



National Capital
PRESBYTERY
MISSIONAL • PASTORAL • PROPHEMIC

Manual for Clerks of Session

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Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to be the clerk of session for your church. The clerk is one of the two session officers specified and required by the Book of Order, the other (normally the pastor) being the moderator. BoO G-3.0104. The clerk of session is a critical job in any Presbyterian church. It can also seem overwhelming. I hope to make your job a little easier.

This manual will address the role of the session in Presbyterian polity, the role of the clerk, session meetings and minutes, congregational meetings and minutes, rolls and registers, the Book-of-Order-required manuals and policies, and the relationship of the session to the presbytery. I will also list other resources you might find helpful. Please let me know if there are other topics you would like covered—I see this as a living document to which all clerks can contribute!

Yours in Christ,

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Role of the Session Clerk

The basic duties of the clerk of session are listed in the Form of Government (G-3.0104). That section provides that clerks are to:

- record the transactions of the council,
- keep its rolls of membership and attendance,
- maintain any required registers,
- preserve its records, and
- furnish extracts from them when required by another council of the church.

The Form of Government (G-1.0505) also provides that the clerk of session shall:

- serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation, and
- record the actions taken at those meetings.

Then, there are tasks not specified in the Form of Government that clerks generally do (or make sure someone else does):

- with the moderator, draft an agenda for session and congregational meetings; serve as parliamentarian
- receive and write correspondence on behalf of the session
- notify the session of special meetings and issue the call for congregational meetings
- assemble the session Manual of Administrative Operations
- review the roll of active members annually and counsel those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership
- provide information for the Annual Statistical and other General Assembly reports
- report to the presbytery every fall the names of ruling elders in the congregation who have died in the past year
- participate in a session records review in which your church books will be reviewed and you will review other churches' books
- distribute NCP's biweekly Thursday Mail to all elders, deacons, and interested parishioners
- make sure your commissioners to presbytery meetings have information about the meetings
- keep the session on track—keep a list of unfinished business by the session and remind those responsible to report to the session, make sure that insurance is in place, make sure there is a sexual misconduct policy and a child and youth protection policy, make sure that a full financial review is completed annually
- provide information on session actions to the congregation
- arrange with the stated clerk of the presbytery for a moderator for session and congregational meetings if the church is currently without a pastor
- provide the presbytery information on your pastor's terms of call or contract

Role of Session

Although you don't have to be an expert on the entire Book of Order, clerks should read G-3.01 and G-3.02 carefully. In our polity, the session is responsible for governing the congregation and guiding its witness so that it becomes a place of faith, hope, love and witness. In contrast, the powers of the congregation are quite limited (see G-1.0503). The pastor is also delegated certain powers in the Book of Order, such as moderating session and congregational meetings and ordering the worship. (see W-2.0304, 0305). But the session bears the largest responsibility.

The session has the power and responsibility to provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard. This includes:

- providing a place where the congregation can gather for worship, education and spiritual nurture
- providing for regular preaching
- 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
- planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community
- initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to the love and grace of God

The session has the power and responsibility to provide that the Sacraments be rightly administered and received. This includes:

- authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate
- exercising pastoral care among the congregation in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace and the congregation may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments

The session has the power and responsibility to nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ. This includes:

- receiving and dismissing members
- reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership
- providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship
- training, examining, ordaining, and installing those elected by the congregation as ruling elders and deacons
- encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources
- managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission

- directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation
- employing the administrative staff of the congregation
- leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church
- warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community
- serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline

The session must also:

- elect, as commissioners to presbytery, ruling elders from the congregation, preferably for at least a year, and receive their reports
- nominate to presbytery ruling elders from the congregation who may be considered for election as commissioners to synod and General Assembly
- see that the guidance and communication of presbytery, synod, and General assembly are considered, and that any binding actions are observed and carried out
- welcome representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits
- propose to the presbytery, or through it to the synod and General Assembly, such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church
- send to presbytery and General Assembly requested statistics and other information according to the requirements of those bodies, as well as voluntary financial contributions

