



**Manual for Clerks of Sessions  
(and a reference for Moderators)**

Presbytery of Shenandoah  
1111 North Main Street  
Harrisonburg, VA 22802  
540.433.2556

[www.shenpres.org](http://www.shenpres.org)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction .....	1
Roles of the Clerk of Session .....	2
Responsibilities at a Glance.....	2-3
Guidelines for Session Meetings .....	3-7
Clerk’s Annual Report.....	6
Keeping Minutes Safe .....	6-7
Nuts and Bolts of Session Minutes.....	7
Congregational Meetings.....	7-8
Session Meeting Rules.....	8-9
Electronic Meetings .....	9
Rolls and Registers .....	9-12
Rolls.....	9-11
Roll Books .....	11
Registers .....	11-12
Paper versus Electronic Rolls .....	12
Annual Review of Session Records .....	12-13
Annual Statistical Reports .....	13
Appendix A – Recording Actions in Session Meetings .....	14
Appendix B – Congregational Meetings and Minutes .....	15
Appendix C – Required Clerk’s Checklist .....	16-18
Appendix D – Sample Letters .....	19-23
Appendix E – Parliamentary Procedures.....	24-27
Appendix F – Full Financial Review Defined.....	27
Appendix G – Incorporation and Bylaws .....	28
Appendix H – Executive Session .....	29-30

## **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to the office of clerk of session! You have joined a unique and important group of people in the Presbyterian Church (USA). The Book of Order (G-3.0104) mandates that each governing body of the PC(USA) have a moderator and a clerk. Clerks of presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly are called stated clerks. Those serving sessions are called clerks of session.

As clerk, you will record a good deal of history of your church as you write the session minutes. Future generations will learn what your church did to further Christ's mission in the world by reading the minutes you write. It follows then, that it is important that you keep accurate records of all the proceedings in the session meetings and in congregational meetings.

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

The Sessional Records Committee has refined this manual for use by Shenandoah Presbytery's clerks and sessions. That being said, we would like to give special thanks to Catherine Blacka, Stated Clerk of Baltimore Presbytery. The manual from Baltimore Presbytery which was put together by a task force was exceedingly well written and easy to use. The following presbyteries were resourced for creation of that manual and we give thanks to their writers as well: West Virginia, Grace, Monmouth, and National Capital Presbyteries.

If you have any questions, or need assistance, please contact the Stated Clerk.

## **ROLES OF THE CLERK OF SESSION**

The primary role of the clerk of session is to maintain and preserve the records of the church, including the minutes of session and congregational meetings, and the rolls and registers. Clerks may assist the moderator in docket preparation or serve as a sounding board for the moderator. An important role of the clerk is to assist the moderator by keeping the moderator informed and providing information to the pastor as requested. Other assistance will be determined by the relationship between the pastor and the clerk and by the needs of the moderator.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES AT A GLANCE**

1. Keep a full and accurate record of the proceedings of the session (G-3.0107 and G-3.0204).
2. Keep the roll of session membership and attendance (G-3.0104).
3. Arrange for the careful preservation of session records, making recommendation to the session for the permanent safekeeping of its records (G-3.0104 and G-3.0107).
4. Furnish extracts from the minutes when required by another governing body of the church (G-3.0104).
5. Maintain and preserve rolls and registers required of session (G-3.0204a and b). (See Rolls and Registers, pages 9-12).
6. Be responsible for the preservation of the records of the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees (G-3.0204).
7. Be familiar with the responsibilities of the session as described in the Book of Order (G-3.0201).
8. Notify the session or congregation of special meetings, describing accurately the business that will be transacted. Adequate public notice of all congregational meetings shall be given. Congregations shall provide their own rule for minimum notification requirements and give notice at regular services of worship prior to the meeting (G-1.0501 and G-1.0502).
9. Be sure that the annual statistical form and Annual Clerk's Questionnaire (see page 13) requested by the General Assembly is completed accurately and reported to the PC(USA) by the deadline noted. Also, be sure to return other paperwork requested by the stated clerk to the Presbytery office by the deadline noted.
10. Submit the session minutes book to the Sessional Records Committee of Shenandoah Presbytery for annual review. A letter will be sent to each clerk of session annually which provides instructions for this review. The checklist may be found in Appendix C, pages 16-18. (G-3.0108a)
11. Serve as secretary for meetings of the congregation (G1.0505, G-3.0204), seeing that the minutes are appropriately read and approved by the congregation prior to the adjournment of the meeting, or by the session at its next stated meeting, and are inscribed in the permanent session minutes book. (See Congregational Meetings, pages 7-8)
12. Bring all official correspondence to the attention of the moderator and the session, and respond as directed by the session.

13. Keep a list of unfinished business, including all matters referred to a committee or a staff member for later report to session, and remind the appropriate person(s) if not reported expeditiously.
14. Be prepared to respond to questions of procedure in meetings if requested in consultation with the moderator.
15. Receive and submit communications from/to other governing bodies.
16. Respond to all information requests from the stated clerk.
17. Assist the moderator in preparing the agenda for session meetings, as requested.
18. Be available to assist the session moderator in church officer training when requested.
19. If requested and in consultation with the moderator, prepare a statement of highlights of session actions and reports following the meeting for information for the congregation.  
NOTE: Confidential matters should not be included.
20. Perform other such duties as may be assigned by the moderator or the session.

## GUIDELINES FOR SESSION MINUTES

Minutes of each session meeting must include:

1. Whether the meeting is a regular or special meeting.
2. The name of the church, the place, date, and beginning and ending time of the meeting.
3. The name of the moderator of the meeting.
4. The opening and closing of each meeting with prayer.
5. The roll, listing ruling elders present, ruling elders absent, and any who are excused; the clerk, moderator, and other staff present or excused; others present and their identity. As a suggestion, consider listing ruling elders by class and noting their presence (P), absence (A) or excused absence (E). **(Please use first and last names.)**
6. The affirmation of a quorum (G-3.0203). The session shall provide by rule for a quorum for the meetings. The quorum must be specified in the bylaws of the congregation. A suggested quorum of the session might be the moderator or other presiding officer and one third of the ruling elders, but no fewer than two, except for the reception and dismissing of members, when the quorum could be the moderator and two members of the session. (This reflects the quorum set in the Book of Order prior to 2011.) Unless the quorum is lost during the meeting, the clerk's certification of a quorum at the beginning meets this requirement; if the quorum is lost, the minutes should report that the clerk advised the session and its moderator of that fact.
7. The approval of the agenda. (In the case of a special meeting, the call to the meeting stating the purpose becomes the agenda.)
8. The approval of the minutes of the previous meeting. (Any corrections of previous meeting minutes should be listed, or the minutes may be considered as a draft until the corrections are made and the minutes are approved. If this is the case, this should be noted in the session's Administrative Manual of Operations.)
9. Clerk's report may include correspondence, announcements, and report of the serving of the Lord's Supper, in addition to listing of baptisms, marriages, births, deaths, and changes in membership rolls.

