Who are Members of the Session?

The members of session include the moderator, all currently elected ruling elders, and all installed pastors and associate pastors of the church. [G-3.0201] All members may speak at

³ A sample Manual of Administrative Operations is available upon request.

⁴ Sample Sexual Misconduct and Child Protection policies are available upon request.

meetings and vote on motions. The moderator represents the unity of the church, preserves decorum, and protects the rights of everyone. The installed pastor is ordinarily the moderator. If the pastor is unable to moderate a meeting, or if there is no installed pastor, the moderator is determined by G-3.0201.

Are Session Meetings Open or Closed?

Session meetings are open to members of the congregation unless the session specifically votes to close the meeting to visitors. In 1980 the General Assembly adopted an Open Meeting Policy which interpreted the meaning of G-3.0203 and said in part: *That each judicatory [council of the church] ... be fully open for observation by the church within its bounds unless a specific matter, and only that specific matter, is voted to be considered in private or executive session.* [Minutes of the 1980 General Assembly, page 240] Therefore, session meetings are open to visitors unless the session votes to go into executive session to consider a specific issue. *The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly.* [G-3.0203]

Executive Session

If the session votes on a motion to go into in executive session, the motion is recorded in the minutes of the meeting stating the specific issue to be discussed and the time the session goes into executive session. The time the session exits executive session is also recorded. It is recommended that actions based on executive session discussion be taken after the session exits executive session so that any such actions may be part of the public minutes of the body and referenced later for historical clarity.

Duties of the Session

The session shall have 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. [G-3.0201] These duties include:

1. *providing a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, [with preaching the Word and celebration of the sacraments], education, and spiritual nurture...*
2. *planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world with the message of salvation and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship;*
3. *planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community in accordance with the prophetic witness of Jesus Christ;*
4. *initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to God's love and grace;*
5. *receiving and dismissing members; reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership;*
6. *providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship;*
7. *training, examining, ordaining, and installing those elected by the congregation as ruling elders and deacons;*
8. *encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources;*
9. *managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission;*
10. *directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation;*

11. *employing the administrative staff of the congregation;*
12. *leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church;*
13. *warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community;*
14. *serving in judicial matters* (in accordance with the Rules of Discipline)
15. *sessions have a particular responsibility to participate in the life of the whole church through participation in other councils* (such as participation in the presbytery). [G-3.0202]
16. *each council [session] shall obtain property and liability insurance coverage to protect its facilities, programs, staff, and elected and appointed officers.* [G-3.0112]

Session's Relationship to Other Organizations

All organizations of the congregation are accountable to the session. All such organizations should make financial, programmatic, and missional reports to session at least annually.

Trustees: The board of trustees is accountable to the session. *The ruling elders on the session of a congregation, who are eligible under the civil law, shall be the trustees of the corporation, unless the corporation shall determine another method for electing its trustees.* [G-4.0102] The powers and duties of the trustees are assigned by the session, defined in the corporate Bylaws or session's Manual of Administrative Operations, and/or listed in G-4.0101. The power of the trustees shall not infringe on the powers of session.

Other Corporations Established by the Congregation: In 1990 the General Assembly adopted an Authoritative Interpretation of G-4.0101 concerning the establishment of additional corporations by a congregation (such as a foundation, school, mission project, etc.) It requires all additional corporations (beyond the church's main corporation) to be set up under the authority of the session.

Since the tasks assigned to an additional corporation could be handled by simply establishing a committee, the General Assembly discouraged additional corporations: "A particular church establishing a second corporation must very carefully define every power and integrate such powers securely in the session. The second corporation must in every way be identical in session authority as is the primary corporation. In view of the difficulty in establishing and maintaining a second corporation in full accord with church law and civil liability, to which the church and participants in the second corporate activity may be exposed by reason of either not conforming to constitutional requirements of control in the organization, or the independent acts of the trustees via civil law, a particular church is well advised to avoid such a second corporation." (Item 21.172, Minutes of the General Assembly, 1990, Part I, p. 256)

Deacons: *Deacons may be individually commissioned or organized as a board of deacons. In either case, their ministry is under the supervision and authority of the session.* [G-2.0202]

Nominating Committee: *Ruling elders and deacons shall be nominated by a committee elected by the congregation ... the committee shall consist of at least three active members of the congregation, and shall include at least one ruling elder who is currently serving on the session. The pastor shall serve ex officio and without vote.* [G-2.0401] It is a committee of the

congregation, not the session. It does not report to session, although the committee may wish to consult with session.

Pastor Nominating Committee: *The session shall call a congregational meeting to elect a pastor [or associate pastor] nominating committee ... The committee's duty shall be to nominate a pastor [or associate pastor] for election by the congregation. [G-2.0802]* It is a committee of the congregation, not the session. Although the presbytery's Committee on Ministry works closely with the PNC throughout the process of calling a pastor [G-3.0307], the PNC has several points of contact with the session: (1) the PNC develops the Church Information Form, (2) the session approves the form and forwards it to the Committee on Ministry for final approval, (3) the PNC negotiates the terms of compensation of the new pastor in consultation with the session, (4) The PNC requests session to call a congregational meeting when it is ready to bring a candidate. The congregation (not the session) votes on the call of a new pastor. The presbytery has a detailed manual for conducting a pastoral search.

Personnel: Two duties of the session are (1) the annual review of *the minister's terms of call and [the session] shall propose for congregational action [G-1.0501] such changes as the session deems appropriate [G-2.0804]* and (2) *employing the administrative staff of the congregation. [G-3.0201c]*

The session has oversight of all the pastors and other administrative, programmatic, and missional staff. The session should establish a program whereby all personnel are annually reviewed. This responsibility may be delegated to a Personnel Committee and/or head of staff. Details should be written in a Personnel Policy. Sample copies of personnel policies are available upon request of the presbytery's Stated Clerk. However, the Personnel Committee and/or head of staff must report all decisions, actions, and recommendations to the session.