Other requirements:

- The session must have stated meetings at least quarterly.
- The session must provide by rule for its quorum.
- The session must keep the minutes of the session meetings, the congregational meetings and all joint meetings with deacons and trustees.
- The session must maintain membership rolls and registers of baptisms, of ruling elders and deacons, of installed pastors.
- The session must adopt a budget and determine the distribution of the congregation's benevolences.
- The session must authorize offerings and account for the proceeds of the offerings and their disbursement.
- The session must provide full information to the congregation about its financial decisions.
- The session must elect a treasurer and ensure supervision of the treasurer.
- The session must make sure all offerings are counted and recorded, that financial books are kept and open to inspection by officers, and that no less than annually reports are made of all financial activities to the session or other entity vested with financial oversight.

Session Meetings

There are two kinds of session meetings—regular or “stated” meeting and special or “called” meetings. Session is required to meet at least quarterly. At regular meetings of the session the routine business of session—reports, decisions about budgets, membership roll changes—is conducted.

A special meeting of session may be called by the Moderator when she/he thinks it is necessary and must be called when requested in writing by two members of session, or when the presbytery has directed session to meet. There must be “reasonable notice” given of all special meetings, and your session should develop its own rule for how notice is given and what “reasonable notice” means. Be especially careful in giving e-mail notice of a special meeting held in the midst of conflict—it is your responsibility to make sure that every member of session is included in e-mail notices. You will want to save the e-mail notification of a session meeting to answer a challenge from a session member that you either forgot or excluded him/her. The agenda for a special meeting is shaped and limited by the call to the meeting—which must describe an action to be taken, a motion which will be made, etc.

Session is to provide by rule for its own quorum. Robert’s Rules of Order (11th ed.) recommends that the quorum “should be as large a number of members as can reasonably be depended on to be present at any meeting, except in very bad weather or other exceptionally unfavorable conditions.” Section 40, p. 346. Here are three options:

- The quorum for the Session of First Presbyterian Church is the Moderator and a majority—i.e., more than half-- of the ruling elders currently serving.
- The quorum for the Session of First Presbyterian Church is the Moderator and three ruling elders currently serving.
- The quorum for the Session of First Presbyterian Church is the Moderator and 25% of the currently serving ruling elders.

Meetings of session are to be conducted within a simple and basic understanding of parliamentary procedure. The parliamentary authority in the Presbyterian Church (USA) is the most recent version of Robert’s Rules of Order, currently the 11th edition. If a provision of the Constitution of the PCUSA conflicts with Robert’s Rules, the Constitution prevails. (G-3.0105).

Robert’s permits more relaxed procedures for small boards (in our case, most of our sessions and committees) of not more than about a dozen members. Here are some of the things permitted:

- Motions need not be seconded.
- There is no limit to the number of times a member can speak to a debatable question (a member may speak only two times in a large meeting). However, the motion to limit debate would still be in order.
- Informal discussion of a subject is permitted while no motion is pending.
- When a proposal is perfectly clear to all present, a vote can be taken without a motion's having been introduced.
- Vote can be taken by show of hands.
- If the chairman is a member, he or she may, without leaving the chair, speak in informal discussions and in debate, and vote on all questions.
- Informal discussion may be initiated by the chair, which, in effect, enables the chair to submit proposals without formally making a motion.

Robert's Rules permits other than in-person meetings if they are authorized in the congregational bylaws (or, in our case, Manual of Administrative Operations) and there is simultaneous aural communication—i.e., all participants are capable of hearing and speaking to the other participants throughout the meeting. Thus, telephone conference calls or electronic meeting facilities such as Zoom are permitted, but the exchange of emails is not. Electronic voting is also permitted—as long as there is no email discussion among session members that violates the rule prohibiting email meetings. The session should adopt a policy to permit electronic voting so long as no member objects and wants to have a meeting regarding the matter being voted on. Electronic voting should be limited to noncontroversial matters.

