

## 1. THE SESSION

### 1.1 THE BASIS OF THE SESSION

The Constitution of our denomination affirms the vital role of each particular church and points out the central role of the session in the Life of the church:

#### Book of Order

G-7.0102 - Ministry: The particular church carries a vital responsibility in the mission of the church. There God's people perform especially the ministries of worship, proclamation, sharing the Sacraments, evangelism, nurture, counseling, personal and social healing and service. Without this basic ministry to persons, neighborhoods, and communities, and the support given at the congregational level through prayer, personnel, and money, any other significant ministry of the church becomes impossible. Congregations serve as essential mission arms of the presbytery and of the larger church.

G-7.0103 - Government: The members of a particular church voluntarily put themselves under the leadership of their officers, whom they elect. The session, which consists of the pastor or co-pastors, the associate pastors, and the elders in active service, is the governing body in a particular church. The law and government of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presuppose the fellowship of women and men with their children in voluntary covenanted relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests upon the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.

The work of the session is accomplished in a large part through its various Ministry Teams and other committees. The session functions as a policy making and governing body. Most of the work will be done in the Ministry Teams. Therefore, the Ministry Teams' responsibilities are outlined in this Manual for clarity of understanding of the mutual tasks and responsibilities.

The Presbyterian understanding of the nature of church office:

#### Book of Order

G-6.0101 - Christ's Ministry: All ministry in the church is a gift from Jesus Christ. Members and Officers alike serve mutually under the mandate of Christ who is the chief minister of all. His ministry is the basis of all ministries; the standard for all offices is the pattern of the one who came "not to be served but to serve." (Matt. 20:28)

G-6.0102 - Offices of Ministry: One responsibility of membership in the church is the election of officers who are ordained to fulfill particular functions. The existence of these offices in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church. These ordained officers differ from other members in function only.

G-6.0103 - Offices Names: The church offices mentioned in the New Testament which this church has maintained include those of presbyters (ministers of the Word and Sacrament and elders) and deacons.

G-6.0104 - Variety of Forms: While the ministry is one, specific forms of ministry may emphasize special tasks and skills and the ordering of the offices of ministry shall reflect this variety. These may be forms of ministry in which primary emphasis is given to proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments, forms that stress deeds of love and mercy, forms that are primarily educational, administrative, legislative, or judicial, and forms that are primarily prophetic.

## **1.2 THE PERSONNEL OF THE SESSION AND THEIR DUTIES**

### **A. THE SESSION MEMBER:**

#### **1. ELDERS - Book of Order G-6.0300**

G-6.301 - Scriptural Practice: As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in governing and ministry.

G-6.0302 - Governmental Responsibilities: Elders are chosen by the people. Together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, they exercise leadership, government, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a particular church as well as the church-at-large, including ecumenical relationships. They shall serve faithfully as members of the session. (G-10.0102.) When elected commissioners to higher governing bodies, elders participate and vote with the same authority as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, and they are eligible for any office.

G-6.0303 - Gifts and Requirements: Elders should be persons of faith, dedication, and good judgment. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel, both within the church and in the world. (G-6.0106.)

G-6.0304 - Specific Responsibilities: It is the duty of elders, individually and jointly, to strengthen and nurture the faith and life of the congregation committed to their charge. Together with the pastor, they should encourage the people in the worship and service of God, equip and renew them for their tasks within the church and for their mission in the world, visit and comfort and care for the people, with special attention to the poor, the sick, the lonely, and those who are oppressed. They should inform the pastor and session of those persons and structures which may need special attention. They should assist in worship. (See W-1.4003, W-2.3011-.3012, W-3.1003, W-3.3616 and W-4.4003.) They should cultivate their ability to teach the Bible and may be authorized to supply places which are without the regular ministry of the Word and Sacrament. In specific circumstances and with proper instruction, specific elders may be authorized by the presbytery to administer the Lord's Supper in accord with

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G-11.0103z. Those duties which all Christians are bound to perform by the law of love are especially incumbent upon elders because of their calling to office and are to be fulfilled by them as official responsibilities.

2. The church functions as a representative democracy. Session members are elected representatives of the congregation and are responsible for the government of the local church. Each session member is morally bound to be present at all meetings unless providentially hindered. The session member will serve on session Ministry Teams as assigned and assume these responsibilities by virtue of the office of elder.

**B. THE MODERATOR:**

The Moderator convenes and presides at all meetings of the session; calls meetings when deemed necessary or when requested to do so under the conditions set forth in the Book of Order. The moderator in conjunction with the Administrative Ministry Team, names session members to permanent Ministry Teams, and reports to the session any problems, whether spiritual, administrative, or personal, which relates to the welfare of the church, including special or temporary committees or task forces.

**C. THE CLERK:**

G-9.0203 – Clerk and Meeting: The Clerk records the transactions of the governing body, keeps its rolls and membership and attendance, preserves its records carefully, and provides extracts of them when required by another governing body of the church. These extracts, verified by the clerk, are evidence in any governing body of the church.

Other duties of the clerk are to see that such transactions, records and minutes are approved and properly endorsed; and make and keep records of reports for the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly. The clerk keeps an up-to-date membership roll, which includes an accurate list of active, inactive, affiliate and Baptized members. the clerk handles the necessary correspondence of the session, including dismissing of members, and keeps other necessary or required records, and has available at all meetings orders of procedure. Further, the clerk notifies members of the session of date, time, and place of meetings; creates as feasible a list of adopted policies for ease of reference; issues baptismal and membership certificates to those who are baptized and/or received into the church; keeps an accurate record of all baptisms, marriages, deaths, and other significant events. These responsibilities may be delegated to other Ministry Teams when feasible. The Clerk is elected by the session for a one year term.