10. Reports of teaching elder(s), other staff, and the treasurer and committee chairpersons should be summarized in the minutes. A carefully selected inclusion makes the minutes a more valuable historical record of the church. The clerk has wide discretion, but should be sure that the inclusion represents the wishes of the session.
11. All motions and amendments, if any, and whether they passed or failed. Be sure to record the disposition of all motions, regardless of passage or failure. (Details of discussion should not be recorded, except when needed to give a sense of the action).
12. Be especially careful and diligent in recording all actions taken to hire, compensate, evaluate, discipline, or terminate non-ordained staff. See Appendix A, page 14, for examples of items to report.
13. When a previous action of the session is referred to, the page on which it is recorded, or the date of the meeting at which it occurred, should be designated.
14. The administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper must be reported at the next succeeding regular meeting. When the sacrament has been administered to those unable to attend public worship, the name of the teaching elder officiating and the name of the ruling elder or ruling elders assisting should be noted. (This may be part of the clerk's report or the report of the worship committee.)
15. The administration of the Sacrament of Baptism at the next succeeding regular meeting, giving the full name of adults baptized including 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 the one rightly exercising parental responsibility (W-2.3014), and may include the mother's maiden name. (This may be part of the clerk's report, the pastor's report or that of the appropriate committee.)
16. The full name of applicants for church membership (in the case of married women, include maiden name) and the manner of their reception:
  - a. By profession of faith, previously baptized
  - b. By profession of faith and baptism
  - c. By re-affirmation of faith
  - d. By letter of transfer, giving the name of the church from which received
17. The full title of the church to which a certificate of transfer is granted and the full name of the person transferred with the date of transfer.
18. Record the job descriptions for employed personnel, both clergy and non-clergy, as they are approved.
19. Name of ruling elders elected to be commissioners to meetings of the presbytery, and the exact period for which elected (G-3.0202a).
20. Record that commissioner(s) to a presbytery meeting made a report on that meeting to the session. The report may be summarized.
21. When the session finds it necessary to exercise discipline, the Form of Government and the Rules of Discipline should be carefully studied by a committee of the session and if discipline be administered, the minutes of the session must contain such a record of the proceedings, which will enable the presbytery to know who was disciplined, why, and how.

22. In case of a sale, mortgage, gift or lease of property, the session records must show:
  - a. Name, address, and legal description of the property
  - b. Name of buyer/lessee
  - c. Sale price
  - d. Loan amount, purpose, and terms, including the name of the lender
  - e. Lease terms and liability insurance
  - f. Concurrence of the presbytery if the church has not received the exemptions
23. If a report is received, note that in the minutes. If the report contains recommendations for actions, those become main motions of the body and are acted upon. In most cases a report would be the result of a request by the session for a committee or task force or elder to gather and compile information in a report format. Regular information from standing committees of the session may be summarized in the appropriate area of the minutes.
24. If the session endorses, approves, or otherwise adopts a report, the report becomes the position of the adopting body. The full text of **adopted** reports must be placed in the minutes. They may be added as attachments to the minutes.
25. Approval of the annual budget. (G-3.0113, G-3.0205)
26. Approval of the distribution of the church's benevolences. (G-3.0205)
27. The annual review with each pastor of the adequacy of compensation.
28. The recommendation to be made to the congregation for changes or for no change in the terms of call for each pastor.
29. The annual review by the personnel committee (or other responsible body appointed by the session) of the adequacy of compensation of all paid staff.
30. Whether new officers have received training and been examined. (G-2.0402)
31. The ordination and/or installation of ruling elders and deacons at the next succeeding meeting.
32. The recognition of trustees (if any) at the next succeeding meeting.
33. That property and liability insurance has been obtained. (G-3.0112)
34. A full financial review. (G-3.0113) (See Appendix F, page 27, for more information.)
35. Annual Statistical Report, and record of approval by the session.
36. Report of the Sessional Records Committee on review of the minutes from the previous year.

## **Clerk's Annual Report**

Following the last meeting of each calendar year, the Clerk may include these items in the minutes as a Clerk's Report:

1. Indication by page number where the latest job description for each staff person is located in the minute book.
2. Changes during the year in the membership of session, diaconate, and trustees through death, resignation, or removal.
3. State the composition of the session with regard to racial ethnic members, women, men, and age groups, and how this corresponds to the composition of the congregation. **(Photocopying the annual statistical report required by the General Assembly into the session records may fulfill this requirement.)**
4. If the congregation has deacons and/or trustees, report in the minutes where their records are kept.

## **Keeping Minutes Safe**

1. Electronic storage, in place of paper storage, **is not acceptable**, because there is no way to attest by signature to the accuracy and correctness of the documents, along with long term storage and accessibility problems.
2. Because official church records are to be held in perpetuity, the only ways that are acceptable for keeping these records are to have them on paper, printed on acid-free paper, or on microfilm. Only acid-free paper and properly processed microfilm are considered permanent at this time.  
While any records that are identified in the Book of Order as permanent, including session minutes and registers, can be created on a computer, the record copy must be printed out on acid-free paper, stored securely, and can eventually be transferred to microfilm. Records copies of minutes should be printed out and signed at the time of their creation, and, at a minimum, registers should be printed out annually.
3. Minutes may be kept in bound books or in loose-leaf binders; however, the Sessional Records Subcommittee **STRONGLY** recommends using bound books. When those in loose-leaf binders are to be stored, store the pages in archival boxes.
4. It is important that pages be numbered consecutively, both sides of the page, including any attachments. It is especially important for loose pages or pages kept in a loose-leaf binder to be numbered. If a page or section of a page is intentionally blank, mark it with a stamp that says "Intentionally Left Blank" or mark with a large X.
5. Acceptable numbering schemes are:
  - a. A one-up numbering system beginning at as early a time as possible. (1, 2, 3, . . .)
  - b. A one-up numbering system that starts over at the beginning of each year. In this case, consider some system, such as a note in a header or footer, which keeps track of the year. (2015, Page 1; 2015, Page 2, etc.)
  - c. Pre-numbered pages in a bound book.