Neither the Clerk of Session nor the Moderator should make motions, because both are responsible for conducting the meeting.

The Moderator

The pastor of the congregation is the Moderator of Session. If it is impractical for the moderator to moderate, they shall invite another minister of Word and Sacrament who is a member of the presbytery or a person authorized by the presbytery to serve as moderator. If there is no installed pastor, or if the installed pastor is unable to invite another moderator, the presbytery shall make provision for a moderator. (G-3.0104). In National Capital Presbytery you can call the stated clerk to get a moderator appointed if the minister is not otherwise able.

The Agenda

Generally, the clerk and the moderator together shape an agenda for the session meeting. The session meeting agenda should consist of committee reports along with any action items. Ideally the agenda will have been e-mailed or sent electronically to everyone prior to the meeting. It can be amended to include something new which needs immediate attention.

You can use the agenda as a tool for systematizing your duties. For example, you could make a list of activities as they arise during the year. Below is a sample of what such a list might look like:

Stated Session Meetings Planning Timetable

The timetable below indicates some of the recurring items before the session during the calendar year and can be used as a basis for planning. Current items are added to each meeting at the time the agenda is planned

January	
Written Reports: Clerk, Ministries, Deacon	Prepare GA Statistical Report, effective 12/31 of prior year. (Clerk to compile – elders to complete specific sections at clerk’s request.) Send GA Statistical Report to NCP by end of the month. (Clerk).
Elect permanent commissioner NCP	Minutes: record that communion was/was not served by Pastor to members at home or in hospital
Distribute Session Handbooks. (Clerk)	Approve final budget
Oral Reports: Finance Ministry, Property Ministry, Personnel Ministry	Minutes: Report church officer training
Annual Review of salary (terms of call) for clergy and church staff Personnel Ministry	Minutes: Record church officer installation
Designate Emergency Loan Fund and Nonoperating Budget Fund Panels	

February	
	Minutes: Record approval of deacon records.
Elect commissioner NCP March meeting.	Minutes: Include annual statistical report, compensation for all staff members, budget, income and expenditures.
Oral Reports: Finance Ministry, Local Mission Ministry, Parish Life Ministry	Minutes: Record membership of Nominating Committee
Meeting of Trustees of First Church PC, Inc.	

March	
Reports: Pastor, Associate Pastor, Clerk, Ministries, Deacon's	
Oral Reports: Finance Ministry, Welcoming Ministry, Global Mission Ministry	

April	
Reports: Pastor, Associate Pastor, Clerk, Ministries, NCP, Deacon's	Minutes: Record church has Property & Liability coverage.
Elect commissioner to NCP May meeting	Minutes: Records Review: Record in minutes that session records were approved or approved with exceptions by NCP session records committee. Record that any exceptions were corrected. Indicate where to find corrections.
Oral Reports: Finance Ministry, Property Ministry,	

May	
Reports: Pastor, Associate Pastor, Clerk, Ministries, Deacon's	
Elect commissioner to NCP June meeting	
Oral Reports: Finance Ministry, Worship and Music Ministry, Christian Education	

June	
Reports: Pastor, Associate Pastor, Clerk, Ministries, NCP, Deacon's	Organize rolls review (clerk, one elder, one deacon, pledge secretary, pastor) to establish list of potential inactive members. Contact members who have not been active.
Annual Reviews of Staff, Personnel Ministry to meet with all employees of the church. Changes in job descriptions and changes in salary and benefits to be recorded in minutes	Prepare for hiatus until next meeting in August.
Oral Reports: Finance Ministry, Local Mission Ministry	

