Clerk of Session Guidebook

PRESBYTERY *of* PHILADELPHIA

Office of the Stated Clerk

Presbytery of Philadelphia | 915 East Gowen Avenue | Philadelphia, PA 19150

Phone: 215.242.1400 | Fax: 215.242.1444 | www.presbyphl.org/stated-clerk

To our Clerks of Session

Welcome to this ministry!

For some, it might sound strange to refer to the role of clerk of session as a ministry, but it is a very important part of ministry in the Presbyterian Church (USA). The clerk is the primary person responsible for communication between the congregation and the larger Church, and this communication enables us to be more effective in being the connectional Church we seek to be as a denomination.

The minutes and records you maintain are a means of telling the story of the life of your congregation. The decisions made in session and other meetings, the membership, baptism, and other rolls and records are all important points of information that can provide an account of the "who, what, where, when, and why" of your congregation's witness to the Holy Spirit's work in your congregation for such a time as this.

Hopefully, this manual will help you understand how to accomplish the tasks expected of clerks of session and where to find the tools and resources to assist you in those tasks. Although you may be the only clerk of session in your congregation, you are not alone! The Presbytery can connect you with colleagues and PC(USA) staff with a wealth of experience and best practices so that you don't have to re-invent the proverbial wheel.

Please feel free to contact me at 215-242-1400, extension 307 or statedclerk@presbyphl.org if I can be of assistance.

Blessings,

Kevin L. Porter

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The Role of 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 pastor by keeping the pastor 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 pastor.

Connectional Participation

Church leadership is a ministry

◊ To contribute to that which enables the church to be "the Body of Christ"
◊ The ministry of leadership and administration is essential
◊ Provides an opportunity to serve Jesus Christ in and through the church
◊ Spiritual gifts

W hat does it mean to be "Presbyterian? " Our form of government means

◊ The church is administered by presbyters (pastors/teaching elders and ruling elders)
◊ The church is connectional among its councils
◊ Presbyterian Churches are constitutionally governed by
◊ The Book of Confessions
◊ The Book of Order

The Connectional Structure of the Church

◊ United through sessions, presbyteries, synods and General Assembly
◊ Presbyterian systems rests hierarchical authority in the group of persons who constitute the presbytery from congregation to PWV to General Assembly plus Synod
◊ Presbyterian system is participatory, rather than "representative," democratic or "monarchic" (Belief that the Holy Spirit informs our deliberations and discernment together)

The Clerk of Session's Qualifications

◊ Ruling elder, member of the church and regular in attendance
◊ Devoted to the work of the clerk's congregation and its mission in Christ
◊ Able to command the respect of the congregation
◊ Accuracy and clarity
◊ Connected to presbytery and wider Church of Christ

When ordained to office, teaching elders, ruling elders and deacons are asked:

◊ To function in obedience to Jesus Christ
◊ Under the authority of Scripture
◊ Be guided by the Confessions
◊ To approve or endorse the church's governance
◊ To honor its discipline

The Role of Clerk of Session

Reporting

Contact with the Presbytery

The Clerk of Session is responsible for maintaining the records of the church and communicating with the Presbytery. Although not exhaustive, the following is a comprehensive list of reporting responsibilities that falls under the purview of the Clerk of Session:

Pastoral Changes

(all forms available at presbyphl.org/leadership/commissions/commission-on-congregations-and-leadership/documents)

- ◊ Covenant of Closure Exiting Pastor
- ◊ Board of Pension Change Form
- ◊ Terms of Call Form and Worksheet
- ◊ Contract - Temporary Stated Supply
- ◊ Contract -Interim Ministry
- ◊ Ordination and Installation Plans Form

Church Records and Apportionment

- ◊ Annual Statistics (PCUSA)
- ◊ Annual Clerks Report (PCUSA)
- ◊ Reading of the Session Records (*we offer various options for annual Records Review)*

You may access all forms and links to forms on the Presbytery website: presbyphl.org

Reporting updated/new By-Laws and Manual of Operations

While it is not required by the constitution to have churches' by-laws approved by their Presbytery, in the advent of the New Form of Government and the requirement of a Sexual Misconduct Policy, it is advised that churches notify the Presbytery when their updated By-laws and new Manual of Operations has been approved by the congregation during their Annual Congregational Meeting. If anyone has questions regarding this policy, please contact the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.