6. Each council shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings. Minutes and all other official records of councils are the property in perpetuity of said councils or their legal successors. When a council ceases to exist, its records shall become the property of the next higher council within whose bounds the lower council was prior to its cessation. The clerk of each council shall make recommendation to that body for the permanent safekeeping of the body's records with the Presbyterian Historical Society or in a temperature and humidity controlled environment of a seminary of the Presbyterian Church (USA). (G-3.0107). The Presbyterian Historical Society will preserve records for congregations. See their web site <http://www.history.pcusa.org/> or call them for information. Their address is 425 Lombard Street, Philadelphia, PA 19147. Telephone: 215-627-1852, Fax: 215-627-0509. Hours are Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

## **NUTS & BOLTS OF SESSION MINUTES**

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

1. Clerk takes notes for the minutes at meeting.
2. Clerk writes the minutes and types or arranges for them to be typed.
3. Clerk makes copies and distributes before the next meeting.
4. At the next meeting, the minutes are either approved as correct or corrected.
5. Previously approved minutes may be corrected by noting the corrections in the current minutes and/or noting them in ink in the previously approved minutes.
6. Clerk types or photocopies approved minutes in the session permanent minutes book.
7. If using a computer for minutes in the permanent minutes book, archival quality paper must be used.

Do not use erasures, whiteout, strikethroughs or footnotes. Do not insert in the records separate sheets of paper with written or printed matter on them or leave sticky notes in the minutes, as this could compromise the integrity of the acid-free paper.

The records of each session meeting are to be duly attested (signed in ink) by the clerk.

The minutes of congregational meetings, the annual report of the church treasurer or treasurers, and the annual statistical report required by the General Assembly are to be included. These are to be typed or photocopied into the permanent record book and not included as inserts.

## **CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS**

Minutes of all congregational meetings shall be included in the session record book along with session minutes in one chronological order (See Appendix B, page 15)

Minutes of these meetings shall include:

1. Indication of whether the meeting is the annual congregational meeting or "special meeting."

2. If it is a “special meeting,” the minutes shall include the call to the meeting. The business to be transacted is limited to those items listed in the call for the meeting. (G-1.0501)
3. Name of the church.
4. Date, beginning and ending time, and place of the meeting.
5. Name of the moderator or presiding officer.
6. Presence of a quorum. Indicate the number of active members needed to satisfy the quorum requirement, and record the actual number of active members present. (Congregations shall provide by rule the quorum necessary to conduct business [G-1.0501]. The quorum must be specified in the bylaws of the congregation.)
7. Opening and closing of the meeting with prayer.
8. Declaration that the minutes of the previous congregational meeting have approved, and an invitation to the congregation to request reading of the previous meeting’s minutes.
9. A record of all actions, whether adopted or lost.
10. At a congregational meeting for the purpose of calling a pastor, in order for each person to be able to vote his/her conscience, a written ballot should be used.
11. Action by the congregation on each teaching elder’s terms of call.
12. Minutes of the meeting of the congregation or corporation at which the annual financial reports are made should indicate, at least:
  - a. Report of a full financial review of the financial records. (G-3.0205) (See Appendix F, page 27)
  - b. A complete, itemized report of income and expenditures for the year.
  - c. Provide the complete, itemized proposed budget adopted by the session for the coming year.
  - d. Details of the status of loans from the General Assembly, synod, or presbytery, if any are outstanding.
13. If the congregation does not approve the minutes before adjournment, the session may approve the minutes at its next scheduled meeting.
14. The clerk must attest (in ink) congregational meeting minutes.

## **SESSION MEETING RULES**

1. Session meetings are generally regarded as open meetings. Members of the congregation and staff wishing to attend are to notify the moderator or the clerk prior to the meeting and indicate their reason(s) for attending. The names of visitors and their reason(s) for attending will be included in the meeting minutes.
2. The session, on occasion, will go into executive session for a specific purpose or purposes. No visitors are permitted in these sessions unless invited by the session because of their knowledge of the subject or subjects. For further information on executive session, see Appendix H, pages 29-30.
3. The teaching elder of the church is the moderator; where there are co-pastors, they alternate moderating the session meetings. When the pulpit is vacant, either the interim

pastor or another teaching elder appointed by the presbytery is the moderator. A session cannot meet in the absence of the moderator except:

- a. If the moderator thinks it advisable, he/she with the session's concurrence invites another teaching elder of the presbytery to moderate.
- b. If the session is directed to meet by presbytery, the clerk and/or the moderator consult with representatives of the presbytery; depending on circumstances, it may be advisable for a representative of the presbytery to moderate the meeting.

## **ELECTRONIC MEETINGS**

Sometimes matters that need immediate action arise when calling a session meeting is impractical. For those cases, the session may adopt a policy for electronic meetings. A policy should include provisions to reach all members, for two or more members to object and thus cancel the electronic meeting, and for any decisions to be included in the minutes of the next regular session meeting. If the session adopts such a policy, then the policy should be recorded in the minutes of the session meeting and in the session's Manual of Administrative Operations.

A sample policy from the Presbytery of Pittsburgh's Clerk of Session Manual can be found below:

### **SESSION POLICY ON ELECTRONIC MEETINGS (Adopted (date)) [SAMPLE]**

In those cases where routine matters must be presented to the members of session for action before its next scheduled meeting, then session may conduct this routine business by conference call or electronic means which bring members together, or by polling, either by telephone or other electronic means. The requirements for such meetings are:

- A reasonable attempt shall be made to reach all members.
- There shall be a quorum of members responding.
- In the event that any two members object to the electronic or telephone procedure, then in that case the decision shall either be postponed until the next regular meeting or a special meeting must be convened.
- Any action resulting from a telephone or electronic meeting shall be confirmed at the next scheduled meeting, so that it can be included in the minutes of the session.