August	
Reports: Pastor, Associate Pastor, Clerk, Ministries, NCP, Deacon's	Minutes: Record that there has been an Annual Financial Review.
Elect commissioner to NCP September meeting.	
Oral Reports: Finance Ministry, Personnel Ministry, Stewardship Ministry, Nominating Committee, Christian Education Ministry	

September	
Reports: Pastor, Associate Pastor, Clerk, Ministries, NCP, Deacon's	
Personnel Chair to conduct annual review of salary for clergy and staff. Compute housing allowance. Record in minutes. Send clergy compensation information to presbytery and note in minutes.(This may need to be done as late as January, depending on status of budget. For tax purposes, housing allowance should be recorded in December minutes if possible.)	Session action on recommendations of church rolls committee. Record in minutes; annual review of rolls was made. Clerk to send letters to potential inactive members.
Oral Reports: Finance Ministry, Welcoming Ministry, Property Ministry, Global Mission Ministry	
Set date for congregational meeting to act upon the report of the nominating committee for new officers	

October	
Reports: Pastor, Associate Pastor, Clerk, Ministries, NCP, Deacon's	
Elect commissioner to NCP November meeting	Clerk: Compile a list of members who died in current year with date of death for All Saints Sunday; send list to NCP of elders (including date of ordination) who died during the year.
Set dates: Ordination and installation of officers; new officer training; Annual Meeting (in January/February)	Clerk: Complete Clerk's Annual Questionnaire for the Office of General Assembly, getting assistance from session members as needed.
Oral Reports: Finance Ministry, Stewardship Ministry, Parish Life Ministry, Christian Education Ministry	

November	
Reports: Pastor, Associate Pastor, Clerk, Ministries, NCP, Deacon's	Elders-elect invited to November and December meetings.
Oral Reports: Finance Ministry, Stewardship Ministry, Worship and Music Ministry	

December	
Reports: Pastor, Associate Pastor, Clerk, Ministries, NCP, Deacons	Turn in Session Handbooks to clerk for updating.
Elect commissioner to January NCP meeting.	Clerk: Present recommendations for deletion from membership for final session approval.
Announce Session assignments	
Elect a treasurer and clerk	Annual Reports are due to Office Administrator in January.
Approve Communion dates and worship schedule for year. (Worship)	
Oral Reports: Finance Ministry, Stewardship Ministry, Personnel Ministry	

Another tool to help you systematize your work is to create an agenda template so matters like prayer at the beginning and end are not forgotten and the clerk's report items (new members, celebration of the Lord's Supper, Baptisms, etc.) are not overlooked. See Appendix A.

The Minutes

A major responsibility of the Clerk of Session is the accurate recording of the minutes of the session meeting. Session minutes should be kept in a book designated solely for that purpose. It can be a Cokesbury minute book (<http://www.cokesbury.com>) or you can use a loose-leaf binder with acid-free paper. From the Office of General Assembly:

What many congregations are now using is 8.5 x 11 acid-free paper for printing minutes (see www.history.pcusa.org for acid-free requirements and suppliers). The minutes are maintained in an appropriately-distinguished binder, folder, or box, which is carefully stored, preferably in a secure, fireproof location. The pages are numbered, with blank pages marked (ordinarily accomplished by drawing a diagonal line across any open space on a page before the beginning of the next pages in the minute book) so that additional material will not be inappropriately inserted after the minutes are approved. The approved copy of the minutes becomes the official/record copy.

“What to include” in minutes is a common question. One piece of advice frequently encountered is “record what was done, not what was said.” Not a bad general rule, but without any contextual explanation the bare bones minutes sometimes make no sense at all. For example, why would the session decline to accept a gift of \$40,000? If all you see is the vote, you will never understand that the gift was for the direct benefit of a particular mission co-worker in Honduras, and so is not permitted by the IRS.

So a better standard might be that the minutes should help someone who was present instantly recall what was done, and will completely fill in an absent Session elder.