The Role of Clerk of Session

Book of Order Definition

Clerks in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

G-1.0505 Secretary and Minutes The clerk of session shall serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If the clerk of session is unable to serve, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting. The secretary shall record the actions of the congregation in minutes of the meeting.

D-3.0106 Clerk receives and distributes key communications of the congregation

G-3.0104…Each council shall elect a clerk who shall record the transactions of the council, keep its rolls of membership and attendance including the rolls… preserve its records, and furnish extracts from them when required by another council of the church. Such extracts, verified by the clerk, shall be evidence in any council of the church. The clerk of the session shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine…

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

G-3.0107 Records and preservation 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 (U.S.A.)

G-3.0202 Relations with Other Councils Sessions have a particular responsibility to participate in the life of the whole church through participation in other councils. It is of particular importance that sessions:

1. elect, as commissioners to presbytery, ruling elders from the congregation, preferably for at least a year, and receive their reports;
2. nominate to presbytery ruling elders from the congregation who may be considered for election as commissioners to synod and General Assembly, and to serve on committees or commissions of the same, bearing in mind principles of inclusiveness and fair representation in the decision making of the church (F-1.0403);
3. see that the guidance and communication of presbytery, synod, and General Assembly are considered, and that any binding actions are observed and carried out;
4. welcome representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits;
5. propose to the presbytery, or through it to the synod and General Assembly, such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church; and
6. send to presbytery and General Assembly requested statistics and other information according to the requirements of those bodies, as well as voluntary financial contributions.

Responsibilities @a glance

Recording

- Write minutes
- Serve as corporate secretary
- Send and receive correspondence
- Keep policies accessible, share
- Keep legal documents, bylaws and archive with Presbyterian Historical Society as needed
- Maintain rolls of ministers, ruling elders and deacons, active and affiliate members, baptisms… weddings, deaths are optional
- Keep and report annual statistics, Clerk's questionnaire on ministry, terms of call, contributions, and changes for presbytery directory

Communicating

- Convey information –emails, newsletters
- Between presbytery and session
- Between presbytery and congregation
- Between session and COM
- Among clerks of presbytery, with other congregations

Servant Leadership

- Maintaining consistency during a vacancy in the pulpit
- Plan meeting agenda with moderator
- Advise on parliamentary procedure and Book of Order questions
- Participate in records review

Spiritual Gifts

- Committed to the mission of Christ
- Focus upon Christ and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church; bring the perspective of the Gospel
- Leader
- Prayer
- Listening
- Understanding
- Tact
- Organized
- Details
- ***Writer of the ministry story***

Time Line for Clerks Related to Presbytery

January

Complete your **annual statistical report** and submit it by the announced annual due date (usually mid-February). In the interest of time, it is acceptable to enter statistics prior to the annual congregation meeting, provided the Clerk reports the statistical information in the Clerks Annual Report given at the annual meeting. (*The Presbytery can make additions, corrections, and changes up to the first week March. Contact Betsi Moise at 215.242.1400, ext. 329 or enews@presbyphl.org*)

February

Prepare your **Minute Book and Register** for the annual administrative review by presbytery. Fill in the requirements on the Green form for Church Records and the Yellow form for Session Minutes with the requested page numbers for each book. These forms can be found on the Stated Clerks page at presbyphl.org/stated-clerk

As known, announce presbytery meeting dates for the year. Generally, the Presbytery of Philadelphia meetings are held in January, May, July and November. The Session elects commissioners for each meeting according to the number of commissioners assigned to your church for the year. You will be informed of the number for the year at the previous November presbytery meeting.