## **ROLLS AND REGISTERS**

### **Rolls**

**The Rolls of the church should contain information about those who are members of the local congregation.** It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to maintain, or to oversee the maintenance of the Rolls as required in G-3.0204a.

Names of members shall be placed upon, removed, or deleted from the rolls of the congregation only by order of the Session. (G-3.0204a)

### **G-3.0204a:**

There shall be rolls of baptized, active, and affiliate members in accordance with G-1.0401, G-1.0402, and G-1.0403. 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. The session may delete names from the roll of the congregation when a member so requests, or has moved or otherwise ceased to participate actively in the work and worship of the congregation for a period of two years. The session shall seek to restore members to active participation and shall provide written notice before deleting names due to member inactivity. (See Appendix D, pages 19-23, for sample letters that might be used for this purpose).

### **Active Members**

An active member is one who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into membership of the church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of the particular church, and participates in the church's work and worship. (G-1.0402)

Record name, date received into membership, and method of reception on the roll. Record date of removal from the particular roll and whether by death, transfer to another church, (placed on inactive roll, if one is maintained), or removed.

### **Baptized Members**

A baptized member is one who has received the Sacrament of Baptism, but has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This includes adults who were baptized in that particular church who have not made a profession of faith and baptized children of active members or pastors related to the particular church. (G-1.0401) The 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly issued a "clarification of meaning" to this definition to include children of active members who have been baptized in a Christian church (Trinity baptism) but who have not yet been received as active members (confirmed).

Record name, date of baptism (if known), church where Sacrament of Baptism occurred on the roll. Names should be removed from this roll when a profession of faith is made, or when the person moves from the community.

### **Affiliate Members**

An affiliate member is one who is an active member of another church of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the 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. (G-1.0403) An example of an affiliate member would be a college student living in your community while attending school.

Record name, date of affiliation, name of home church, date of renewal, date of return to home church on the roll.

(Note from the Stated Clerk: You may notice that there is no **inactive roll**, as there has been in

Books of Order prior to 2011. The session may choose to maintain an inactive roll, however, and, if it does, then the rules for keeping an individual on that roll or deleting such an individual should be determined by the session, recorded in the minutes of the session, and kept in the session's Manual of Administrative Operations. The former definition is this: An inactive member of a particular church is one who does not participate in the church's work and worship. An inactive member is entitled to all the rights and privileges of an active member except the right to speak in the meetings of the congregation and to vote and hold office.)

### **Roll Books**

Roll books usually provide double pages for a chronological roll by date of reception into membership with columns for name, how received, name of church from which member transferred if that is the manner of reception, date of deletion from the active roll and reason – by death, inactivity, or transfer, in which case the name of the church to which the member is transferring is listed.

Pages may be provided in the same binder for an alphabetical listing of members along with the membership number that is assigned in the chronological roll. Many find it easier to keep the alphabetical listing electronically, printing the list, along with the member number, at least annually.

Pages may also be provided for baptized, affiliate, and inactive member (if kept) rolls in the same binder.

Pages containing columns for the information requested may be obtained through Cokesbury (800) 672-1789. [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com)

### **Registers**

**Registers are historical records and need to be carefully maintained.** It is the responsibility of the clerk of session to maintain or oversee the maintenance of registers as required in G-3.0204b.

All registers should be kept in the same binder, or in the binder with the rolls. The binder used may be a loose-leaf notebook or a bound book. Pages for each register listed may be obtained through Cokesbury Book Stores (800) 672-1789. You may obtain a sample page for each register and then create your own register pages.

The session shall maintain the following registers:

#### **Marriages**

**Register of Marriages** shall include marriages of members of the church, all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the church, and all marriages performed on church property.

#### **Baptisms**

**Register of Infant and Adult Baptisms** shall include name, parents' names, and date of birth of those being baptized.

#### **Ruling Elders**

**Register of Ruling Elders** shall include each elder's name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.

#### **Deacons**

**Register of Deacons** shall include each deacon's name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.

**Teaching Elders (Ministers of the Word and Sacrament)**

**Register of Teaching Elders** shall include the names of pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, assistant pastors, interim pastors, stated supplies, and parish associates serving the church, with dates of service.

**PAPER VS ELECTRONIC ROLLS**

For many of the reasons that appropriate paper records of the session minutes are required, a chronological paper record of rolls and registers shall also be kept. Electronic records are useful for counting the various categories of members and for keeping an alphabetical list.

Paper rolls are chronological and should have the full name, date joined, and how joined (letter of transfer, profession, reaffirmation) as a minimum. If by letter, record the name of the church. It should record the date of removal from the roll and the reason. A one-up roll book number makes it possible to cross-reference alphabetical lists with chronological lists.

These are the minimum items for an electronic roll, too. We suggest adding to an electronic roll the information that the Annual Statistical Report asks for, such as gender, racial/ethnic identity, disability (if applicable), and date of birth (for calculating ages).

Many old roll books contain a section for adding member names in an alphabetical order, at least by the first letter of the surname. That function may be best done via an electronic roll. Print an alphabetical list, with roll book number, at least annually, and keep this alphabetical list with the paper Roll Book.

**ANNUAL REVIEW OF SESSION RECORDS**

The Sessional Records Subcommittee of the Committee on Relational Ministry of Shenandoah Presbytery is charged with the task of reviewing the Session Records of congregations within the bounds of the presbytery. Recently, this review has been done during the winter and early months of spring.

Early in the year, clerks will receive a letter from the chairperson of the subcommittee with specific instructions about that year's review. Members of the subcommittee will read the records, completing a sheet with feedback which is to be shared with the moderator and session so that all may work together to strengthen the historical record of the church.

We request that the clerk or moderator fill out the Checklist for the Review of Session Records (found in Appendix C, pages 16-18, and on the presbytery website, [www.shenpres.org](http://www.shenpres.org) under "Forms and Policies", then choose "Sessional Records under Committee Forms", then select "Session Checklist") to facilitate the reading of the minutes of session and congregational meetings.