Other Organizations: One of the duties of the session is *managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission. [G-3.0201c]* This includes control of the use of all church property, including granting permission for the sanctuary to be used for weddings, church organizations, or outside groups. This duty can be delegated to a committee or to the church staff, as the session deems necessary.

The purpose of an outside organization using the church should not be contrary to the mission of the congregation or the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is wise to have a written contract for all outside organizations using the church building, stipulating any rental fee, honoraria for any staff utilized, maintenance standards, insurance coverage and rooms of the church to be used.

Decisions Requiring Session AND Presbytery Approval

Because connectionalism is a hallmark of the Presbyterian Church (USA), a few decisions require the approval of more than just the session or congregation.

1. For a person to begin steps toward ordination as a Minister of Word and Sacrament, both the session and the presbytery must give approval for enrollment as an "inquirer" under care of presbytery. [G-2.0605]

2. The congregation and the presbytery must give approval for mortgages and sales of church property. The presbytery takes on contingent liability whenever congregations enter into indebtedness. [G-1.0503 and G-4.0206a] The session may make a recommendation concerning these matters, but it is the congregation who decides.⁵
3. The congregation and the presbytery approval are needed for any lease of the church's property used for purposes of worship, and all leases of church property or a period of more than five years. [G-1.0503 and G-4.0206a] The session may make a recommendation concerning these matters, but it is the congregation who decides.⁶
4. Changes in the location or worship place of a church requires the approval of the session and presbytery. [G-3.0303b]
5. Changes of the name of a church requires the approval of the congregation and presbytery [G-3.0303b]
6. Approval of new calls, changes in the terms of call, and dissolutions of installed pastors and associate pastors require approval of the congregation (upon recommendation of the session) and presbytery. [G-2.09, G-2.08 and G-3.0804]
7. Approval of new temporary pastoral positions (i.e. Stated Supply, Temporary Supply, Interim Pastors, Parish Associates, etc), changes in the terms of compensation or position descriptions, and dissolutions require approval of the session (not the congregation) and presbytery. [G-1.0504]
8. Special meetings of the session may be called by (a) the moderator (b) the written request from two members of session, or (c) as directed by presbytery. [G-3.0203]
9. Special congregational meetings may be called by (a) the session (b) the presbytery, or (c) when requested in writing by one-fourth of the active members of the congregation. [G-1.0502]
10. The appointment of a substitute for the session moderator can be made by (a) the current moderator or (b) the presbytery. [G-1.0504] However, the substitute must be a Minister of Word and Sacrament or a Ruling Elder. [G-3.0201]
11. Waivers from the rule limiting ruling elders to a total of six consecutive years of service on the session must be approved by the congregation and the presbytery. [G-2.0404]

Business Proper for Congregational Meetings

Business to be transacted at meetings of the congregation shall be limited to matters related to the following: (a) electing ruling elders, deacons, and trustees;(b) calling a pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor; (c)changing existing pastoral relationships, by such means as reviewing the

⁵ There is an exception to this rule which is complicated and requires a detailed explanation which is available upon request.

⁶ Like above, there is an exception to this rule which is complicated and requires a detailed explanation which is available upon request.

adequacy of and approving changes to the terms of call of the pastor or pastors, or requesting, consenting to, or declining to consent to dissolution; (d) buying, mortgaging, or selling real property; (e) requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption as permitted in this Constitution [G-2.0404]; and (e) approving a plan for the creation of a joint congregational witness, or amending or dissolving the joint congregational witness [G-5.05].

Whenever permitted by civil law, both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting. [G-1.0503]

No business other than the matters listed above may be considered at a regular or special meeting of the congregation. Any motions or discussion of any other topic must be ruled out of order by the moderator. The annual budget is adopted by the session (not the congregation), but it should be reported as information to the congregation.

Reports to Session

Reports should be distributed to members of session in advance of the meeting so that members can come to the meeting prepared. Reports should contain three sections: (1) Motions to be voted upon by the session, (2) Actions taken by the committee under the authority delegated to them by the session (or listed in the Manual of Administrative Operations), and (3) Information the committee wants the session to know. If all reports are submitted in this format, it will make it easier for members to find the motions in the report which will be discussed and voted by the session.

Sample Report to Session⁷

Motions from the Committee on Kittens and Puppies:

1. That First Presbyterian Church amend the Manual of Administrative Operations such that Pit Bulls are prohibited from membership on all Session committees.
2. That First Presbyterian Church provide kennel service at every meeting of the congregation.
3. That First Presbyterian Church overture the Presbytery to provide educational material concerning the care and feeding of homeless stray animals.
4. That First Presbyterian Church approve the following actions taken by the Committee on Kittens and Puppies and received the items of information.

Actions by the Committee on Kittens and Puppies:

1. Adopted the attached policy statement concerning Cat Nip Substance Abuse.
2. Sent the following members to the National Association of Christian Veterinary Science annual meeting in Fire Hydrant, North Carolina: Sarah Shepherd, Jack Russell, and Dianne Boxer.

⁷ This is a tongue-in-cheek format for a committee report to session with three parts: (1) Motions from the committee for session to vote upon, (2) Actions taken by the committee fulfilling the duties delegated to it by the session, and (3) Information the committee wants to share with the session.