March - June

Schedule time for your Church Records review. Record reading options:

- ◊ Partner with a fellow clerk and send a copy of completed reviews to Betsi Moise at the Presbytery office to receive your stickers.
- ◊ Bring your records to one of our clerk's gatherings.
- ◊ Schedule a time with Betsi Moise at the Presbytery office to have your records read. Bring your Minutes and Register.

Fall

Information regarding the Stated Clerk's Annual Questionnaire and a link to complete it online will be emailed from the Office of the General Assembly.

Plan to attend the informative annual **Clerks Fall Gathering.** This is normally scheduled for late September /early October.

December

General Assembly will announce the opening date for entering the online denominational statistics. All information, resources and links will be posted to the Presbytery of Philadelphia's website on the Stated Clerks page.

Guidelines for Meetings and Minutes

Session Meetings

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

A special meeting of Session may be called by the Moderator when she/he thinks it is necessary and must be called when requested in writing by two members of Session, or when the presbytery has directed Session to meet. The agenda for a special meeting is shaped and limited by the call to the meeting—which must describe an action to be taken, a motion which will be made, etc.

The call for meetings should be made two weeks prior to the meeting date.

Session is to provide by rule for its own quorum.

Meetings of Session are to be conducted within a simple and basic understanding of parliamentary procedure. The parliamentary authority in the PC(USA) is the most recent version of Roberts Rules of Order. If a provision of the Constitution of the PCUSA conflicts with Roberts Rules, the Constitution prevails. (G-3.0105).

THE MODERATOR: The pastor of the congregation is the Moderator of Session. If there is no pastor, the presbytery will appoint a Moderator. "...the Session shall not meet without the pastor or the designated Moderator." (G-3.0201).

THE AGENDA: The Clerk and the Moderator together shape an agenda for the Session meeting. It is to be voted on immediately after the certification that a quorum is present. Typically, the agenda will have been e-mailed to everyone prior to the meeting. It can be amended to include something new which needs immediate attention. Keep in mind, however, that the Session meeting agenda should consist of committee reports along with any action items.

Motions coming from a committee do not require a second. It is best for the chairperson to speak very briefly about the matter and then make the motion so that it is properly before the Session.

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

Guidelines for Meetings & Minutes

Session Minutes: ***Minutes of each session meeting must include***

- ◊ Whether the meeting is a regular or special meeting.
- ◊ The name of the church, the place, date and time of the meeting.
- ◊ The name of the moderator of the meeting.
- ◊ The opening and closing of each meeting with prayer.
- ◊ The roll, listing elders present, elders absent and any who are excused; the clerk, moderator and other staff present or excused; others present and their identity. (Please use first and last names.)

- ◊ The affirmation of a quorum (G-3.0203). The session or the bylaws of the congregation set the quorum for the session.
- ◊ The approval of the agenda. (In case of a special meeting, the call to the meeting stating the purpose becomes the agenda.)
- ◊ The approval of the minutes of the previous meeting. (Any corrections of previous meeting minutes may be listed, or the minutes may be considered as a draft until the corrections are made and the minutes are approved.)

- ◊ Clerk's report: may include correspondence, announcements, and report of the serving of the Lord's Supper, in addition to listing of baptisms, marriages, changes in membership rolls.
- ◊ Reports of pastor, other staff, and the treasurer and committee chairpersons should be summarized in the minutes.

- ◊ All motions and amendments, if any, and whether they passed or failed. (Details of discussion should not be recorded, except when needed to give a sense of the action.)
- ◊ Be especially careful and diligent in recording all actions taken to hire, compensate, evaluate, discipline, or terminate non-ordained staff.
- ◊ When a previous action of the session is referred to, the date of the meeting at which it occurred, should be designated.

