



THE CLERK OF THE SESSION AND THE RECORDS OF THE CHURCH

BY:

**THE SESSION MINUTES REVIEW TASK FORCE
OF THE PRESBYTERY COUNCIL**

**PRESBYTERY OF CHARLOTTE
(NOVEMBER 2019 EDITION)**

Nothing herein shall be considered as
superseding or taking precedence
over the BOOK OF ORDER
of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

RULES FOR SESSION RECORDS
PRESBYTERY OF CHARLOTTE, PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)
November 2019 Edition, replacing all earlier editions

I. SCOPE OF THESE RULES

The focus of these rules for session records is on permanent official records, not on the full range of responsibilities of sessions and their clerks; refer to the **Book of Order** for those. It will be helpful to use the questionnaire for records to be examined as a checklist for compliance.

Various helpful but nonofficial systems such as those used with index cards and computers are beyond the scope of these rules. This is a manual of record requirements and not of office procedures. The denominational book that serves more as a comprehensive handbook is **Companion to the Constitution: Polity for the Local Church** by Frank A. Beattie (Louisville: Geneva Press) which may be purchased from Cokesbury Bookstores.

The documents on which these rules are based are the **Book of Order** and **Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised**.

A. BOOK OF ORDER

The actions of the session, the governing body of the church, are of great importance, so its records should be accurate and complete. The **Book of Order**, part of the constitution of the church, specifies certain records that are to be kept.

The clerk of session, not the pastor, has primary responsibility for seeing that all records required by the **Book of Order** are properly kept in the fashion required by these rules of the presbytery, with or without assistance from the church staff.

The presbytery is required by the **Book of Order** to review the session's records at least once a year (G-3.0107 and G-3.0108). The manner of review is specified in G-3.0108a:

In reviewing the proceedings the presbytery shall determine, either from the records of those proceedings or from any other information as may come to its attention, whether:

- (1) The proceedings have been correctly recorded;
- (2) The proceedings have been regular and in accordance with the **Constitution**;
- (3) The proceedings have been prudent and equitable;
- (4) The proceedings have been faithful to the mission of the whole church;
- (5) The lawful injunctions of a higher governing body have been obeyed.

The **Book of Order** has four parts which are designated by the capital letters in parentheses: The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity (F) Form of Government (G), Directory for Worship (W), and Rules of Discipline (D). By reference (G-3.0105) the **Book of Order** elevates the most recent edition of **Robert's Rules of Order**, to constitutional status for meetings of governing bodies, commissions, and committees except in those cases where this Constitution provides otherwise. The procedures and records of the session should be in accord with these books.

B. ROBERT'S RULES

The most recent edition at the time of writing these rules (2011) is the 11th edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (Scott, Foresman and Company). "Newly Revised" was added to the title of the official series of Robert's Rules beginning with the 7th edition in 1970, and all copies without "Newly Revised" are seriously out of date. Section 47, Minutes and Reports of Officers, contains an excellent 8-page discussion of minutes that should be followed whenever it is not superseded by the *Book of Order* or the presbytery's rules.

II. IMPORTANCE OF ACCURATE MINUTES, ROLLS, AND REGISTERS

Records are needed for historical purposes, especially for researching the background of church policies, for writing church histories, and for researching family trees.

As working documents, minutes record not only history but also approved plans, responsibilities, and schedules that clarify who is supposed to do what and when, so it is helpful for them to be completed and distributed to members of the session and the staff quickly after meetings.

As legal documents, minutes, rolls, and registers attest to actions taken by the session; they are extremely important. If anything is appealed to the presbytery or if action is taken in civil court. Reference to minutes as legal documents is needed every year in some churches of every presbytery.

Rolls and registers record who is in the various categories of membership and record such events as baptisms, marriages, deaths, and ordinations. It happens rarely that records of births and marriages are accidentally not submitted to the government or that the government records are damaged or lost. In which case church rolls and registers provide legally acceptable verification useful for obtaining passports, social security benefits, etc.

