

POLICY CHANGES REQUIRED BY THE NEW FORM OF GOVERNMENT

Session Policy Manual

The session will maintain a manual of operations with policies appropriate to the particular congregation for which it has responsibility and will review and update policies as needed. In order to fulfill the provisions of the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church (USA), there should be policies to cover the following matters:

Policies of the congregation (set by the congregation)

- Quorum for congregational meetings
- Adequate notice for congregational meetings

Policies of the session

- Quorum for session meetings (G-3.0203)
- Provision for worship times and place
- Provision for sacraments including preparation for baptism
- Maintaining and reviewing the rolls of the congregation's membership
- Maintaining registers of baptisms, or ruling elders, deacons and installed pastors
- Preparation for examination and examination and installation of deacons and ruling elders
- Election and term of Clerk of Session
- Provision for nominating process
- Provision for participation in the work of presbytery and the larger church (G-3.0202b.)
- Provision for adoption and reporting of budget and all financial activities to session
- Provision for election of treasurer and term of office
- Provision for financial practices (G-3.0205)

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE STATED CLERK

Items requiring a vote of the congregation.

1. Quorum for congregational meetings

New: G-1.0501:

Congregations shall provide by rule the quorum necessary to conduct business.

Old: G-7.0305

Quorum – The quorum of a meeting of the congregation shall be not less than one tenth of the members unless the particular church upon application to the presbytery shall obtain the consent of the presbytery to a provision for a smaller quorum. A congregation by its own vote may fix a higher quorum. No meeting of fewer than three members shall be considered a congregational meeting.

Recommendation: The quorum of a meeting of the congregation shall be not less than one tenth

of the members.

2. Adequate notice for congregational meetings

New – G-1.0502.

Congregations shall provide by their own rule for minimum notification requirements and give notice at regular services of worship prior to the meeting. (Notice that regular services of worship are plural.)

Former – G-7.0303b.

Public notice of the meeting shall be given on two successive Sundays. The meeting may be convened following the notice given on the second Sunday.

Recommendation: Public notice of a congregational meeting shall be given on two successive services of worship prior to the meeting. The meeting shall convene following the notice given on the second Sunday.

3. Vote to accept Robert's Rules of Order (RONR) as your parliamentary guide unless otherwise provided in the Constitution.

Items requiring a vote of the session.

1. Quorum for session meetings

New: G-3.0203

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.

Old: G-10.0202

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 dismissal 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.

Recommendation: Use the freedom granted by the new FOG to establish a quorum that is appropriate for your session. Remember that many of our churches have elders that go "north" for the summer. This may require you to establish a quorum that is less than what everyone might consider ideal.

2. Inactive Members

Inactive Members – Inactive members are no longer included in the Constitution.

Recommendation: I suggest you maintain contact information on people who are no longer

members for follow up and pastoral care and that you number them among other participants described in G-1.0404

3. Provision for worship times and place
4. Provision for sacraments including preparation for baptism
5. Maintaining and reviewing the rolls of the congregation's membership
Recommendation: I suggest you do this on a yearly basis. (See the new FOG, G-1.0404 concerning "other participants." Membership is based on active participation.)
6. Maintaining registers of baptisms, ruling elders, deacons and installed pastors
7. Preparation for examination and installation of deacons and ruling elders
8. Election and term of Clerk of Session
9. Provision for nominating process

The new FOG changes the minimum requirements for the nominating committee from listing the specific groups to be represented and the number of elders on the committee.

New: G-2.0401

Ruling elders and deacons are men and women elected by the congregation from among its members. The nomination and election of ruling elders and deacons shall express the rich diversity of the congregation's membership and shall guarantee participation and inclusiveness (F-1.0403). Ruling elders and deacons shall be nominated by a committee elected by the congregation, drawn from and representative of its membership.

Congregations may provide by their own rule for a congregational nominating committee, provided that 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. When elections are held, full opportunity shall always be given to the congregation for nomination from the floor of the congregational meeting by any active member of the congregation. A majority of all the active members present and voting shall be required to elect.

Old: G14.0221

The committee shall itself include both women and men, giving fair representation to persons of all age groups, of all racial ethnic members, and of persons with disabilities who are members of that congregation. At least two members of this committee shall be elders designated by the session, one of whom shall be currently on the session and serve as moderator of the committee. At least one member of this committee shall be designated by and from the board of deacons, if the church has deacons. Other members of the committee, in sufficient number to constitute a majority thereof (exclusive of the pastor), shall be chosen by the congregation or by such organizations within the church as the congregation may designate, none of whom may be in active service on the session or in active service on the board of deacons.

Recommendation: Adopt a policy for a nominating committee that fits within the guidelines of the new FOG. It would be acceptable to just adopt the old FOG, but this is an area where it might be helpful to adopt a policy this is better suited to your church's particular situation.

10. Provision for participation in the work of presbytery and the larger church (G-3.0202b.) including election of ruling elder commissioners to presbytery in adequate number to be fully representative of your congregation as provided by the Stated Clerk of the presbytery.
11. Provision for adoption and reporting of budget and all financial activities to session
12. Provision for election of treasurer and term of office
13. Provision for financial practices (G-3.0205)

NOMENCLATURE

Please note that the following nomenclature needs to be changed in all official church documents.

--Ministers of the Word and Sacrament are also referred to as "Teaching Elders." Elders are now referred to as "Ruling Elders." (See New Form of Government G-2.0301. Ruling Elders do not "lord" it over the congregation but are chosen by the congregation to measure its fidelity to the Word of God and strengthen its faith and life.)

Note that teaching elders and members of congregations can serve on committees. Service on commissions is open to teaching elders and ruling elders. (G-3.0109b)

--Governing Bodies (Session, Presbytery, Synod, G.A.) are now referred as Councils. (The name was changed to reflect the fact that these bodies are responsible for worship and fellowship as well as governance.)

ORGANIZATION OF DEACONS

Deacons Organized as a Board – If the Deacons are organized as a Board, there are no longer stated requirements regarding membership and meetings. Instead, the work of the deacons is under the supervision and authority of the session, which gives to the deacons their assignments in the congregation.

New: See G-2.0202 for organizational requirements.

Old: G-6.0403a. (Deacons) as a Board – They may be organized as a board, of which the pastor, co-pastors, and associate pastors shall be advisory members. The board of deacons shall elect a moderator and a secretary from among its members. The secretary shall keep a record of the board's proceedings.

G-6.0405 Meetings – The board shall meet regularly, or upon the call of its moderator, or when directed to meet by the session, but it shall meet at least quarterly. The board shall determine its own quorum. A joint meeting of the session and board of deacons shall be held at least annually to confer on matters of common interest, with the moderator of the session presiding. No binding decision may be reached in such joint meeting, but the session and the board may act separately on matters committed to their care.

Recommendation: Use the former Constitution. This would be determined by a vote of the

deacons and subsequent approval by the session.