The following guidelines should be helpful in deciding what to record:

- ◊ Record only that which is vital to the transactions of the meeting, including affirmative votes and significant negative votes.
- ◊ Details of discussions, or of plans which have not been adopted, or suggestions which have not been followed should not generally be recorded, except by special order of the session. That special order should be noted in the minutes.
- ◊ Reference to a previous action should include the page or pages of the official minute book on which that action is recorded.
- ◊ Should you include the annual report to the congregation? Usually that is the best review that tells the story of the ministry of the congregation.

Congregational Meeting and Minutes

Meetings of the congregation are either Stated—for example, the **mandated annual meeting** required in G-1.0501 or **Special/Called**—for example, a meeting held to hear the report of the Pastor Nominating Committee. A meeting shall be called by the Session, by the presbytery, or when requested in writing by one-fourth of the active members to deal with one of the following:

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

If a petition is presented to Session with the correct signature requirement but for the consideration of a topic not described above, Session is to decline the petition and provide full explanation of its reason for doing so.

According to G-1.0502, the congregation is to create a rule related to the notification requirements, and shall announce the meeting at a worship service or services. So the rule might be as it was in the previous Form of Government—two Sundays, with the meeting held on the second Sunday—or it might be announcement during worship on three consecutive Sundays with the meeting held on the third Sunday of notice.

The congregation is also required to create a rule related to the quorum requirement for a congregational meeting. (G-1.0501). Again it might be the same as previously—one-tenth of the members on the active roll on the day the meeting was called—or you might take this opportunity to affirm that a larger share of the members is required. (A congregation with 2000 members, under the one-tenth quorum requirement, is in reality empowering 101 members (a majority of 200) to make decisions binding on all 2000 members).

Maintaining Church Membership Rolls

The session is responsible for maintaining the church rolls. Even if a session committee, a membership secretary, or the church secretary takes on this responsibility, it falls on the clerk to see that the job is done and done correctly.

The rolls are to be recorded in the Church Register, which provides sections for each of the rolls to be kept. Even if your church maintains rolls electronically, there should be a permanent written record as well. Historically, specially made books and paper have been used for record maintenance, but a 3-ring binder (properly tabbed) with letter-sized copy paper is also acceptable. Ideally, the Church Register should be kept in a secure fireproof environment.

Certificates are provided to all new members, persons baptized, and persons ordained and/or installed. Certificates for these occasions can be printed in-house at our church, supplied by the Presbytery of Philadelphia upon request, and are also available for purchase from the PC(USA) Store (pcusastore.com). The PC(USA) seal is easily downloadable.

Membership Rolls: Active members are those who have been received into active membership by the session. Other baptized persons who attend regularly (and who may even participate in church activities) but who have not been received into active membership by the session are called **baptized members.** The largest percentage of this group will probably be the children of the congregation prior to their participation in a confirmation class. **Other participants** include individuals who participate in the life of the church, but are not members, may not be baptized or may come from different denominations or religious persuasions. Although no longer required by the Book of Order, a church may choose to maintain and inactive member roll.

Baptism Rolls: It is important to maintain an accurate baptism roll because it can serve as a legal backup for birth certificates, especially for infant baptisms.

Marriages: This section is also a legal backup as are the minutes of Session meetings and the information should be as complete as possible.

Deaths: The Church Register provides a section for listing deaths. This information also needs to be recorded in the membership roll.

Ordination and Installation: The Church Register provides sections for listing all ordinations and installations of elders and deacons. The dates of service are also to be recorded. For persons previously ordained, the date of ordination, if known, is to be entered. If a person is elected to consecutive terms, that information can go into the existing entry. If there is a break between terms, there should be a new entry. This method will make the roll close to chronological.

PCUSA Statistical Reporting: Telling your Church Story

Recording the information to tell your church story is a vital aspect of the role of Clerk of Session and it helps the Presbytery in tracking trends over a period of time. As we move forward into a new design structure for the Presbytery of Philadelphia, we hope to be able to provide encouragement and support to our hard working Clerks. One of the ways we can do this is to provide a general timeline for Clerks so the collection of statistical information is as seamless as possible.