3. Consulted with the Worship Committee concerning the proper role of pets in Sunday worship services.

Information:

1. The following were present at the April 1, 2015 committee meeting: Ruling Elder G. Dane (Moderator), Ruling Elder Sarah Shepherd, Ruling Elder Jack Russell, Ms. Dianne Boxer, Ruling Elder Kitty Feline, and Mr. Tom Burmese.
2. All requests for resources from this committee should be emailed to the moderator at gdane@animalplanet.com.
3. The corrected minutes of the last meeting were approved after Rover ate the original version. The next meeting will be a called meeting as soon as wolves and lambs feed together.
4. There will be a church-wide workshop on June 16th in Fellowship Hall concerning the proper way to use live animals in our Christmas nativity scenes.
5. The new Dog and Cat Liturgical Calendars are available from the Church Resource Center. Call the Resource Center today to reserve your copy!
6. The Theology and Worship Ministry Unit of the General Assembly has recently published a new book by Dr. Rover Ruff, Professor of Canineology at Austin Seminary. The title is: *How Adam Named the Animals*. The Committee on Kittens and Puppies highly recommends this book.

CHAPTER 3: MINUTES, ROLLS AND REGISTERS

Minutes, Records and Archiving

Each council [session] shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings. Minutes and all other official records of councils [sessions] are the property in perpetuity of said councils. [G-3.0107] There shall be rolls of baptized, active, and affiliate members in accordance with G-1.0401, G-1.0402 and G-1.0403. [G-3.0107a]

Session minutes should contain mainly a record of what was done at the meeting, not what was said by the members. The Clerk of Session should prepare a draft of the minutes and circulate the draft to the members of session prior to the next meeting of the session. After the minutes have been approved, an original copy of the minutes should be prepared on acid-free paper, signed by both the clerk and moderator, and kept in a substantial binder. Every page should be numbered. The minutes should never reflect the opinion of the Clerk of Session, favorable or otherwise, on anything said or done.

Each year, following presbytery's review of the minutes, the minutes (along with the presbytery's certification of review) could be bound in a volume prepared by a bookbinder. Copies of this volume could be made for routine use by the session, but the original should be archived in a temperature and humidity-controlled depository with protection against fire, weather, and other hazards.

Digitized minutes could also be kept by the Clerk of Session for routine use and reference. However, all permanent records should be on acid-free paper and archived – not kept

electronically. As new technologies are adopted, the kind of technology used to store old records may become incompatible with new technologies and thereby unrecoverable. Even though it is low-tech, acid-free paper properly archived is still the best form of record retention.

What Should (and Shouldn't) be in the Minutes?

The minutes of typical session meetings should indicate:

1. the name of the church; the date, time, and location of the meeting; attendance (members present, excused or absent and visitors); whether a quorum was present; that the meeting was opened and closed with prayer, and whether it was a regular or special meeting. If it was a special meeting, the call to the meeting specifying the purpose should be included in the minutes.
2. approval of the minutes of the previous meeting (as presented or as corrected)
3. approval of the docket
4. the report of the Clerk of Session (or appropriate committee or staff member), including
 - a. a list of celebrations of the Lord's Supper approved by the session (with the dates, places, and those officiating)
 - b. a list of baptisms approved by the session (with the dates, places and those officiating, the full names of adults baptized, the maiden name of married women, the record of infants baptized, noting the name of the child, date of birth, and the names of the parents or sponsors) [W-3.0404]
 - c. a list of weddings (with the full names of brides and grooms) and funerals
 - d. approval of new members received by the session (with full names and the manner of their reception: (a) by profession of faith, or (b) previously baptized, or (c) by profession of faith and baptism, or (d) by re-affirmation of faith, or (e) by letter of transfer, along with the name of the church from which received)
 - e. approval of members dismissed to other congregations by the session (with the name of the church where a certificate of transfer is granted, the full name of the person transferred with the date of transfer, together with names of baptized children, if applicable)
 - f. approval of members removed from the roll by the session. *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.* [G-3.0204a]
5. approval for the use of the church building (including weddings and funerals)

6. names of ruling elders elected as commissioners to meetings of the presbytery, and a summary of their reports from the meetings
7. report of the congregation's decision concerning any sale, mortgage, gift or lease of property, giving the name, address, and legal description of the property; legal name of buyer/lessee; sale price or terms of the lease; loan amount, purpose and terms, including the name of the lender; lease terms and liability insurance
8. all main motions and any amendments (with the name of the maker of the motion) along with the vote (either "unanimous" or number of those in favor, opposed, and abstentions – if a count was made)
9. all points of order and appeals, whether sustained or lost, together with the reasons given by the moderator for his or her ruling
10. reports given by committees, organizations, or individuals. However, the content of a report without a motion need not be included, unless the session votes for it to be entered into the minutes (for clarity or for historical purposes)
11. the name and subject of a guest speaker (but not a summary of the remarks)
12. the time of adjournment the meeting was closed in prayer

Annual Items to be Included in the Minutes

It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to see that the following is recorded in the minutes every year.

1. approval of the annual budget [G-30205], and the distribution of the church's benevolences [G-3.0205]
2. annual review of each pastor concerning the adequacy of compensation [G-2.0804]
3. recommendations made by the session to the congregation for changes in the terms of call for each pastor
4. annual review of the adequacy of compensation of all staff
5. formation of the Congregational Nominating Committee, and list of new officers nominated and elected by the congregation [G-2.0401]
6. report that new elders and deacons have received training and been examined [G-3.0201c]
7. ordination and/or installation of ruling elders and deacons
8. report of trustees and corporate officers elected
9. a summary of the church's current property and liability insurance [G-3.0112]

10. report of the annual financial review or audit with comments [G-3.0113]
11. election of the Clerk of Session [G-3.0104] and church treasurer [G-3.0205]
12. annual review of session minutes and church rolls by the presbytery [G-3.0108a]
13. approval of curricula and teachers for the educational program [G-3.0201c]
14. a summary of the Annual Statistical Report sent to the General Assembly [G-3.0202f]
15. minutes of all congregational and corporation meetings [G-1.0501]
16. summary of the session's oversight of the ministry of the deacons [G-3.0201]
17. review of the session's Sexual Misconduct Policy and Child Protection Policy [G-3.0106]

Rolls and Registers

A roll is a record of information which changes from time to time (“rolling” so to speak), such as a membership roll. A register records events (baptisms, marriages, ordinations, installations, deaths) and does not change. A name is never removed from a register. It is a permanent record. Rolls on the other hand will change frequently. Once a year (typically at yearend) the rolls are recorded in the session minutes. All information in the registers should be cross-referenced in the session minutes.