IV. OWNERSHIP AND PRESERVATION OF SESSION RECORDS

Minutes and other official records of the session, which shall include minutes of congregational meetings and records of the board of deacons and the board of trustees of the particular church, are the property of the session, and the clerk shall be responsible for their preservation. They shall be available to the presbytery upon request and may be stored with the denomination's historical agency. G-3.0107

It is the responsibility of the clerk of session to make recommendations to the session for the permanent safekeeping of its records with the Department of History or a seminary of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Microfilming should also be considered. G-3.0107.

V. SESSION AND CONGREGATION MINUTES

A. GENERAL PROVISIONS

- 1. RECORDS OF ACTIONS.** Session minutes are records of all the actions of the session; meaning a record of all decisions whether made by common consent or by actual vote. If decisions are made by common consent, the clerk must be sure that decisions were actually made rather than merely discussed. If the moderator does not announce a decision, the clerk should ask for an announcement before the session takes up the next subject.

Since session minutes are records of deliberate actions taken, they are not records of what people say in debate. Only what the session adopts, by general consent or by vote, is recorded, and the session does not adopt the debate. It may or may not be desired for discussions to be summarized in some committee minutes, but never in session minutes. A summary is a listing of what is most important in the opinion of the clerk, expressed in the thought patterns and words of the clerk.

There is no place in the minutes for the opinions of the clerk, since the session does not adopt his or her opinions. Even adverbs expressing opinion such as the session voted *enthusiastically* are out of place unless they were adopted by the session. *EXAMPLE: The session adopted by common consent a resolution to enthusiastically thank the ladies who prepared the meal.*

- 2. CHECK LIST.** A check list is designed to accompany these rules for clerks to use as they review their own minutes. A copy is to be completed and signed by the clerk to accompany whatever minutes, rolls, and registers are submitted to the presbytery for its review.

Examples of some points are given below as suggestions, but there are other satisfactory styles of presenting the same information. Whatever style the clerk uses, the information described is required and clarity of language and style is important.

- 3. SUITABLE BOOKS.** Minutes, roles, and registers should be printed on or photocopied onto acid-free paper and kept in suitable binders. Special loose-leaf books are available from the Presbyterian Publishing House and Cokesbury Bookstores. They have consecutively pre-numbered pages for minutes to make unauthorized substitution of pages more difficult.

Computers may be used in any way that is helpful in writing minutes and keeping roles and registers, but the only official records are the paper copies kept as just described, which may be printouts of the computer record.

- 4. TITLE.** The full name and location of the church with the date of the first minutes contained in the book is required on the cover, title page, or top of the first page. When the book is filled, the date of the last minutes should be added. The name of the location of the church does not require a complete address but rather a city or other geographic area sufficient to distinguish the church from others with the same name.
- 5. FIRST SENTENCE.** Each set of minutes is to begin with the name of the organization, the type of meeting, and the time, date, and place of meeting. *EXAMPLES: (1) The session of Knox Presbyterian Church met in regular session [Or, at the call of the moderator, or as instructed by the presbytery, etc.] in the conference room at 7:30 pm on April 2, 2013. (2) Due notice having been given, the congregation of Knox Presbyterian Church met at the call of the session in the sanctuary at 12:10 pm on April 2, 2013.*
- 6. MODERATOR.** The name of the moderator, together with reference to his/her authority to moderate if the moderator is not the pastor, shall be given. The session should vote to approve temporary moderators other than those appointed by the presbytery. *EXAMPLES: (1) Pastor Smith moderated the meeting. (2) Dr. John J. Jones, moderator appointed by the presbytery, presided. (3) Dr. John J. Jones, invited by Pastor Smith to preside in his absence with the concurrence of the session having been voted during the March 2 meeting, called the meeting to order.* G-3.0104; G-1.0504
- 7. QUORUM.** If a quorum is present, the minutes should say so. *EXAMPLES: (1) A quorum being present, Moderator John J. Jones convened the meeting. (2) The clerk informed the moderator that a quorum was present.* G.3.0203

If a quorum is not present, the meeting should still be convened and one or more of the following actions should be taken and recorded in the minutes: (1) Adjourn either absolutely or to a fixed time and place. (2) Recess. (3) Take measures to obtain a quorum. Adjournment should follow alternatives (2) and (3) if no quorum is obtained. No other business can legally be transacted.