This is a sample guideline for assisting our Clerks gather statistical information from various parties. Sometime during the first part of the year, it will be helpful to identify the individuals who will be responsible for providing this information. For example, the head Usher may be responsible for recording the attendance at worship services. In following the timeline, you would periodically contact them to make sure the attendance recording is up to date.

Suggested Timeline:

First part of the year: Identify those individuals that will be responsible for various parts of the statistical information. Head Ushers, Treasurers, Christian Educators and other leaders in your congregation will be supplying important statistics. Let them know that you appreciate their service and when you will require year-end statistics. *It is helpful to provide a deadline about 2 weeks prior to the PCUSA deadline.*

September – This is a good time to follow up with those involved in providing statistics to make sure they are keeping an ongoing record, and if there are any concerns, there would still be time to address them.

Mid-December – Contact everyone involved to remind them that statistics will be due as soon as possible after the first of January. This will give you time to compile them, check for complete information and have them ready to be entered online at the PCUSA website.

Mid to late January – Follow-up with anyone if you are any missing statistical reports.

Deadline: All statistics are due to the OGA by mid-February

You can use the following check list to name the folks responsible for statistics in your congregation:

Membership: ____

Attendance: ____

Baptism: ____

Age distribution: ____

People with disabilities: ____

Christian Education: ____

Racial / Ethnic: ____

Financials: ____

RESPONSIBILITY IN REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

All persons must, under Pennsylvania State Law (§ 3490.11), make a report of suspected child sexual abuse. The incident must be reported immediately to the PA Department of Public Welfare-ChildLine at (800) 932-0313 or to Children & Youth Services of Montgomery County at (610)-278-5800. All persons must comply with State and Local laws regarding incidents of actual or suspected child sexual abuse.

A person who, in the course of employment, occupation or practice of a profession, has reasonable cause to suspect, on the basis of medical, professional or other training and experience, that a child under the care, supervision, guidance or training of that person or of an agency, institution, organization or other entity with which that person is affiliated is a victim of child abuse, including child abuse by an individual who is not a perpetrator. It is not necessary for mandated reporters to determine if an individual is a perpetrator under the CPSL and a report shall be made to ChildLine regardless of the status of the individual. The only exceptions to this are in respect to confidential communications made with a member of the clergy or an attorney. Yes. The child need not come before you directly in your professional or official capacity, but must be under the care, supervision, guidance or training of an agency, institution, organization or other entity with which you are affiliated. In your personal life, you may report a case as a non-mandated reporter.

Pennsylvania State Code § 3490.11. Reporting suspected child abuse.
(a) A person may make a report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine or a county agency if the person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused. Reports shall be accepted by ChildLine or the county agency regardless of whether the person identifies himself.
Any suspicions about child sex abuse, whether committed by a priest or pastor, or even a parent, should be reported immediately to local law enforcement and Children & Youth Services agencies. In Pennsylvania, the following agencies handle reports of child abuse, sexual and physical:
Bucks County:
24 Hour Child Abuse Reporting Hotline: 1-800-932-0313
Delaware County:

- Upper Darby Office: 610-713-2000
- Chester Office: 610-447-1000
- Sexual Abuse Center: 610-891-5258

Montgomery County: 610-278-5800
Philadelphia County: 215-683-4DHS

G-4.0302 Mandatory Reporting
Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian educator employed by this church or its congregations, shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication as defined in G-4.0301, (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

Serving as Clerk of Session

Some tasks and tips for clerks of session

Introduction

Have you agreed to serve as clerk of session and now find yourself wondering what you have done? Read on to learn about your responsibilities as put forth in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) . . . and other duties you might be asked to do.