Here are some guidelines:

1. Begin with the date, time, and place of the meeting, and by whom it was convened.
2. Describe the nature of the meeting. It is either “stated” or “special/called”. The regular monthly meeting is the stated meeting and everything else is a special/called meeting. If this is a special/called meeting, indicate in the minutes by whom it was called, and the specific limited purpose(s) for which it was called.
3. Certify that a quorum was present throughout the meeting. (Unless the quorum disappears during the meeting, the Clerk’s certification of the presence of a quorum at the beginning of the meeting suffices.)
4. Record the attendance: those present, those excused, and those absent without excuse.
5. Record the approval of the previous meeting’s minutes, noting carefully any corrections or additions.
6. Record session’s prior authorization for all baptisms; afterward record in the clerk’s report that the baptism took place. Include the name, and for infant baptisms, the name of the parents and place and date of birth.

7. Record actions which affect the membership status of a member. For example:
 - Session voted to receive Larry Hudson as a member by certificate of transfer from First Presbyterian Church, Simi Valley California (G-1.0303)
 - Session voted to delete the following members from the roll at their request (G-3.0204a):
 - Gloria Chasen
 - Rupert Holbrooke
 - Jill Forrester
 - And to delete the names of the following members who have not participated in the life of the congregation for at least two years (G-3.0204a):
 - Audrey Long
 - William Green
 - Peter Marksén
 - Session voted to grant a letter of transfer to Donna Lincoln who is joining Second Presbyterian Church, Pompano Beach Florida.
8. Record session's authorization of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. You may want to do this every session meeting or every year approve the celebration schedule for the coming year. Also record each time the Lord's Supper was celebrated.
9. Record session's authorization for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to be extended to homebound members by two or more persons in ordered ministry (Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Ruling Elders, Deacons) (W-3.0414), this extension to happen on the same day that the Lord's Supper has been celebrated by the congregation. Record that the Lord's Supper was received by the homebound member.
10. Record the wording of all motions and their disposition.
11. Record the names of elders elected to be commissioners to meetings of the presbytery.
12. Record reports that have been received. Include the full text of any reports or policies that are adopted.
13. Every year include
 - a. Approval of the annual budget and include the budget in the minutes
 - b. Annual review of each pastor's compensation and the recommendation to be made to the congregation for no change or a change to the terms of call.
 - c. That compensation information has been sent to the National Capital Presbytery Office, Attn: COM Administrator.
 - d. The training and examination of new ruling elders and deacons.
 - e. The ordination and/or installation of ruling elders and deacons.
 - f. The fact that property and liability insurance has been obtained.
 - g. The fact that there has been an annual audit of financial records.
 - h. The fact that the work of the Board of Deacons (if any) and Board of Trustees (if other than the session) has been reviewed.
 - i. A copy of the Annual Statistical Report required by the General Assembly
14. Sign each set of session meeting minutes.

Congregational Meetings and Minutes

Meetings of the congregation are either stated—for example, the mandated annual meeting required in G-1.0501 or a meeting to elect officers—or special/called—for example, a meeting held to hear the report of the Pastor Nominating Committee. A meeting shall be called by the session, by the presbytery, or when requested in writing by one-fourth of the active members to deal with one of the following (G-1.0503):

- Electing elders, deacons, trustees
- Calling a pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor
- Changing the terms of call for a pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor
- Dissolving the relationship with a pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor
- Buying, mortgaging, or selling real property
- Asking the presbytery to waive the six-year limit on terms of service of elders or deacons

There are a couple of other things that can be done at a congregational meeting. The congregation elects the nominating committee (G-2.0401), enacts bylaws (G-1.0201), decides not to have deacons (G-2.0202), and incorporates (G-4.0101). If a petition to call a congregational meeting is presented to session with the correct signature requirement but for the consideration of a topic not described above, session should decline the petition and provide full explanation of its reason for doing so.