If it is deemed necessary, however, the members present transact business at their own risk with the hope that it will be confirmed at a later meeting at which a quorum is present. *EXAMPLE: A quorum not being present, Moderator John J. Jones convened the meeting with prayer and recessed it until after the 11 am worship service on the same date and place. (See Robert's Rules, Section 39)*

8. **ROLL.** The roll for the meeting should have the following sections or paragraphs: (1) Members Present (including all installed pastors), (2) Members Excused, (3) Members Absent (not including those excused), and (4) Others Present. Names should include first names or initials. Suffixes such as Jr. and III should be given if needed to distinguish persons from other members of the congregation. Either paragraph or tabular format may be used. A checklist may be used in compiling the roll, but it is not a substitute for entering the roll into the minutes.
9. **OPENING WORSHIP OR PRAYER.** Meetings should be opened with prayer and may be opened with worship beyond prayer. *EXAMPLES: (1) A quorum being present, Moderator John Jones opened the meeting with prayer. (2) A quorum being present, Moderator John Jones called the meeting to order. Elder Mary Green led the session in the opening devotional and prayer. G-3.0105*
10. **APPROVAL OF SESSION MINUTES.** If this is a regular meeting, the minutes of the last regular meeting and all intervening special meetings should be approved, plus minutes of any other meetings that should have been approved before but weren't.

If there are corrections, it is **not** sufficient to record merely, *The minutes of the June 1, 2019, meeting were approved as amended. Each correction must be recorded in full.*

If the corrections change the meaning of the minutes, especially with money, a cross reference should be written in the margin of the corrected minutes referring to the minutes which list the correction. If the correction is short, as in correcting a number, it should also be indicated in the margin of the corrected minutes, with one thin line crossing out the erroneous number but not making it illegible.

11. **THE BODY OF THE MINUTES.** Include all the reports and other motions of substance acted on. There should be a separate paragraph for each subject. The paragraphs may be arranged in outline style if desired.
12. **MOTIONS.** The disposition of motions should be recorded, whether approved, approved as amended, disapproved, referred, etc., except that motions that are withdrawn need not be recorded. The final wording should be recorded. Use the words *As amended* if it has been amended. **EXAMPLE:** *John Smith presented the report of the Christian Education Committee, and its recommendations were adopted as amended as follows: [Copied in their final form].*

However, if the session temporarily disposes of a motion by postponing action or referring it, the minutes must include all amendments and adhering secondary motions.

If a vote is by ballot or the session orders a count, the number of votes on each side is entered.

The name and subject of a guest speaker can be given but no summary of what he or she says.

13. **DISSENTS AND PROTESTS.** The minutes must properly record dissents and protests and related actions. G-3.0105
14. **NAMES.** The names of persons who present committee reports and the names of movers of important motions should be given. Omit the names of people who second motions.

- 15. CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS.** Minutes of congregational meetings should be received and copied into the minute book at their proper chronological place. If the congregation does not approve its own minutes before adjournment, the session should approve them at its next regular meeting. The copy in the book should be attested by the moderator **and** the secretary.

When the session calls a congregational meeting, the Session minutes should list the specific items of business to be transacted. At the congregational meeting the specific items of business should be announced before any business is transacted.

The session minutes should record approval of temporary moderators of the congregation other than those appointed by the presbytery. (The congregation elects its own temporary secretaries.)

- 16. COMMISSION REPORTS.** A commission of the session shall keep a full record of its proceedings, including its decisions, and transmit them in writing to the clerk of session. The clerk shall report them to the session at the next meeting after receiving them and enter them into the minute book. The decisions are effective when announced by the commission since the commission acts with the full authority of the session in its designated work, so the only actions of the session are to record their receipt and copy them into the book. The copy in the book should be attested by the secretary or chair of the commission.