The first thing to know is that the *Book of Order* is your handbook. Although it says little about clerks, you will want to become familiar with it, either in print form or online at the denominational Web site, www.pcusa.org. The *Book of Order* has four sections: the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, the Form of Government, the Directory for Worship, and the Rules of Discipline. For clerks, the important section is the Form of Government. You won't need to go to the Rule of Discipline unless a case regarding a member of the congregation is brought before the session. If that happens, confer immediately with the stated clerk of your presbytery.

Two Officers

According to the *Book of Order*, two officers govern the session: the moderator and the clerk (G-3.0104). But don't let this power go to your head. Other officers are elected by the session or may be mandated by the incorporation statutes of the state. The moderator is ordinarily the clergyperson installed as pastor of the congregation. The clerk "shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine" (G-3.0104). Your tenure can be a year or forty years, but you are elected for a specific term. Some sessions elect the clerk for one year at a time; others, for longer terms, such as three or five years. "Clerk for life" is not a specific term, however.

Some sessions elect a clerk from those ruling elders on the session, while other sessions select someone not currently on the session. If you are currently serving on the session, you have voice and a vote. If you are not on the session now, you do not have a vote and should refrain from speaking except to ask for clarification for the minutes. If you have pertinent information from past minutes or records for the matter under discussion, you may request the floor from the moderator in order to offer that information. As one who has served under both conditions, I recommend a clerk who is not currently serving on the session. You have plenty to do to record the meeting faithfully without trying to formulate a comment or decide how to vote.

Your tenure can be a year or forty years, but you are elected for a specific term.

What Do Clerks Do?

The basic duties of the clerk of session can be found in the Form of Government (G-3.0104). However, that short list is a bit misleading and is certainly an understatement. So here you will find a bit more information about what those responsibilities actually entail.

The clerk shall record the transactions of the session. No doubt, you expected this responsibility. After all, "clerk" is another word for "secretary." You may even have accepted this office because you enjoy taking minutes. (Yes, some of us actually do.) Note the word "transactions." You need not record every statement pro and con during a discussion. Technically, all that is required are any motions before the session, the votes taken, and whether or not they passed. Generally the vote is not recorded, except when voting on a call of a pastor. However, it is good practice to note a unanimous vote if the topic is controversial. For the sake of historians in the future, you might want to add a bit more. But the minutes of the session are not a gossip rag, so keep personalities out of the recording and certainly do not add comments of your own (good or bad) about the business reported.

The minutes should indicate the type of meeting (stated, called or special, or adjourned), the name of the body (for example, Session of First Presbyterian Church, Baldwin,

Some Ideas for Recording Session Transactions

- Ask the maker of a motion that is substantive to give it to you in writing.
- Read minutes of previous meetings as a guide. If you feel they are not adequate, read the minutes of a meeting of your presbytery. Another source for the basic format for recording minutes can be found in *Robert's Rules of Order* (I.41).
- Distribute the minutes before the next meeting of the session to allow time for them to be reviewed thoroughly. And don't take corrections personally.
- Don't forget to sign the minutes after they have been entered into the official book.
- The records of the congregation held by the clerk are to be examined annually by the presbytery (G-3.0108). Keep up to date with minutes and membership rolls.

Illinois), the date and place, the time it convenes and adjourns, the presider's name, and the names of those present. Each session meeting is opened and closed with prayer by mandate of the *Book of Order* (G-3.0105), and that is to be noted in the minutes as well.

The clerk keeps the congregation's rolls of membership and attendance. Perhaps this is a surprise to you. Yes, you are responsible for keeping the membership rolls accurate and up to date. I once heard about a new clerk who had opened the membership rolls book and found that nothing had been recorded for the previous thirteen years. Not a good idea!

Maintaining the membership rolls means that letters requesting transfers of membership will come to you to be directed to the session for action. Either you or the church office will issue the letter of transfer after it has been approved by the session.