According to G-1.0502, the congregation is to create a rule related to the requirements for notifying the congregation of an upcoming meeting, and the meeting must be announced at regular worship services prior to the meeting. So, for example, the rule in a particular congregation might be as it was in the previous Form of Government—two Sundays, with the meeting held on the second Sunday—or it might be announcement during worship on three consecutive Sundays with the meeting held on the third Sunday of notice.

The congregation is also required to create a rule related to the quorum requirement for a congregational meeting. (G-1.0501). Again, it might be the same as previously—one-tenth of the members on the active roll on the day the meeting was called—or another percentage of congregants.

The clerk of session is secretary to the congregational meeting.

The budget is adopted by the session, not the congregation. However, the session must inform the congregation of the budget. This can be done at a congregational meeting or an informal gathering of the congregation. Salaries of installed pastors must be approved annually by the congregation and reported to the presbytery for approval.

Minutes of congregational meetings are included in the session minutes book in chronological order among the session minutes. Other things to remember:

- Indicate whether the meeting is regular or special/called
- Include the call to the meeting if it was called. The business to be transacted is limited to those items listed in the call for the meeting.
- Give the name of the church; the date, time, and place of the meeting; the name of the moderator; and the presence of a quorum.
- Note the opening and closing of the meeting of prayer.

- Record all actions taken, including action on each pastor's terms of call.
- Sign the congregational meeting minutes. There no longer is a requirement that the moderator sign congregational meeting minutes.

Rolls and Registers

The Form of Government requires the following rolls to be kept (G-3.0204a):

- Baptized Members – these are people who have been baptized and who have been enrolled as a baptized member by the session, but who have not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. These members are usually the children in the congregation who have not yet been confirmed. They have a right to pastoral care and can participate in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, but they do not have a right to vote in congregational matters.
- Active Members – these are people who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, have been received into membership of the church (by the Session), have voluntarily submitted to the government of the church, and who participate in the church’s work and worship. Active members have a right to vote in congregational matters and are eligible for election to ordered ministry (elder, deacon) by the congregation.
- Affiliate Members – These are members of another congregation (Christian, but not necessarily PCUSA) who have temporarily moved from the community where the congregation of membership is situated. They must submit a certificate in good standing from the congregation where they are members and must be received by the session. These members can participate in the congregational life, but may not vote in congregational meetings or be elected to an office in the congregation. These could be military persons with postings away from their hometown or persons who, say, winter in Florida for six months of the year.

And the following Registers must be kept (G-3.0204b):

- Baptisms authorized by the Session
- Ruling elders and deacons
- Installed pastors with dates of service

Other registers can be kept. For example, non-installed pastors and marriages.

Electronic Recordkeeping

From the General Assembly:

There are no requirements surrounding how [rolls and registers] are created or in what medium. Creating and maintaining an access copy of these records in electronic format is totally acceptable...

Information contained in the rolls-and-registers volumes is now maintained either in the old binder format or “live” in electronic computer files, and electronic registers must be preserved in the same way that minutes are. Depending on the amount of activity, clerks should print out on acid-free paper a snapshot of the register every six months or annually.

In no case should minutes or records exist only in electronic form after approval.
(Emphases added)

Manual of Administrative Operations, Sexual Misconduct Policy, and Child and Youth Protection Policy

The Manual of Administrative Operations

G-3.0106 provides that “Each council shall develop a manual of administrative operations that will specify the form and guide the work of mission in that council. All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy and a child and youth protection policy.”

The MAO is a tool to guide your session in how it will accomplish its mission. It should be a living document, perhaps contained in a three-ringed binder for each session member—that can be easily changed if the session adopts new policies, structures or practices. The General Assembly website has a list of some materials recommended for inclusion in the manual of administrative operations. See http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/app_s_t_edits.pdf and page down to Appendix T. Although sessions need not see the General Assembly list as a straitjacket that must be followed in every respect (for example, although you should know where your organizing covenant and the list of charter members is, it need not be in the MAO), the GA list does give some structure and some good ideas.