But if a commission is assigned some of its duties as a committee, the reporting of its committee portion of its work is handled in the manner of any committee report to the session. G-3.0109

B. WORSHIP AND THE SACRAMENTS

- 1. GUEST PREACHERS.** The minutes should record concurrence in invitations for preachers other than the pastor and those sent by presbytery, or, when there is no pastor, the issuance of the invitation. W-2.2007.
- 2. THE LORD'S SUPPER.** The minutes should record approval of communion services and of who will serve the bread and the cup, and also it should record that the sacrament was actually administered. If a schedule of services is approved it will not be necessary to approve each scheduled service separately. W-2.4000 and W-3.6204
- 3. BAPTISMS.** The minutes should record the session's action to approve baptisms, both adult and of infant baptisms, and should record the dates of the actual administration of baptisms after they have taken place. Full names should always be given, the dates of birth, and full names of the parents. (Neither Mrs. Smith nor Mrs. John Smith is the full name of a woman. Record her own first name, maiden name, and married name. Examples: Mrs. John (Alice Jones) Smith or Alice Jones Smith (Mrs. John). W-2.3011 and G-3.0204b

C. THE SESSION AND CHURCH MEMBERS

- 1. CONFIRMING AND COMMISSIONING.** The minutes should record the confirming and commissioning of persons baptized in infancy when they make profession of faith. Note: They are not joining the church, since they are already members of the church on its Roll of Baptized Members. They are being confirmed or commissioned and transferred to the Roll of Active Members. W-4.2003.

2. **RECEPTION OF MEMBERS.** The minutes should give full names of members received, indicate whether they were received by profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or transfer from another church. If by profession of faith, the minutes should state either that they were previously baptized or list the baptismal arrangements. If by transfer, the name and location of the other church should be listed. The minutes should record the names of baptized children received with their families, and the relevant data should be entered on the Roll of Baptized Members. G-1.0303
3. **TRANSFER OF MEMBERS OUT.** When members are transferred to other churches the minutes should record the full names of the persons and of the baptized children who are transferred with their parents and the name and location of the churches to which they are transferred. G-3.0204
When a member of the church is ordained as a teaching elder, the minutes should record the transfer to the roll of the relevant presbytery.
4. **DELETION OF NAMES FROM ROLLS.** The Session may delete names from the roll of when persons request that their membership be terminated, join another church without a regular transfer, or renounce the jurisdiction of the church. Their full names and the reasons for the deletions should be given. Session may delete the name of a member who has moved away or ceased active participation 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 deletion. G-3.0204a
5. **DEATHS.** When members die the minutes should record their full names and dates of death, delete their names from the rolls, and add their names to the Register of Deaths.
G-3.0204b
6. **AFFILIATE MEMBERS.** Actions regarding affiliate members and the applicable dates and church's names and locations should be recorded. G-3.0204a
7. **ROLLS, REGISTERS, AND MINUTES** All rolls and registers listed in G-3.0204 belong to and are under the jurisdiction of the session, so there should be an action of the session recorded in the minutes corresponding to every entry in the rolls and registers. However, the registers may include details not necessary for the minutes. Example: Witnesses to a wedding need not be named in the minutes, but the fact of the wedding with date, place, and full names of those married and of the officiating minister should be found in the minutes as well as in the register.
8. **REVIEW OF ROLLS.** The annual review of church rolls should be reported and recorded, with appropriate actions taken. G-3.0204a.
9. **INQUIRERS AND CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY.** The minutes should record recommendations to presbytery for applicants to be enrolled as inquirers and as candidates for the ministry (G-2.0605) and the appointment of liaison persons for them. When they are ordained, the minutes should record their transfer to the rolls of the ordaining presbyteries.
10. **DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS.** The **Rules of Discipline** apply to situations that require meticulous attention to procedures and records. Minutes should record in legal detail everything that is done. Special attention must be paid to deadlines for various actions and entered into the record. **It is strongly suggested that any clerk of session or pastor who is not very familiar with these legal rules consult with the stated clerk of the presbytery.**

D. FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

1. **TREASURER.** The minutes should record the annual election of the church treasurer. G-3.0205
2. **BUDGET AND SPECIAL OFFERINGS.** The minutes should record the establishment of the church budget and the approval of special offerings. G-3.0205
3. **COMPENSATION REVIEW.** The minutes should record the annual review of the adequacy of compensation for all staff, including pastors and all employees, and the report on the review of the pastors compensation should be given to the congregation. G-2.0804
4. **REPORTS FROM ALL ORGANIZATIONS.** The minutes should record annual or more frequent reports from those in charge of the various funds in the church. G-10.0401. (Note: Financial reports are received but never approved or adopted unless they have been audited.)
5. **AUDIT.** The minutes should record approval of the annual audit of all books and records relating to finances. G-3.0113