As new members join, they are listed on the rolls, indicating how they joined (transfer of membership, reaffirmation of faith, or profession of faith). You may be responsible for writing the letter of transfer. Do so promptly. The death of a member is also recorded in the membership rolls. For specifics on types of membership and the information recorded about the membership, see G-1.04.

Baptisms are also entered into the records book, so be sure the pastor obtains all the information needed when meeting with the family. Some hints to make this task easier are:

- Provide forms to be completed by new members and parents of children who are baptized. This will save you hours of searching for such information as the maiden name of the mother or the name of the church to request a transfer. Check with the stated clerk of your presbytery or other clerks of session for sample forms.
- Keep the membership records up to date, rather than entering all the information at the end of the year. You have enough to do then as you prepare the report that goes to the General Assembly (GA) in February.
- As soon as the GA report form is available online, begin to gather the information, which will come from a variety of sources. Filing your report early is encouraged.

The clerk shall preserve the records carefully. Where are the official records stored? Not under your bed, I trust, although I have heard such rumors. More information on the permanent safekeeping of records is found in G-3.0107. According to Margery Sly of the Presbyterian Historical Society, the best way to preserve these records is to put them on microfiche. Records that you no longer need to keep for handy reference can be taken to the Presbyterian Historical Society or one of the seminaries of the denomination for storage in a temperature- and humidity-controlled environment. For more information or if you have specific questions about storage, contact the reference desk at the historical society, 215-627-1852 or refdesk@history.pcusa.org.

The clerk shall furnish extracts from the records when required by another council. This responsibility is the final one listed in G-3.0104. You are not likely to be called on to do this unless the information is requested as evidence by a higher council.

Recommendations Regarding Records

- Find out what the previous clerk did regarding storage. Today is not too late to start on the right road.
- If your congregation has a historian, work with that person to see that the history of your congregation is properly sorted and preserved.
- Check out the Web site of the Presbyterian Historical Society at www.history.pcusa.org.

Use your good sense about what to report to the session. Certainly correspondence from higher councils must be reported. If in doubt, confer with the moderator.

And What Else?

The clerk shall be secretary of meetings of the congregation. Because clerks are elected to serve as an officer of the session, the Form of Government (G-1.0505) specifically appoints the clerk as the secretary for any congregational meeting. While this task probably does not surprise you, you may not be aware of the specifics when it comes to approving the minutes of a congregational meeting. Here are the options:

1. You read the minutes before the adjournment, and the congregation approves them on the spot. (This is not as overwhelming as you might think. For routine meetings, such as the election of officers, develop a template based on the previous meeting for this purpose and fill it in as the meeting takes place. You can't imagine how this impresses the congregation as well.)
2. If that does not happen, the minutes can be approved by the session, and that action is reported to the congregation the next time it meets. In that case, you are to have copies of the minutes available. The congregation may ask to have the minutes read, and additional corrections can be made. (I don't know about your congregation, but I can't imagine anyone requesting that the minutes be read at one of our congregational meetings.)
3. While the clerk signs the session minutes, the clerk and moderator both attest to the accuracy of the minutes of a congregational meeting by signing those minutes.

The minutes of congregational meetings are entered into the session minutes book.

Tasks That Are Not Specified in the Form of Government

As with every office or job, you will likely discover some expectations that no one told you about. Perhaps you have already discovered some of them.

Meeting docket. Some moderators prefer to set up the agenda or docket for the meeting themselves. Others are happy to let the clerk take care of it. In either case, when the moderator and clerk communicate about the docket before the meeting, meetings run more smoothly and the clerk can be more helpful to the moderator during the meeting. Generally, it is the clerk's task to distribute the docket to the session. With e-mail, the clerk can easily send this along with the other materials for the meeting.

Correspondence. Occasionally the session will instruct the clerk to write a letter. A common request is to thank a ruling elder or deacon who has resigned for his or her service and to acknowledge that the resignation was acted upon. Use church letterhead and write the letter as soon as possible. Mail of all sorts will come to the church addressed to the clerk.