Each council shall review annually or biennially, based on the body's meeting frequency, the

proceedings and actions of all entities related to the body, all officers able to act on behalf of the body, and lower councils within its jurisdiction. In reviewing the procedures of the lower council, the higher body shall determine whether the proceedings have been correctly recorded, have been in accordance with this Constitution, have been prudent and equitable, and have been faithful to the mission of the whole church. It shall also determine whether lawful injunctions of a higher body have been obeyed. [G-3.0108a]

## **ANNUAL STATISTICAL REPORTS**

### **Introduction**

Each year the Office of the General Assembly asks each congregation to complete annual statistical reporting forms for the previous calendar year. One person should be responsible for seeing that the reports are completed and filed; often that person is the clerk. The instructions included with the annual statistical report provide very helpful information and resources for additional help if needed. These forms are typically filled in online.

There are two parts to the report:

- **Annual Statistical Report**: This report, to be filed online by a specified date, provides information on each congregation, and is required by the Office of the General Assembly. Information may be entered online as often as you like for a period of time prior to the deadline date or until the “Submit” button is pressed.

The “Instructions for Completing the On-Line Session Annual Statistical Report” opens with two pages of “Frequently Asked Questions” that can solve a lot of problems and should be read carefully. Included there are a phone number and an e-mail address for obtaining help in completing the report.

- **Clerk’s Annual Questionnaire**: This report is submitted online to a different web address, has a different deadline date, may have different information each year, and must be completed in one online session, contrary to the Annual Statistical Report. The questionnaire is the only means national entities of the church have to gather information about specific programs and activities in all congregations of the PC(USA). The information gathered is very important to the offices asking questions on the questionnaire, and can be useful to others as well. You will most likely need to confer with the pastor or other church staff members or committees to fill out this form, so making paper copies and sharing them with those most likely to be knowledgeable about the various sections will be very helpful.

**RECORDING ACTIONS IN SESSION MINUTES**

1. Be especially careful and diligent in recording all actions taken to hire, compensate, evaluate, discipline, or terminate non-ordained staff.
  - a. When the session hires a non-ordained member of the staff, enter into the minutes of the meeting the full and complete employment agreement or contract. Upon the annual review of the person's compensation, record any changes as follows: "On the recommendation of the Personnel Committee, the hourly rate of pay for the Custodian \_\_\_\_\_ was increased from \$10 to \$12.50, effective January 1, 2010."
  - b. Record the findings of every evaluation of non-ordained staff that the Personnel Committee reports to session. In every instance where the evaluation indicates less than satisfactory performance, record any remedial course of action that the Personnel Committee proposes.
  - c. In the event that termination of an employee is recommended, record the Personnel Committee's report that the relevant provisions of the personnel policies have been followed. Be clear in the record that the session, acting in a legal meeting with a quorum present, voted to terminate the employee. The record must not indicate that any individual, or entity other than the full Session, took this action. Record any severance agreement or terms in full.
2. Record actions taken which affect the member status of any member following one of these examples:
  - a. Session acted to delete the names of these active members from the church's rolls (G-3.0204a): Joe Smith, John Smith, and Jane Doe.
  - b. Upon their request, the Session deleted these names (G-3.0204a): Joe Smith, John Smith, and Jane Doe.
  - c. Session granted a letter of transfer to John and Jane Doe, who are joining Anywheretown United Methodist Church: the request for the letter came from the church's pastor. (G-3.0204a)
3. Record the names of those making motions. The name of the individual seconding the motion does not need to be recorded, unless so ordered by the Session. If the vote requires counting, record the numerical outcome of votes taken.
4. The minutes of all session and congregational meetings, and all other official records, including the records provided to session by the deacons and/or the trustees, if any, are the property of the session. The clerk is responsible for their safekeeping. A request from a member of the congregation for a copy of the minutes, or an excerpt of part of a meeting, is reported to the session at its next meeting, and the clerk is to follow the session's decision.

**CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS AND MINUTES**

1. An annual meeting of the congregation is required (G-1.0501). Special meetings must/shall be called by the session when it deems it necessary, when requested in writing by one-fourth of the members on the active roll, and when session is directed by presbytery to call a meeting.
2. The nature of the business to be conducted in a special meeting shall be included in the call for the meeting. Only those items included in the call for the special meeting shall be included in the business to be transacted. Notify the congregation of special meetings, describing accurately the business that will be transacted. Adequate public notice of all congregational meetings shall be given. Congregations shall provide their own rule for minimum notification requirements and give notice at regular services of worship prior to the meeting (G-1.0501 and G-1.0502).
3. Business to be transacted at meetings of the congregation shall be limited to matters relating 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 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 the Constitution (G-2.0404);
  - f. approving a plan for the creation of a joint congregational witness, or amending or dissolving the joint congregational witness (G-5.05).
4. A congregational petition for the session to call a congregational meeting, in addition to the requirement that it must be signed by one-fourth of the members on the active roll, must be called to consider one of the matters outlined in G-1.0503. If it is called to consider any matter outside the scope of this provision of the Form of Government, session is to decline the petition, with full explanation.
5. If a quorum is not present as the meeting begins, notify the moderator; the members present may recess and seek a quorum, or the moderator may adjourn the meeting. If the meeting proceeds in the absence of a quorum, absolutely no votes are to be taken.

**REQUIRED CLERK’S CHECKLIST**

TO THE CLERK OF SESSION AND MODERATOR: Thank you for your important service in maintaining accurate records. The purpose of this list is to aid you and the reader in finding some items to be verified in minutes, rolls, and registers. **This checklist must be completed before the review by putting page numbers where items may be found.** Those items that happen every meeting (e.g., opening and closing with prayer) may have a check mark if they are done at each meeting. **Please leave this checklist loose in your books for the reader’s use.**

If events, such as regularly scheduled observances of the Lord’s Supper, or election of a clerk for more than a one-year term, have been approved by previous sessions and no change has been made, note that below with an asterisk for the page number and a comment from the clerk.

\*\*\*\*\*

Please Print

**Name of Clerk** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone Number** \_\_\_\_\_ **Church** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**For VA churches only:** Completed the incorporation process? (circle one) Yes No  
(G-4.0101)

	<b>Requirement in session meeting minutes:</b>	<b>Page</b>	<b>Re-viewed</b>
1	Stated meetings held at least quarterly with the date, time, and place of meeting being recorded. [G-3.0203]		
2	Whether the meeting is a regular or special meeting. The purpose of the special meeting should be stated. [G-3.0203]		
3	Meetings opened and closed with prayer. [G-3.0105]		
4	If a quorum was present. The following names should be recorded [G-3.0203] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderator, clerk or acting clerk</li> <li>• Ruling Elders present, excused, and absent</li> <li>• Invited guests and purpose</li> </ul>		
5	Indicate that the session minutes of each previous meeting were read, corrected if necessary, and approved.		
6	Clerk (or acting clerk) signs session meeting minutes that they recorded.		
7	List reports received by session from trustees, deacons, and other committees of the session.		

8	All actions passed, either by vote or by common consent, and should include copies of any reports <u>adopted</u> by the session.		
9	Authorization by session of the observances of the Lord's Supper. [W-2.4012]		
10	Instances of the Lord's Supper since last meeting. May include the number of those served, including the homebound.		
11	Authorization by the session of all baptisms – minutes, rolls and registers. [G-3.0204]		
12	Authorization by the session of all new members and how received. This should be in minutes, rolls and registers. [G-3.0201, G-3.0204a]		
13	Marriages since last meeting – in minutes, rolls and registers.		
14	Deaths since last meeting – in minutes, rolls and registers [G-3.0204a]		
15	Actions to move members from active to inactive, if your session has an inactive roll – in minutes, rolls and registers		
16	Actions to remove members from rolls – in minutes, rolls and registers		
17	Election of commissioners to presbytery and receipt of commissioner's report. [G-3.0202]		
18	Approval of special offerings. [G-3.0205]		
19	Receipt of report(s) from the treasurer. [G-3.0205]		
20	The examination of new ruling elders and deacons after training [G-3.0201c]		
21	The ordination and installation of ruling elders and deacons– minutes, rolls and registers [G-3.0201c] [G-3.0204]		
22	Any job descriptions as approved.		
23	Any actions taken regarding non-ordained staff.		
24	Election of a Clerk of Session for a specific term. [G-3.0104]		
25	Action to call a congregation meeting. [G-1.0502]		
26	Election of a treasurer for a specific term. [G-3.0205]		
27	Establishing a budget (annually). [G-3.0113]		
28	Annual review compensation of staff. [Operations Manual]		
29	Review the rolls and registers (annually). [G-1.04, 3.0201c]		
30	Review of the work of the deacons. [G-2.0202]		

31	The financial records of the church, including all of the church's organizations, have been reviewed by at least two unrelated people or submitted for an official audit. [G-3.0205]		
32	All offerings shall be counted and recorded by at least two duly appointed persons or by one fidelity bonded person [G-3.0205a]		
33	The annual statistical report approved and included in minutes.		
34	The minutes are submitted to presbytery for the annual review and the complete results reported to the session and included in minutes. [G-3.0108a]		
35	The Session's Administrative Manual (Manual of Operations) is included with the minutes book, <u>AND</u> includes the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● by-laws</li> <li>● sexual misconduct policy</li> <li>● child protection policy</li> </ul> [G-3.0106]		
36	The Clerk utilizes and provides this completed checklist for use by the Sessional Records reader.		

	<b>Requirement in congregational meeting minutes:</b>	<b>Page</b>	<b>Re-viewed</b>
37	The secretary (Clerk) signs minutes for congregational meetings.		
38	Election of Nominating Committee [G-2.0401]		
39	Election of Ruling Elders and Deacons [G-1.0503a, 2.0404]		
40	Buying, selling, or mortgaging property [G-1.0503d]		
41	Approval of and annual review of teaching elder's Terms of Call [G-1.0503c]		
42	Calling a pastor or dissolving pastoral relationship [G-1.0503b]		
43	Approval of minutes or designation that session may approve		

### SAMPLE LETTERS

Following are sample letters to potentially inactive members.

1. The first letter, on page 20, is intended for those who have relocated.
2. The second letter, on page 21, is for those still living locally.
3. The third letter, on page 22, is a sample of a livelier letter that could be signed by a pastor or ruling elder who is seeking to reach out to the “lost sheep” among us.
4. On the last page of this appendix is a sample that could be put on a post card to be returned to the church.

We hope that you find these sample letters helpful as you seek to reach out to those who are potential candidates for being moved to your Inactive Roll (if you have one) or being removed from your Active Member Roll.

## CHURCH LETTERHEAD

Date

(Inside Address)

The Session of \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church is in the process of fulfilling its responsibilities as defined in the Book of Order, Paragraph G-3.0201c, which includes “reviewing the roll of members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership.” Since your move to \_\_\_\_\_, we hope that you have found a new community of faith near home. If, in fact, you have become members of another church, please advise us of the name of that church, so that we might note it in our church register.

If you have not yet sought a local church, the Session would like to encourage you to seek the fellowship, support, and spiritual nurture of a faith community. We would be glad to help find another church if that is your desire.

Please let me hear from you. You may e-mail me at \_\_\_\_\_, or return the bottom portion of this letter to me in care of the church, marked appropriately. If I have not heard from you by December 31 concerning your wishes, your name(s) will be removed from the Active Roll/placed on our Inactive Roll. At a later date, should you desire to become active again/transfer your membership, we will be delighted to facilitate your active membership/transfer to another congregation.

Please know that you will continue to be in our thoughts and prayers, and we particularly wish you a blessed Christmas and a joy-filled New Year.

Sincerely yours,

[Your Name }

Clerk of Session

---

**Please complete as appropriate, and return to [name of church] at the above address.**

\_\_\_\_\_ has/have joined another church.

Name of Member(s)

Church Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Church Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to speak to **the Pastor**, or **an elder**, concerning this matter.

(Circle one, if applicable)

## CHURCH LETTERHEAD

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Inside Address)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

The Session of \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church is in the process of fulfilling its responsibilities as defined in the Book of Order, Paragraph G-3.0201c, which includes “reviewing the roll of members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership.” We have missed you during the past year and wonder if you have become involved in another community of faith. If so, we can transfer your membership to that church.

It may be possible, however, that you have not become active in another church. The Session would like to encourage you to return to active participation in the ministry of our church, or to seek the fellowship, support, and spiritual nurture of another community of faith. If there is something I, or another member of session, or our pastor can do to facilitate your active participation in a Christian ministry, whether at [your church] or another church, please do not hesitate to let us know. You can reach me by e-mail at \_\_\_\_\_ or at home [phone number]. The Pastor may be reached at the church office.

Please let me hear from you, either by e-mail, phone call, or returning the bottom portion of this letter, marked appropriately. If, however, we have not heard from you by December 31, your name will be removed from the Active Roll/placed on our Inactive Roll. At a later date, should you desire to become active again/transfer your membership, we will be delighted to facilitate your active membership/transfer to another congregation. Please know that you and your family will continue to be in our thoughts and prayers, and we pray that you and yours have a blessed Christmas holiday season and joy-filled New Year.

Sincerely yours,

[Your Name]

Clerk of Session

---

**Please complete as appropriate, and return to the church at the address above.**

\_\_\_\_\_ has/have joined another church.

Name of Member(s)

Church Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Church Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to speak to **the Pastor**, or **an elder**, concerning this matter.

(Circle one, if applicable)

## CHURCH LETTERHEAD

(Inside Address)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

You have been missed in worship here at \_\_\_\_\_.

We are a large church and there are plenty of folks who are present, but when you are not here for a long time, your absence is noticed! We made a commitment to support you in your spiritual journey and would like to continue doing so. We also value the contributions you have made in the past to the life of this church. Is it possible for us to renew that mutual commitment and continue to strengthen each other?

\_\_\_\_\_ Church is a community of Disciples of Christ encouraging one another to:

- Honor and connect with God (Worship)
- Care for each other (Belonging)
- Participate in God's ministry (Service)
- Become more like Jesus (Spiritual Growth)
- Bless the world as ambassadors of God (Mission)

Your gifts are much needed as well, and I hope you will consider sharing them with us once again. If you have any questions or concerns I or one of the pastors might be able to address with you what would enable you to return to worship, please feel free to call or set up an appointment.

According to the Presbyterian Book of Order the session is charged with reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership. We would like to hear from you as to your request to remain either an active member or be moved to an inactive status.

If you prefer that your membership remain here, please advise us by December 30, 20\_\_.

Please feel free to call me at \_\_\_\_\_. I look forward to speaking with you or hearing from you soon.

In God's presence,

[Your Name]

Clerk of Session (or this could be from a pastor or another ruling elder)

## SAMPLE POSTCARD TO BE RETURNED

Please check the appropriate comment and return to the church.

- I would like to remain active in the life of \_\_\_\_\_ Church by making a commitment to attend worship.
- Inactive status is appropriate.
- I/We are part of another church. Please remove us from the rolls of \_\_\_\_\_ Church.
- Please call. There is something I/we would like to talk about.

---

Name

## PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES

### Purpose

The purpose of parliamentary procedures is three-fold:

- To facilitate the flow of business
- To allow the majority to accomplish its will
- To protect the rights of minority views and opinions

### Book of Order G-3.0105

Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, except when it is in contradiction to this Constitution. Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body. Congregations can agree to this by rule.

### Role of the Clerk

The moderator rules on points of procedure, not the clerk. The role of the clerk, therefore, is to assist the moderator and to advise and provide counsel, usually upon request. However, the more knowledgeable the clerk is of parliamentary procedures, the more time will be saved and procedural logjams will be prevented.

### Size of Governing Body

The size of the body will determine the degree of formal parliamentary procedures. The smaller the size of the session or congregation, the more informal it will be; the larger the body is, the more formal it will become and more exact in its procedures.

### Some Basic Parliamentary Procedures

#### A. Motions

1. I move that... or I recommend that...
2. The maker of a motion has the privilege of the floor immediately following the seconding of the motion (if a second is required).
3. During debate, speakers should indicate at the beginning whether they are speaking "for" or "against" the motion.

#### B. Items Not Needing a Second

1. Report from a committee
2. Nominations
3. A question of privilege
4. A call for division in voting

### **C. Amendments**

1. Amend by: insert or add; strike out (consecutive words); substitute (normally applied to a whole paragraph or resolution).
2. A “substitute motion” is an amendment.
3. There may be only one amendment to the main motion at one time (known as a first degree amendment).
4. There may be only one amendment to the (first degree) amendment pending at any one time (known as a second degree amendment).
5. An amendment is not in order if it is the same as voting in the negative.
6. Once an amendment has been made, discussion must be confined to the amendment until a vote is taken on that particular amendment.
7. Once a motion has been amended, the motion as amended must then be voted on.
8. There is no provision in Robert’s Rules for a “**Friendly Amendment**”. The only way a motion can be modified without a vote, after it has been stated by the Chair, is with the unanimous consent of the members present.

### **D. The Substitute Motion**

The substitute motion is a form of amendment applied when the desire is to amend a motion in several different, non-consecutive places. It also is used when the text to be amended is longer than a paragraph. The procedure to follow is:

1. The moderator calls for amendments to the main motion (sometimes called “perfecting the motion”). The amendments may be debated. Nothing else is in order. If there are no amendments, the Moderator may declare the motion perfected.
2. The moderator calls for amendments to the substitute motion. The amendments may be debated. Nothing else is in order. If there are no amendments, the moderator may declare the motion perfected.
3. The moderator puts the question: “Shall the substitute motion be substituted for the main motion?” At this time, the merits of the main motion and the substitute motion may be debated and no further amendments are in order.
4. Moderator takes a vote on the question in #3:
  - a. If the question is approved, the main motion disappears and the substitute motion is before the assembly for debate and vote. Substantive amendment is out of order. Editorial amendment is in order.
  - b. If the question is defeated, the substitute motion disappears and the main motion is before the assembly for debate and vote. The main motion may continue to be amended.

### **E. Stop Debate and Order an Immediate Vote**

1. Move or call for the previous question.
2. Not debatable.
3. Vote must be taken to determine whether the body is ready to stop debate.
4. 2/3 vote required to stop debate.

## **F. Tie Vote**

### **1. General**

Motion is lost if a majority is required

### **2. Congregational Meetings**

- a. The moderator shall put the question a second time
- b. If there is a tie vote again, the motion is lost if a majority is required.

## **G. Desiring a Count**

1. Following a voice vote or show of hands, any member may call for a division of the house.  
Vote will be taken by rising – if agreed to by a majority.
2. Actual count then must be taken

## **H. Routine Business**

1. Motion without controversy or question may be adopted by common consent.
  - a. The motion is made
  - b. The moderator asks, “Are there any questions?”
  - c. The moderator asks, “Are there any objections?”
  - d. The moderator states, “So ordered.”
2. If there are any objections or debate at all, the regular voting methods must be used.

## **I. Question of Privilege**

1. May interrupt speaker on floor
2. May interrupt motion or debate on a motion
3. Object – to get the attention of the moderator at once
  - a. To ask a question
  - b. To attend to some matter of business that cannot wait

## A FULL FINANCIAL REVIEW DEFINED

The new “Form of Government” of the Presbyterian Church requires the following:

A full financial review of all financial books and records shall be conducted every year by a public accountant or committee of members versed in accounting procedures. Reviewers should not be related to the treasurer(s). Terminology in this section is meant to provide general guidance and is not intended to require or not require specific audit procedures or practices as understood within the professional accounting community. (G-3.0113)

Therefore, a financial review is required for every church organization or group which has a treasury, and which receives and disburses funds. Groups within the local church whose financial transactions must be reviewed might include the General Operating Fund, Benevolence Fund, Memorial Fund, Wills and Endowments, Board of Deacons, Board of Trustees, Building/Maintenance Fund, Choir, Youth, Church School, Presbyterian Women, etc. This review benefits the treasurers, the contributors, and those who benefit from expenditures, giving assurance that donations are used as the donor intended, for the benefit of the specific group, and as a witness to the Lordship of Christ.

The persons making the full financial review do not need to be C.P.A.’s, but there should be some understanding of accounting procedures. Look for persons who have been Trustees or who have some experience in business accounting. Remember that those doing the financial review must not be related to the Treasurer(s).

To be available for review are financial ledgers, records of all forms of income, deposit slips and bank account records, withdrawal slips and canceled checks, authorization of payments, copies of invoices and expense vouchers, and a balance sheet. Financial records from relatively small groups would require less validation; but it is important that each report include a Beginning Balance, Income, Expenses, and a Closing Balance.

Unless a congregation and its income/expenses are very large, it is not necessary to have a professional audit made. A full financial review implies that the financial review committee has checked through the records, has spot-checked those records and (hopefully) has approved them, and (if helpful) has made suggestions for improvement to the treasurer or Finance Committee. **The report of the financial review committee must be approved by the session, trustees, or whichever body has created the committee, and this approval must be recorded in the official minutes of that body.**

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

## INCORPORATION AND BYLAWS

The Book of Order (G-4.0101) directs that each church will be incorporated where it is permitted by law. Incorporation protects individual members of the church in case the church is sued. It also provides certain legal protection for officers of the church as they carry out their duties on behalf of the corporate entity.

**Each clerk of the session should be absolutely certain that the church is incorporated and that the corporation status is kept active if your state permits incorporation.** Recently Virginia law has been changed to permit congregations to incorporate and they should be moving in this direction. West Virginia law does not permit incorporation. There are examples of incorporation documents on Shenandoah Presbytery's website ([www.shenpres.org](http://www.shenpres.org)). (Search incorporation)

**Each corporation is required to name a Resident Agent.** This is done at the time of incorporation and may be changed as needed. This person serves as the legal "address" of the corporation, to which legal papers are served. The Resident Agent has no responsibility other than insuring that any mail or papers received for the corporation are turned over to the appropriate persons – the Clerk of Session or the president of the corporation (or the trustees) or both. Each clerk of session should check the corporate records of the church to determine who the Resident Agent is and if the person is still a member of the church and living at the address of record. If not, it is important that a new Resident Agent be named.

The Book of Order requires the creation of congregational bylaws. Sample bylaws are available at the offices of Shenandoah Presbytery.

### EXECUTIVE SESSION

Robert's Rules of Order define an executive session as a meeting or portion of a meeting whose proceedings are secret. Only members of the governing body are entitled to attend, but they may invite others to stay at the pleasure of the governing body. A motion is required to go into executive session, and a majority of the members must approve it. Those present must maintain the confidentiality of the discussion, and anyone who violates that confidentiality is subject to disciplinary action.

Every once in a while, a council must go into executive session, usually to discuss matters of a sensitive nature, such as personnel issues or disciplinary matters.

An executive session has two basic characteristics. First, **no observers are present**. Generally, only the members of the body, along with their officers (such as the moderator and the clerk of Session) remain in the room. Sessions can allow certain invited guests to be present, but this is uncommon. Generally, these guests are invited because they have information to share that is needed in the executive session. Second, **the proceedings are confidential**. No one is supposed to talk to anyone else later about what went on (although members of the body can discuss those things with one another, provided no one else is listening in). If documents and/or other materials are distributed to the members at the beginning of discussion in an executive session, these documents must be collected at the end of the session and later shredded or destroyed.

It is not advisable to conduct an executive session as part of an electronic meeting, as there is no way for the members to know that privacy and confidentiality is being maintained by those participating electronically.

Minutes must be taken during an executive session, but they must be kept elsewhere than the regular minutes, because no one is allowed to see them other than the individuals who were present during the executive session. However, these minutes should be made available during the annual review of the Sessional Records, or whenever requested by the Presbytery. Votes may also be taken during executive session, but it is generally not in the best interests of transparency for this to occur. When it comes time to approve the minutes of the executive session, the body must go into executive session a second time to do so.

Most Sessions find it easier simply not to pass any motions while in executive session. They discuss the issue at hand, and decide what needs to be done, a member makes a motion to go out of executive session, the motion must pass by a majority vote, and then the body goes out of executive session and immediately passes whatever motions are needed. The action they have taken, then, is public, but the deliberation and reasons behind the action are not. The clerk should note the time the body went into executive session, the primary reason for going into executive session, and the time that the body returned back out of executive session in the regular minutes.

So, when should there be an executive session?

The short answer is, "as seldom as possible." Especially in the church, where transparency is generally the ideal.

Yet, there are situations in which it is a valuable option, such as discussing delicate personnel matters, pondering how to respond to a member who may need ecclesiastical discipline, or setting a range for bidding on a piece of real estate, when it's not to the church's advantage for a seller to know how high the church is willing to go.

If there are no observers in the meeting-room to begin with, a formal executive session may not be needed. The clerk simply needs to take care to limit what goes into the minutes (although motions must always be recorded, and those arising out of executive session should be carefully recorded to reflect what the action is being taken). Yet, even if there are no observers to ask to leave the room, an executive session may still be useful, if only to impress upon the Session members the need for confidentiality.

Those serving on governing bodies should use executive session judiciously and wisely. It should never give the appearance of doing something behind the backs of the constituents or members.