E. PRESBYTERY RELATIONS

1. **COMMISSIONERS.** The minutes should record the election of commissioners to presbytery and the hearing of their reports. G-3.0202a
2. **INSTRUCTIONS FROM ABOVE.** The minutes should record the observance of instructions of higher governing bodies. G-3.0102, G3.0108
3. **TRIENNIAL VISITS.** The minutes should record the triennial visit from the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry.
4. **ANNUAL STATISTICAL REPORT.** The minutes should record the approval of the report by the Session; the sending of the annual statistical report and other information to the Office of the General Assembly and stated clerk of the presbytery. A copy of the report should be included in its minutes as well as notation that a summary was presented to the congregation.
5. **NOMINATIONS TO THE PRESBYTERY.** The minutes should record the nomination to presbytery of any elders who may be considered for election to synod or General Assembly. G-3.0202

F. ELDERS AND DEACONS, SESSION AND DIACONATE

1. **CHURCH OFFICER NOMINATING COMMITTEE.** The minutes should record the appointment of at least 2 members of church officer nominating committees, one of whom shall be moderator. G-2.0401, G-3.0111
2. **NEW OFFICERS.** The minutes should record the instruction, examination, ordination and installation of elders and deacons. G-2.0402
3. **RELEASE FROM OFFICE.** The minutes should record the release from the exercise of ordained office of all whom the session releases. G-2.0406
4. **COMPOSITION OF SESSION.** The minutes should record annually a statement of the composition of the session with regard to racial ethnic members, women, men, age groups, and persons with disabilities, stating how this corresponds to the composition of the congregation. G-3.0103, 3.0201
5. **REVIEW OF DIACONATE'S RECORDS.** The minutes should record at least an annual review of records of the board of deacons. G-2.0202
6. **JOINT MEETINGS.** The minutes should record at least an annual joint meeting of session and diaconate. G-3.0204

G. CLOSING SECTION OF THE MINUTES

- 1. NEXT MEETING.** The minutes should end with a notice of the date, time, and place of the next meeting.
- 2. PRAYER.** The minutes should record the time of adjournment with prayer.
- 3. ATTESTATION.** The minutes should be signed by the clerk. It is not necessary for the moderator to sign them.

The **Form of Government** (G) in the ***Book of Order*** lists the rolls and registers that must be kept along with the required details for each. Approved Presbyterian roll and register books may be purchased from Cokesbury Bookstores. Computers and index cards may be useful in compiling and arranging the records and in gaining quick access to them, but the official records are to be recorded on or printed out on paper and kept in books.

All changes to the rolls and registers are made by session action, so the session minutes as well as the rolls and registers should list by name and category the changes that are made, including details needed to identify persons. When a presbytery reviews the rolls, it compares roll entries to the minutes.

A. ROLLS

The **Form of Government** requires sessions to keep 3 rolls. They are kept and preserved forever. See section IV, above, on Ownership and Preservation of Session Records.

When names are removed or deleted, the names are not physically removed from the rolls, but notes with the dates of session action are added in the remarks column to indicate the removal or deletion. In addition, a single thin line may be drawn through a name to indicate its removal, provided the line does not make the name illegible.

- 1. BAPTIZED MEMBERS ROLL (G-1.0401).** This roll shall list the names of those persons baptized in the particular church who have not been confirmed and children of active members or of ministers of the Word and Sacrament related to the particular church, when such children have been baptized elsewhere. Indicate if one of the parents is a step-parent.

They remain on this roll until (a) they are transferred to the Active Members Roll upon their confirmation, (b) they are transferred to the session to another church with their families, (c) they join another church, or (d) they die.