Hints for Survival That You Won't Find in the Form of Government

- Set up a list of agenda items done annually. See the sample in the appendix. Begin with the minutes from the previous year. This will help you remember such things as approving the dates for the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper annually . . . if you don't forget to look at your list.
- Review the minutes of a year ago before a stated meeting. This is especially important if you are still developing an annual chart.
- Always review the minutes of the previous meeting before determining the docket for the next meeting. Look for baptisms that have been approved and must now be entered as having taken place. Is there unfinished business?
- Get any checklist for the annual review of the minutes and membership records used by your presbytery. The first year I took the records for review was the first time I saw this very helpful sheet. Now I use it to be sure that the membership records are complete and that the session has complied with all requirements, such as the annual meeting of the deacons with the session.
- Sit next to the moderator at the meeting. You want to be close enough to whisper a reminder, such as "No one has seconded that motion." Or you might even give a nudge and say, "Let's move this meeting along."
- Keep your sense of humor. This is a joyous task, not drudgery.

Some of it, junk mail, can go right to the recycling bin. Use your good sense about what to report to the session. Certainly correspondence from higher councils must be reported. If in doubt, confer with the moderator.

Parliamentarian. Although the moderator of the session will be thoroughly acquainted with the *Book of Order* (having been required to pass an ordination test on it) and is the officer who rules on points of procedure, she or he may turn to you for assistance. Take some time to become acquainted with the *Book of Order* and with *Robert's Rules of Order.* At least know your way around the two sources so you can research an answer quickly.

Other tasks. You know that most job descriptions include "and other tasks as determined by." Well, the moderator may have some of those tasks in mind, or they may crop up from time to time in particular session business. One such task may be to moderate the session meeting or the congregational meeting when the call of the pastor(s) is reviewed.

Additional responsibilities will come your way when your congregation is without a pastor. When that happens, become very friendly with the presbytery committee on ministry.

Truly, when the moderator and clerk communicate and work well together, serving as the clerk of session is a joy and an honor. As I said to the moderator who asked me to be clerk nine years ago, "Why, I can't think of anything more interesting than to be at session meetings without a committee responsibility!" I think he almost dropped the phone, but I continue to find it interesting and challenging, even a kind of spiritual discipline. I pray that this will be true for you too.

About the Writer

Carol Wehrheim is a freelance educator, writer, and editor. She was the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators "Educator of the Year" in 2001. She lives in Princeton, New Jersey, where she teaches sixth grade church school and is clerk of session at Nassau Presbyterian Church.

Checklist for the Clerk

Note: This is a sample for you to adapt to your particular congregation.

Every month	Report significant correspondence, baptisms performed, and communions celebrated since previous meeting. Approve minutes of previous meeting. Approve planned baptisms. Report weddings performed by clergy or in church building by other clergy. Keep membership book up to date with new members, transfers, baptisms, deaths, and weddings. Distribute minutes and other materials pertinent to the meeting to the session.
January	Begin working on the statistical report for the General Assembly, so session can approve it before it is submitted. Elect commissioners to the presbytery. Prepare list of times to celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper for approval by session or get the list from the pastor or appropriate committee. Schedule a congregational meeting to elect deacons, ruling elders, auditing committee, and members-at-large for the nominations committee.
February	Submit statistical report to the General Assembly. Send list of presbytery commissioners to the presbytery.
March	Prepare a report for the annual report of the congregation, if requested. Serve as secretary for the annual meeting of the congregation.
April	
May	Sign the confirmation certificates. Although not a requirement for sessions, many clerks provide the nominating committee with a statement about the composition of the session and board of deacons and how it matches the composition of the congregation (see G-3.0111).
June	Elect officers of the corporation.
July	No session meeting.
August	No session meeting.
September	Approve list of church school teachers and any changes in curriculum.
October	Prepare minutes and membership rolls for presbytery annual review.
November	Attend annual meeting with board of deacons.
December	