Important for the MAO would be to include a description of the work of each committee and organization, copies of policies that your session has adopted, a copy of the church budget, and a calendar of church and session activities/work. Things not included in the GA list that you might want to include would be a Social Media Policy and a Safety and Security Policy. You should make the MAO a useful reference that helps the session perform its responsibilities.

The Sexual Misconduct Policy

The Sexual Misconduct Policy for the presbytery (as a council, the presbytery must have this) is on the presbytery website: <https://www.thepresbytery.org/application/files/2914/4181/4180/NCP-Sexual-Misconduct-Policy-060510.pdf>. It can be a resource for your session on how to create such a policy. You can also google “sexual misconduct policies Presbyterian churches” and come up with many samples to use.

The Child and Youth Protection Policy

National Capital Presbytery has resources on child protection policies on the website: <https://www.thepresbytery.org/documents/child-protection-policies>. You can use those as a go-by.

These are the required policies. Sessions might also consider whether they need a Social Media Policy or a Safety and Security Policy.

Relationship of the Session to the Presbytery, Synod, General Assembly

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is an interconnected group of congregations, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly. The Book of Order outlines the relationship between the session and the other councils at G-3.0202. Here are some of the interactions between the councils.

- Sending of Commissioners to Presbytery Meetings

The Book of Order tells us that sessions have a particular responsibility to participate in the life of the whole church through participation in other councils. One way sessions participate in the presbytery is by electing elder-commissioners to attend presbytery meetings and report what happens at presbytery to the session and the congregation. Each spring the stated clerk of National Capital Presbytery sends each clerk of session a letter informing him or her of the number of elder-commissioners who are entitled to voice and vote at presbytery meetings. Each church gets at least two commissioners. It is a good idea to elect one “permanent” commissioner (perhaps an elder no longer on session) who will contribute continuity and a deeper understanding (due to consistent attendance) of the issues being presented at the presbytery meeting and one rotating commissioner from the session so all session members can have some exposure to the presbytery.

Notices and agendas for presbytery meetings are emailed to clerks of session at least 10 days prior to the presbytery meeting. Clerks should forward the meeting information to the elected commissioners for that meeting.

- Nominations for Presbytery Commissions and Committees

Our presbytery is always looking for persons from our congregations to serve on its committees. We are committed to finding racial/ethnic minority members to serve as well as persons from all parts of the evangelical/progressive spectrum. We urge you to contact the chair of the Nominating Committee (contact information is on the website or you can call the presbytery office) to volunteer or recommend someone.

- Annual Reports, Including the Statistical Report

The annual General Assembly Statistical Report is sent out in early December to all clerks of session. It is generally due to be completed by the beginning of February. If a report is not submitted, the prior years' membership numbers will determine the church's per capita obligation.

Every year, lately in the fall, a “Clerk's Annual Questionnaire” is sent from the Office of General Assembly to each clerk. This report changes every year as different parts of the OGA seek information on various aspects of the denomination's mission.

Also, along with the Statistical Report, the presbytery requests that you send it a filled out “Church and Session Information” form that tells us who is on your session and who your clerk and treasurer are. This helps us keep up with changes in contact information.

- Annual Session Records Review

NCP holds four opportunities a year for clerks to have their minutes and their rolls and registers reviewed, as is required by the Book of Order. (G-3.0108a) Every August, the Stated Clerk's Office sends all clerks a list of the session records review review dates and locations. Although clerks are assigned a particular review session, they can arrange to change the date by calling the stated clerk or the assistant to the stated clerk. Before coming to the session records review, clerks should complete the checklist and bring it to the review. The checklist can be accessed at the Office of the Stated Clerk webpage: <https://www.thepresbytery.org/presbytery-meeting/office-stated-clerk>.

- Pastor's Terms of Call and Contracts

NCP, like all presbyteries, adopts minimum terms of call annually for installed and contracted pastors as well as for Certified Christian Educators and Certified Associate Christian Educators. (G-2.0804, G-2.1103b). Clerks should ensure a copy of the terms of call or contracts (usually old Board of Pensions Form ENR-111) is sent to the Committee on Ministry Administrator, Colette Ramm, cramm@thepresbytery.org, every year in order for the presbytery to determine that the minimum requirements have been met.

- Approval of Certain Church Actions

Churches are required to obtain presbytery approval of certain actions. Examples of these are:

- Selling, mortgaging, or encumbering real property or acquiring real property subject to an encumbrance.
- Leasing real property for worship or leasing any other real property for more than five years
- Extending the term of an officer longer than six years
- Overtures for consideration by the synod or General Assembly

Sessions can ask the presbytery to forward overtures, requests for action, to the General Assembly for its biannual meeting. Caution! There are strict and early due dates for overtures to the General Assembly.

- Nominations of elders to be considered for election as commissioners to the synod and General Assembly meetings and to serve on their committees
- And, sessions are to welcome representatives of the presbytery on the occasion of their visits!! (G-3.0202d)

Appendix A – Sample Agenda Template

**First Presbyterian Church
Stated Meeting of the Session
[DATE]
6:00 p.m.**

AGENDA

Rolls

Present: [list all session members]

Excused: [move excused member names here]

Absent: [move absent member names here]

Guests:

Dinner Together (6:00 to 6:30 p.m.)

Bible Study, Prayer, and Missional Focus (6:30 to 7:30 p.m.)

Fiduciary and Administrative Matters (7:30 to 8:30 p.m.)

Motion: to adopt the agenda

Motion: to approve the minutes of the

CLERK’S REPORT

Communion: [home communion?]

Guests in the Pulpit:

Baptisms:

Weddings:

Deaths:

Funeral/Memorial Services:

New Members:

Incoming Correspondence:

Outgoing Correspondence:

OMNIBUS MOTION

Motion: to receive the Clerk’s Report

ORDER OF THE DAY

OTHER BUSINESS

Pastor Update
Associate Pastor Update
Finance Ministry Update

Other Ministry Business
Other Ministry and Staff Reports (see Appendix)
Board of Deacons Report (see Appendix)

Motion: to receive the Ministry Reports

Thanksgiving and Intercessory Prayers (8:30 to 8:45 p.m.)

Benediction (8:45 p.m.)

Calendar Notes:

Jane Doe, Clerk of Session

Appendix to Agenda
Stated Meeting of the Session
[date]

PASTOR'S REPORT
ASSOCIATE PASTOR'S REPORT

MINISTRY REPORTS

Christian Formation
Finance
 Memorial Funds
Global Mission
Local Mission
Nominating
Parish Life
Personnel
Property
 Memorial Garden
Stewardship
 Planned Giving

**Environmental Stewardship
Welcoming
Worship and Music**

OTHER REPORTS:

**Board of Deacons:
Board of Trustees:
National Capital Presbytery Meeting:**



Resources for Clerks of Session

- Book of Confessions – (In English, Spanish, Korean, Portuguese)
<http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/constitutional-services/constitution/>
- Book of Order – (In English, Spanish, Korean)
<http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/constitutional-services/constitution/#boo>
- Office of General Assembly Constitutional Services
<http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/constitutional-services/>
- Manual of Administrative Operations
https://www.thepresbytery.org/application/files/2114/9581/1465/MAO_May.pdf
- Presbytery Stated Clerk Page
<http://www.thepresbytery.org/presbytery-meeting/office-stated-clerk>
- Session Records Review Guidelines (on Stated Clerk page)
- National Capital Presbytery Clerk’s Tips Page
<http://www.thepresbytery.org/presbytery-meeting/office-stated-clerk/clerks-tips>
- Office of the General Assembly Resources: <http://oga.pcusa.org/>

Parliamentary Procedure Resources

- Robert's Rules of Order - <http://www.rulesonline.com/>