**D. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS:**

The session has a stated meeting the second Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. The session has called meetings for reception of new members as needed on Sunday mornings at 10:15 am. Session, by a majority vote, may change this schedule for a particular meeting or permanently. The session may also meet on call according to the Book of Order. (G-10.0200)

G-10.0201 - Meetings: The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly. The moderator of the session may call a special meeting of the session when he or she judges it necessary and shall do so when requested in writing by any two members of the session. The session shall also meet when directed to do so by presbytery. Reasonable notice of all special meetings must be given when other than routine business is to be transacted. The session may invite members of the congregation to attend and observe its meetings if it so desires, without restricting its right to meet in executive session whenever circumstances indicate the wisdom of doing so.

G-10.0202 - Quorum: A quorum of the session shall be the pastor or other presiding officer and one-third of the elders but no fewer than two, except for the reception and dismissing of members, when the quorum shall be the moderator and two members of the session. The session may fix its own quorum at any higher number.

### **1.3 GENERAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SESSION**

#### THE SESSION (Book of Order - G-10.0000)

G-10.0101 - Membership: The session of a particular church consists of the pastor or co-pastors, the associate pastors, and the elders in active service. All members of session, including the pastor, co-pastors, and associate pastors, are entitled to vote.

G-10.0102 - Responsibilities: The session is responsible for the mission and government of the particular church. It therefore has the responsibility and power:

- A. To provide opportunities for evangelism to be learned and practiced in and by the church, that members may be better equipped to articulate their faith, to witness in word and deed to the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and to invite persons into new life in Christ, in accordance with G-3.0300;
- B. To receive members into the church upon profession of faith, upon reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ, or upon satisfactory certification of transfer of church membership, provided that membership shall not be denied by any person because of race, economic or social circumstances, or any other reason not related to profession of faith;
- C. To lead the congregation in participation in the mission of the whole church in the world, in accordance with G-3.0000;
- D. To provide for the worship of the people of God, including the preaching of the Word, the sharing of the Sacraments, and for the music program, in keeping with the principles in the Directory for Worship, and to appeal to the presbytery for a duly trained and authorized elder under the provisions of G-11.0103 in those extenuating circumstances where an ordained minister of the Word and Sacrament is not available to meet the need for the administration of the Lord's Supper;

- E. To provide for the growth of its members and for their equipment for ministry through personal and pastoral care, education programs including the church school, sharing in fellowship and mutual support, and opportunities for witness and service in the world;
- F. To develop and supervise the church school and the educational program of the church;
- G. To lead the congregation in ministries of personal and social healing and reconciliation in the communities in which the church lives and bears its witness;
- H. To challenge the people of God with the privilege of responsible Christian stewardship of money and time and talents, developing effective ways for encouraging and gathering the offerings of the people and assuring that all offerings are distributed to the objects toward which they were contributed;
- I. To establish the annual budget, determine the distribution of the church's benevolences, and order offerings for Christian purposes, providing full information to the congregation of its decisions in such matters;
- J. To lead the congregation continually to discover what God is doing in the world and to plan for change, renewal, and reformation under the Word of God;
- K. To engage in a process for education and mutual growth of the members of the session;
- L. To instruct, examine, ordain, install, and welcome into common ministry elders and deacons on their election by the congregation and to inquire into their faithfulness in fulfilling their responsibilities;
- M. To delegate and to supervise the work of the board of deacons and the board of trustees and all other organizations and task forces within the congregation, providing for support, report, review, and control;
- N. To provide for the administration of the program of the church, including employment of non-ordained staff, with concern for equal employment opportunity, fair employment practices, personnel policies, and the annual review of the adequacy of compensation for all staff, including all employees;
- O. To provide for the management of the property of the church, including determination of the appropriate use of church buildings and facilities, and to obtain property and liability insurance coverage to protect the facilities, programs and officers, including members of the session, staff, boards of trustees, and deacons;
- P. To maintain regular and continuing relationship to the higher governing bodies of the church, including:
  - 1. Electing commissioners to presbytery and receiving their reports; sessions are encouraged to elect commissioners to the presbytery for at least one year, preferably two or three;
  - 2. Nominating to presbytery elders who may be considered for election to synod or General Assembly;
  - 3. In both the above responsibilities, implementing the principles of participation and inclusiveness to ensure fair representation in the decision-making of the church;

4. Observing and carrying out the instructions of the higher governing bodies consistent with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
  5. Welcoming representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits;
  6. Proposing to the presbytery and, through it, to the synod and the General Assembly such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the whole church;
  7. Sending annually to the stated clerk of the presbytery statistical and other information according to the requirements of the presbytery.
- Q. To establish and maintain those ecumenical relationships necessary for the life and mission of the church in its locality;
- R. To serve in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline;
- S. To keep an accurate roll of the membership of the church, in accordance with G-10.0302, and to grant certificates of transfer to other churches, which when issued for parents shall include the names of their children specifying whether they have been baptized, and which when issued for an elder or deacon shall include the record of ordination.

#### **1.4 THE MODERATOR**

The pastor, Head of Staff, of the church shall be the moderator of the session and the session shall not meet without the Head of Staff except as hereunder provided. (See G10.0103)