Three Rolls should be maintained by the Clerk of Session (or committee or staff member appointed by the session): baptized members, active members, and affiliate members.

1. **A Roll of Baptized Members:** *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 the pastoral care and instruction of the church, and may participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.* [G-1.0401] Baptized members are children or young people who have been baptized in a Christian church (not necessarily a Presbyterian Church) with the Trinitarian formula of baptism, but who have not been received as active members. Names should be moved from this roll to the active member roll when profession of faith is made or removed from this roll when the person moves from the community.
2. **A Roll of Active Members:** *An Active member is a person 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 this church, and participates in the church's work and worship ... The session shall have responsibility for preparing those who would become active members of the congregation.* [G-1.0402]
3. **A Roll of Affiliate Members:** *An affiliate member is a member of another congregation of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the congregation of membership is situated, has presented a*

certificate of good standing from the appropriate council or governing body of that congregation, and has been received by the session as an affiliate member. An affiliate member may participate in the life of the congregation in the same manner as an active member except that an affiliate member may not vote in congregational meetings or be elected to ordered ministry or other office in the congregation. [G-1.0403] Example of affiliate members would be a college student living in the community while attending school, or a retiree who lives in the community for part of each year. The roll should include the name of the person, date of affiliation, name of home church, date of renewal, and date of return to home church.

Four Registers should be maintained by the Clerk of Session (or staff member or committee appointed by the session). Additional registers may also be required as the session may deem necessary (such as a Register of Marriages). [G-3.0204b]

1. **A Register of Baptisms** authorized by the session
2. **A Register of Ruling Elders** elected, ordained, and installed by the congregation
3. **A Register of Deacons** elected, ordained, and installed by the congregation
4. **A Register of Installed Pastors** with their dates of service

Checklist for Annual Review of Session Records

<u>SESSION MINUTES</u>		Page Number(s) in Minutes (Not Dates)
Items Required by the Book of Order		
1	Date, time, and location of each stated (regular) meeting of session. The session must meet at least quarterly each year. (G-3.0203)	
2	Date, time, and location of each called (special) meeting and who called it. (G-3.0203)	
3	Quorum declared and attendance listed: all members present, absent, excused and any guests present. (G-3.0203) A quorum is fifty percent of the members plus one unless otherwise stated in session's Manual of Administrative Operations.	
4	Approval of minutes of previous meeting including all motions, actions, and reports (or summaries) submitted to the session (Roberts Rules §48)	
5	Prayer at the beginning and end of each meeting (G-3.0105)	
6	Clerk of Session (or Moderator) signature at the end of each meeting's minutes (Roberts Rules §48)	
7	Minutes of congregational meetings should be included in the session minute book along with the signature of the Clerk of Session (G-3.0204)	
8	Session authorizing the permanent storage of records in the Presbyterian Historical Society archive or other secure location (G-3.0107)	
9	Summary of the General Assembly Annual Statistical Report as approved by session (G-3.0202f)	
10	Evidence of annual reports (or summaries) from congregational groups received by the session. (G-3.0108)	

<u>SESSION MINUTES</u>		Page Number(s) in Minutes (Not Dates)
Items Required by the Book of Order		
11	Evidence of a full annual financial review of all financial books and records conducted by a public accountant or committee of members versed in accounting procedures. Reviewers should not be related to the treasurer(s). (G-3.0113)	
12	Annual budget showing income sources, operating expenses, and mission funds recipients (G-3.0205)	
13	Income and expense reports (G-3.0113 and G-3.0205)	
14	Receipt and expenditures of special funds such as memorial funds, investments, and endowments (G-3.0113 and G-3.0205)	
15	Loans approved and a report of plans for repayment (G-3.0205 and G-4.0206)	
16	Election of ruling elders as commissioners to meetings of the presbytery (G-3.0202a)	
17	Reports to session from commissioners to meetings of the presbytery (G-3.0202a)	
18	Items of communication from the presbytery reported to the session (G-3.0202c)	
19	Session authorization of Baptisms (which should precede the baptism) (W-3.0403)	
20	Dates and names of people baptized (recorded after the baptism) (W-3.0403 and G-1.0401). This information should be also recorded in the Register of Baptized Members.	
21	Dates when session authorized the Lord's Supper (which should precede celebrations of communion) (W-3.0410)	
22	Dates when the Lord's Supper were celebrated (recorded after the services) (W-3.0410)	
23	Dates and names of newly elected ruling elders examined and trained by the session (G-3.0201c) This information should also be recorded in the Register of Ruling Elders.	
24	Dates and names of newly elected deacons (if any) examined and trained by the session (G-3.0201c) This information should also be recorded in the Register of Deacons.	
25	Session approval of Church School teachers and leaders – or date session delegated this authority (G-3.0201c)	
26	Session approval of the use of the church building and property by outside groups – or date session delegated this authority (G-3.0201c)	
27	Session approval of contracts. (G-3.0201c and G-4.0206)	
28	Congregation review of the compensation for the installed pastor, co-pastors and/or associate pastors (G-1.0503c)	
29	Session review of compensation for temporary pastors (i.e. interim pastors, interim associate pastors, stated supplies, temporary supplies, parish associates) (G-1.0503c)	
30	Work of the pastor, co-pastors and associate pastors reviewed by the session, and feedback given to them – or date session delegated this authority (G-2.0504a)	
31	Work of all employees reviewed, and feedback given to them – or date session delegated this authority (G-2.0504b)	
32	Actions and reports concerning Inquirers and Candidates under the care of the session (G-2.0605)	
33	Dates and names of new members received by the session (G-1.0303) This information should also be recorded in the Roll of Active Members.	
34	Session review of the Roll of Active Members (G-1.0402 and G-3.0201c)	

<u>SESSION MINUTES</u>		Page Number(s) in Minutes (Not Dates)
Items Required by the Book of Order		
35	Session review of the Roll of Affiliate Members (if any) (G-1.0403)	
36	Adoption or review of the session's Manual of Administrative Operations (G-3.0106) A sample Manual of Administrative Operations is available upon request from the Stated Clerk.	
37	Adoption or review of the session's Child and Youth Protection Policy (G-3.0106) A sample Child and Youth Protection Policy is available upon request from the Stated Clerk.	
38	Adoption or review of the session's Sexual Misconduct Policy (G-3.0106) A sample Sexual Misconduct Policy is available upon request from the Stated Clerk.	
39	Adoption or review of the session's Harassment Policy (G-3.0106) A sample Harassment Policy is available upon request from the Stated Clerk.	
40	Adoption or review of the session's Antiracism Policy (G-3.0106) A sample Antiracism Policy is available upon request from the Stated Clerk.	
41	Record of boundary training regarding sexual misconduct and child sexual abuse prevention for ruling elders every thirty-six months. (G-3.0106) Recommendations for sufficient training may be obtained from your insurance carrier or the Stated Clerk.	
42	Adoption or review of the session's insurance policies, including property, liability, and director's and officer's insurance (G-3.0112)	

<u>SESSION ROLLS</u>		If included in the Roll, please check this column. ✓
Items Required by the Book of Order		
Rolls should be listed alphabetically or chronologically. Addresses are helpful, but not required.		
1	<u>Baptized Members Roll</u> (G-1.0401) (a) Names of children baptized along with dates of birth, and names of parents (or other sponsors) (b) Names of active members' children baptized elsewhere along with dates of and place of baptism, dates of birth, and names of parents (c) Names of ministers' children baptized along with dates of birth, and names of parents	
2	<u>Active Membership Roll</u> (G-1.0402, G-3.0201c, G-3.0204a) (a) Date member is received by session (b) Date member is transferred to another church (or presbytery) by session along with the name and address of the church (c) Date member resigned or renounced jurisdiction (d) Date member is removed by session after two years of inactive participation in the worship, ministry, and stewardship of the church (see Inactive Membership Roll below) (e) Date of death	
3	<u>Affiliate Member Roll</u> (if any) (G-1.0403) (a) Names of affiliate members and dates of session action (b) Names of home churches and addresses	

	<u>OPTIONAL ROLL</u> (No Longer Required by the Book of Order)	If included in the Register, please check this column. √
1	<u>Inactive Membership Roll</u> (a) Date member discontinued participation in the worship, ministry, and stewardship of the church (b) Date member is deleted from the active roll by the session after two years of inactive participation in the worship, ministry, and stewardship of the church along with the page reference to the Active Membership Roll (c) Date of notification by the session	

	<u>SESSION REGISTERS</u> Items Required by the Book of Order Registers should be listed alphabetically or chronologically. Addresses are helpful, but not required.	If included in the Register, please check this column. √
1	<u>Register of Ruling Elders</u> (G-3.0204b) (a) Names of ruling elders elected by the congregation (b) Dates of ordination and installation	
2	<u>Register of Deacons</u> (G-3.0204b) (a) Names of deacons elected by the congregation (b) Dates of ordination and installation	
3	<u>Register of Ministers of Word and Sacrament</u> (G-3.0204b) (a) Names of ministers who served the church (pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, interim pastors, interim associate pastors, stated supplies, temporary supplies, etc.) (b) Dates of ordination, installation (beginning date), and dates of dissolution (ending dates)	
4	<u>Register of Baptisms</u> (G-3.0204b) (a) Names of adults baptized (b) Names of children baptized along with dates of birth, and names of parents (or other sponsors) (c) Names of active members' children baptized elsewhere along with dates of and place of baptism, dates of birth, and names of parents (d) Names of ministers' children baptized along with dates of birth, and names of parents	

How Safe are Your Records?

The story is told about a Clerk of Session who worried about session minutes being destroyed in a fire. So, an expensive, fireproof safe was purchased. A few months later, a fire destroyed the church, and the clerk thought the records were saved from the fire. Unfortunately, the safe was on the first floor of the building, the fire destroyed the flooring, and the safe fell into the

basement which quickly filled with water from the hoses fighting the fire. The safe was not waterproof. The records were destroyed.

Is the solution to purchase a fireproof and waterproof safe? No. The solution is to store permanent records in a humidity and temperature-controlled facility which is protected against fire, storms, and other perils.

Permanent Records

The Presbyterian Historical Society is such an archive. It is an agency of the General Assembly. It offers free storage of historical documents and artifacts to all Presbyterian churches and institutions.

The church or agency which puts items in the archive continues to own the items and can retrieve them at any time (such as for anniversary celebrations or historical research purposes). The only cost is shipping. The Presbyterian Historical Society offers other services such as digitalization of historical documents. There is a charge for digitizing, but there are grants available for smaller churches.

All historical records of Grace Presbytery are archived in the Presbyterian Historical Society facilities. Contact information: Presbyterian Historical Society, 425 Lombard Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19147; Telephone: (215) 627-1852; Monday – Friday, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm; Email: refdesk@history.pcusa.org Website: <http://www.history.pcusa.org/>

CHAPTER 4: ANNUAL FINANCIAL REVIEW (AUDIT)

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). [G-3.0113]

Purpose for the Audit

The purpose of the financial review is not to find fraud, malfeasance, or incompetence. The purpose is to instill confidence in church members that their contributions are being handled in an appropriate and businesslike manner. The review will also help the church celebrate what is going well and change what needs improvement in the management of finances.

Audit Committee

If an independent professional auditor is not engaged to conduct the financial review, it can be completed by a committee of members. However, the committee should be people of integrity, knowledge in accounting procedures, and independence from the church treasurer, financial secretary, stewardship leaders and others responsible for handling the finances of the church.

The committee should become familiar with the financial procedures of the church. It should evaluate the financial reports, operations, and procedures in light of commonly accepted

accounting practices. Conversations with those charged with handling funds will give the committee an idea of how large the sample size should be when reviewing deposits and expenditures.

A checklist is available upon request to assist churches using a committee of members in fulfilling this requirement of Book of Order. Completion of this checklist will satisfy the requirement.

CHAPTER 5: RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULE

Records to be Kept Permanently

The following records should be maintained permanently: Session Minutes, Membership Rolls (Baptized, Active and Affiliate Members), Church Registers (Baptisms, Ruling Elders, Deacons, Ministers), Articles of Incorporation (Certificates of Formation), Corporate Bylaws, Manuals of Administrative Operations, and one-copy each of the following: annual reports, annual budgets, annual financial statements, annual financial reviews (audits), architectural drawings (plats, plans, blueprints, as-built drawings), bequests and wills, judicial cases (under the Rules of Discipline), and legal cases involving the church in civil or criminal courts, histories, newspaper articles about the church, historically important brochures, photographs (properly identified with names of people pictured, names of events, and date of picture),

Records to be Kept Seven Years

The following should be filed for seven years: accounts payable (and invoices), accounts receivable records, bank statements, canceled checks, expense reports, cash receipt records, donations, FICA and W-2 records, payroll records, petty cash records, receipts of purchases,

Records to be Kept Three Years

The following should be filed for three years: cash receipt records, accounts payable invoices, accounts receivable records, bank deposit slips, periodic financial reports (monthly or quarterly),

Personnel Records

All employment records (including payroll and tax records) should be maintained for seven (7) years following the termination, resignation, death, or retirement of lay and clergy employees.

Contracts

Contracts should be retained for three (3) years after the contracts have expired.

Real Estate and Property Records

Property appraisals, records of sale and other real estate records should be kept for twenty (20) years after the property is sold.

Loan Records

All records related to loans, mortgages and other indebtedness should be kept on file for twenty (20) years after the loan has been paid and satisfied.

CHAPTER 6: ELECTRONIC MEETINGS AND EMAIL VOTING

Questions: Is email voting permissible for the session, trustees, deacons, and? Answer: Yes and no; it is a little complicated:

In 2022 the General Assembly added the following to G-1.0501:

In accordance with the requirement of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, congregations and their committees may meet electronically at the discretion of their sessions, provided that the technology employed allows for all members present to hear and be heard simultaneously. This includes joining one or more persons electronically to an otherwise in-

person meeting. Congregations should adopt special rules of order and standing rules to govern such meetings.

Provisions for Email Voting

Electronic voting is permitted if the following contingencies are met:

1. Provisions for electronic polling must be written in the Manual of Administrative Operations. These provisions need to address the following issues:
 - a. the type of equipment required for participation in meetings, whether the session must provide such equipment to participants, and contingencies for technical difficulties or malfunctions
 - b. methods for determining a quorum
 - c. the conditions under which a member may raise a point of order doubting the presence of a quorum, and the conditions under which the continued presence of a quorum is presumed if no such point of order is raised
 - d. methods for seeking recognition and obtaining the floor
 - e. means by which motions may be submitted in writing during a meeting
 - f. methods for taking and verifying votes (including unanimous consent)
2. If an opportunity for discussion of a motion has been afforded at an earlier meeting, an email vote can be taken subsequent to the meeting if no member objects to the vote. The Book of Order says *decisions shall be reached in governing bodies by vote, following opportunity for discussion and a majority shall govern.* [G-3.0205] The vote can be delayed as long as all members approve of the vote at a later time.
3. If there has been no previous discussion of the motion, an email vote can be taken under certain circumstances. One of *Robert's Rules of Order* voting methods is "unanimous

consent” by which the moderator offers an opportunity for any comment or objection, and if there is none, simply declares the motion adopted. An email vote can be taken (when allowed by the Manual of Administrative Operations) under the following circumstances:

- a. No member objects to the action or wishes to discuss it. It only takes one member to veto a vote via email and to postpone action until the next face-to-face or telephone conference meeting.
- b. The minutes must indicate that every member in fact received the email and was given the opportunity to discuss it or veto action until the next face-to-face or telephone conference meeting. (See the Suggested Procedures below.)

Suggested Procedure for Email Voting

1. The moderator (or Clerk of Session) shall notify each member by electronic mail. If a member does not have access to email, that member shall be notified by telephone, fax, or U.S. mail. The notification shall include the complete wording of the motion, pertinent information, and deadline for responding to the moderator (or clerk).
2. Every member must reply that the notice has been received in order to proceed.
3. The moderator shall use discretion when relaying confidential information. Confidential information shall be sent via U.S. mail if a member does not have sole access to an email account or if fax messages are accessible by anyone other than the member.
4. Quorum shall be one-half of the voting members.
5. If a member objects to the matter being presented, voted upon, or wants to discuss the matter in detail, the matter will be handled at the next stated meeting, a special meeting called for this purpose, or a telephone conference call meeting.
6. Voting:
 - a. A minimum of three days should be permitted to complete voting. Members wishing to vote must vote or abstain from voting via email, fax, or the U.S. mail.
 - b. Votes shall be submitted only to the moderator (or clerk) in order that early voters do not influence later voters. The moderator shall maintain contact with those members voting by means other than email.
7. If the number of members voting does not constitute a quorum, the motion shall be discussed at a later meeting.
8. Action taken by this process shall appear in the minutes of the next meeting.

Sample Motion Format for Email Voting

In accordance with Robert’s Rules of Order (11th Edition, pages 97-99) and in accordance with the 216th General Assembly Authoritative Interpretation of the Book of Order [F-3.0205], the following motion is proposed by [names]

That [state the motion] ...

Background or Rationale: [if needed]

Instructions: If any member requests discussion of the motion, or if any member requests discussion of a parliamentary question, the motion must be postponed until the next face-to-face meeting, Zoom meeting, or telephone conference call. Do not “Reply to All” so that earlier voters will not influence later voters.

Deadline: Please respond no later than [date] with your vote. We need a quorum of members to respond by the deadline.

- I vote yes.
- I vote no.
- I abstain.
- I request discussion of the motion at the next face-to-face or telephone conference meeting.
- I request discussion of a parliamentary question at the next meeting.

CHAPTER 7: ISSUES CONCERNING CHURCH PROPERTY

1. Who owns the property of a congregation in the Presbyterian Church (USA) denomination?

This is a simple question with a complex answer. So, fasten your seat belt, here is the answer:

Local church corporations generally hold legal title to the congregation’s real estate property. However, ownership of the real property comes with a condition. The Book of Order states in Chapter Four that the property is held in trust – not for the sole interest of the congregation, but for the benefit of the whole denomination:

G-4.0203: “All property held by or for a congregation ... whether legal title is lodged in a corporation, a trustee or trustees, or an unincorporated association, and whether the property is used in programs of a congregation or of a higher council or retained for the production of income, is held in trust nevertheless for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).”

2. Can the local church sell any of its property without the approval of the presbytery?

In most cases, the answer is “No.” The Book of Order states:

G-4.0206a: “A congregation shall not sell, mortgage, or otherwise encumber any of its real property and it shall not acquire real property subject to an encumbrance or condition without the written permission of the presbytery transmitted through the session of the congregation.”

This means that the presbytery must give its approval before real estate is sold, mortgaged, or legally encumbered. Should you have need to purchase property, the presbytery must also approve.

This applies to transactions for entire parcels and/or partial properties. For example, if a church wishes to sell “the back parking lot we no longer need”, this requires approval at the same consideration if you were selling the entire church property, buildings and all. This applies to properties used for worship, manses, estate properties, and any other real properties for which the church holds legal title.

3. What is an encumbrance?

“Encumbrance” is a legal term for any form of binding claim or lien on a parcel of real property. These include mortgages, leases, deeds of trust, recorded abstracts of judgment, unpaid property taxes, tax liens, mechanic’s liens, easements, and any rights to water, timber, or surfaces. Though the owner holds title, any encumbrance is usually on record with the County recorder of deeds, and encumbrances must be paid or released at some point. Usually, a potential buyer will want clear title without encumbrances, though in some cases encumbrances are transferrable. The presbytery will review any proposed encumbrances and advise of the impacts.

4. Can a church lease its property?

A lease is a special type of encumbrance, where a Lessor (the church) enters into a legal agreement with a Lessee (a tenant). The most frequent requests are for use of the building space. Many churches generously share their spaces with outside non-profit groups, for example an AA group or Scouts. Some may allow local children’s sport teams to practice on the property. Generally, these sharing arrangements fall under the category of a Building or Property Use Agreement, which is another topic for another day. However, in certain cases, a legally binding lease document is needed and preferred, most commonly in cases where an outside entity seeks a commitment to guarantee certain spaces for certain dates and times and for a sustained period. This lease arrangement may be with another worshipping community, with a school (one that is not a specific ministry of the church, or not under the session’s leadership), or in rare cases with an outside business. To protect both the church and the tenant, the presbytery office provides a template for a leasing agreement and will discuss how to best structure the terms of the lease.

The Book of Order states:

G-4.0206b: “Leasing Congregational Property. A congregation shall not lease its real property used for purposes of worship, or lease for more than five years any of its other real property, without the written permission of the presbytery transmitted through the session of the congregation.”

Therefore, if a church has any outside worshipping group asking to use your building for worship space, or if any outside entity (non-profit or for-profit) asks to lease space, please contact the Presbytery office, and let us help review the request. In some cases, this may require formal approval by the presbytery, and in other cases, we only may offer friendly advice and best wishes for a welcoming relationship with community neighbors. *In all cases, we recommend the church should check with their insurance company regarding use of the property by outside entities.*

A final note about leases: a church may be approached about a mineral lease or some other form of timber or surface rights lease on the church property. Most often, these requests exceed 5 years, and therefore require presbytery approval. Check with us before you sign!

5. Is there an exception to the property rule?

Yes. And here is where it gets more complicated. In 1983 the former southern Presbyterian denomination (known officially as the Presbyterian Church in the United States or PCUS) reunited with the former northern Presbyterian denomination (known officially as the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America or UPCUSA). In 1983 former PCUS congregations were given a choice: either (a) live under the new Book of Order property rules, or (b) they could receive “an exception” and be permitted to live under the property rules in the last edition (1982-1983) of the PCUS Book of Church Order Chapter 6; or (c) vote with a 2/3 majority to be dismissed from the PCUSA to another reformed denomination with their property. There was a limit of eight years in which the congregations were permitted to apply for the exception or to leave the PCUSA (1983 – 1991).

Unfortunately, in the 1980s this choice was not explained carefully. Frequently, members were told that if they exercised “the property exception,” ownership of the property would forever be solely that of the local church – with no involvement by the presbytery. Some were even told, “If we vote for this, we will own our property and full authority over it – not the presbytery.” However, that is not what the 1983 edition of the PCUS Book of Church Order said. The entire PCUS chapter on property is available upon request. In 1990 the General Assembly was asked to clarify this issue and adopted an official interpretation. The entire Authoritative Interpretation is available upon request.

It is wise to know whether your congregation falls under these exceptions. If you do not know, consult with the presbytery office.

6. Do former PCUS churches own their property?

The PCUS chapter on property in the Book of Church Order differs from the current Book of Order in one very important way: PCUS congregations which went through the formal voting procedures and applied for the exception may (upon vote of the whole congregation) buy, sell, and mortgage property on their own authority and without permission of the presbytery. The PCUS Book of Church Order states:

Chapter 6, Paragraph 6-2: “The officers of the corporation may be given any or all of the following responsibilities: holding title to church property for the benefit of the corporation and the Presbyterian Church in the United States; acquiring and conveying title to the property; buying, selling, and mortgaging the property of the church....”

This means that PCUS churches which went through the formal voting procedures in the 1980s have greater authority over their property than do the former UPCUSA churches – but not unrestricted authority. The congregations of Grace Presbytery which went through the formal voting procedures in the 1980s and are exempt from the current Book of Order chapter on property are listed at the end of this article. These congregations are, instead, subject to the Chapter on Property in the Book of Church Order (1982-1983 Edition).

7. What if a former PCUS congregation votes to leave the denomination, can they take their property with them?

Not without the approval of the presbytery. The trust clause is in both the PCUS Book of Church Order and the newer Book of Order. The PCUS Book of Church Order states:

Chapter 6, Paragraph 6-4: "If a particular church is dissolved by the Presbytery, attempts by either majority or unanimous vote to withdraw from the Presbyterian Church in the United States or otherwise ceases to exist or function as a member of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, any property that it may have shall be within the control of the Presbytery and may be held for designated purposes or sold or disposed of in such manner as the Presbytery, in its discretion, may direct."

8. Can a former PCUS congregation sell all its property (while not asking to be dismissed or dissolved) without the approval of the presbytery?

The General Assembly has ruled it is not permissible for a congregation to sell all its property without the approval of presbytery. The entire Authoritative Interpretation is available upon request. Since property is held in trust for the Presbyterian Church (USA), the denomination is entitled to the maximum benefit of the property. For the trustee (congregation) to determine that the Presbyterian Church (USA) must accept the exchange of the property for money with no continuation of the mission that was supported by that specific piece of property would contravene the church's fiduciary responsibility.

9. Anything else we need to know regarding property in Grace Presbytery?

Grace Presbytery has delegated authority to the Board of Trustees for certain approvals for property transactions. The Trustees meet regularly to consider requests received. In some circumstances, the motion to the Trustees can be voted by email. Most requests come to the Presbytery from the church session sent by the Clerk of Session. Transactions beyond the delegated scope of the Trustees require the approval of the full presbytery, which would be scheduled for vote at a presbytery meeting.

Forms, Real Estate Agents, Commercial Loans

There are presbytery forms we use for some property requests (no surprise there – we are Presbyterians after all.)

Ordinarily churches are expected to use a realtor/broker/agent when making property transactions. But you must gain approval from the presbytery before signing a listing agreement or advertising a property for sale.

Churches may use any mortgage company or bank who offers commercial loans. However, the presbytery recommends you consider the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program (PILP). The presbytery guarantees loans made through PILP, and we have found them to offer most favorable rates and best service to local congregations.

Assistance with Property-Related Matters

If you have questions or need any assistance with property-related issues, please contact Grace Presbytery's Director of Finance and Property Vicki Roberts at vicki@gracepresbytery.org. It is always best to contact us when you begin consideration of selling, purchasing, mortgaging, leasing, or encumbering property so we may advise you and share best practices early in the cycle.

CHAPTER 8: ADMINISTRATION (HOW THE CHURCH DOES MINISTRY)

Ministry or Administration

Church administration is often disparaged as “administrivia” meaning trivial, time-consuming, and unimportant work. However, the English word “administration” has a very lofty original meaning. It comes from the Latin *administrare* meaning “to help, assist, guide.” The core of the word is “ministration” and derives from the Latin word *ministrare* “to serve, attend, wait upon.” The root meaning of “administration” is “to serve.” Imbedded in it is the word “ministry.”

The term “minister” frequently denotes a member of the clergy (as opposed to the laity). The word “clergy” derives from the Old French word *clergie* meaning “knowledge, learning, erudition.” From about fourteenth century it has meant ordained priests or ministers. The word “laity” is from the Greek *λαϊκός* (*laikos*), which is derived from *λαός* (*laos*) and means “of or from the people.” Unfortunately, today “lay” means unqualified, uninformed, uneducated, or simply ignorant.

The Bible uses the terms “ministry and laity” differently than modern usage. The New Testament word most commonly translated as “ministry” is *διακονία* (*diakonia*) meaning “servant or attendant” from which the modern word “deacon” is derived. It carries the idea of service. So, the root meaning of “ministry” is servanthood. In the early church there was no distinction between the laity and the clergy. In fact, the term “clergy” appears nowhere in the Bible. The original disciples of Jesus came from secular professions. At times Paul took time off as a missionary to return to tentmaking.

Administration is Mission

The words “ministry, clergy, and laity” all imply service. Church administration is a ministry of service in the church. It is the infrastructure for the mission of the church. Evangelism, mission, worship, nurture and all the ministries of the church would be impossible without administration.

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