For infant baptisms, include full name, parents' full names, date of birth of those being baptized, and the names of any persons other than the parents who present the children for baptism. G-3.0204b

- 2. ACTIVE MEMBERS ROLL (G-1.0402)** This roll includes all who have been placed on it by session action who have not yet been removed by death or further session action. The roll should indicate whether they were received by profession of faith, transfer from another church (which should be named), reaffirmation of faith, or restoration from the Roll of Inactive Members. It should also note their baptism if they were baptized upon their profession of faith.

(The clerk should note or see that an assigned person notes, but not on the roll proper, the dates when active members become non-resident or their addresses become unknown. Such notes enable specified procedures to be followed before deleting their names (G-3.0204a)

- 3. AFFILIATE MEMBERS ROLL (G-1.0403)** This roll includes all who have been placed on it by session action who have not been removed by death, further session action, or expiration of the 2-year term of membership. The roll should give their full names, the name and location of the church where their permanent membership is, and the date of the session meeting when they are enrolled as affiliate members.

B. REGISTERS

The **Form of Government** requires sessions to keep the following registers: (G.3.0204b)

- 1. BAPTISMS** (a) Adult baptisms: Keep in the Roll of Baptized Members (b) Infant/child baptisms: Include name, parents' names, and date of birth of those being baptized.
- 2. RULING ELDERS** Include the name of the church in which each was ordained, the date of ordination, terms of active service, and the record of removals.
- 3. DEACONS** Include the name of the church in which each was ordained, the date of ordination, terms of active service, and the record of removals.
- 4. PASTORS, CO-PASTORS, ASSOCIATE PASTORS, TEMPORARY PASTORS, INTERIM PASTORS, DESIGNATED PASTORS AND PARISH ASSOCIATES**
Include names, titles as just listed, and dates of service.
- 5. OTHER REGISTERS** May include marriages and others as designated by the Session.

SAMPLE OUTLINE OF SESSION MINUTES

A quorum being present, Moderator John Smith convened a stated meeting of the session of First Presbyterian Church of Podunk at 7:30 PM on February 12, 2019, in the conference room.

(OR)

A quorum being present and due notice having been given, the session of First Presbyterian Church of Podunk met at 7:30 pm on February 12, 2019, in the conference room for the following purposes listed in the call: (List them.)

The enrollment was as follows:

Members present: Jane Adams, John Brown, Jr., John Smith, etc.

Members excused: Beverly Cole, Aubrey Turner, etc.

Members absent: James McKay

Others present: Parish Associate George Tubbs, DCE Jane Polk

The moderator opened the meeting with prayer.

(If a called meeting, proceed with minutes for the business listed in the call.)

(If a called or adjourned meeting, enter minutes for all business transacted, which would include some or all of the following.)

Approval of the minutes

Approval of congregation minutes

Approval of the docket

Pastor/Moderator's report: Baptisms, weddings, etc.

Clerk's report: Communications, Report on presbytery's review of minutes, etc.

Various committee reports

Unfinished business

New business

Motion to adjourn

Announcement of next meeting

Closing prayer

Respectfully submitted,

Guy Bradford, Clerk of Session

(The next sentence is not part of these minutes but is added following the clerk's signature.)

These minutes were approved (or were approved as amended) on (date).

SAMPLE OUTLINE OF CONGREGATIONAL MINUTES

A quorum being present and due notice having been given, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Podunk met at 12:10 pm following the worship service on February 12, 2019, in the sanctuary at the call of the session for the following purposes listed in the call: (List them.)

Pastor John Smith presided and opened the meeting with prayer.

Secretary Joan Weaver, Clerk of Session, read the call.

(Enter the minutes related to the business in the call.)

Reading and approval of minutes

The business stated in the call having been completed, a motion to adjourn was adopted.

The meeting was closed with prayer by Elder Harry Martin.

ATTEST: _____
Moderator

Secretary

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR REVIEW OF SESSION RECORDS

Must be completed by the clerk of session and submitted with the records.
All minutes must have been approved by the session before submitting them for review.
This questionnaire is based on the 2019 edition of the Rules for Session Records.

Date of submission of records listed below: _____

CHURCH
ADDRESS
CHURCH TELEPHONE
CLERK OF SESSION
TELEPHONE
MINUTES SUBMITTED: (Dates)

OTHER INFORMATION OR INSTRUCTIONS: