PLEASE PASS THIS BOOK TO YOUR SUCCESSOR

HANDBOOK
FOR
CLERKS OF SESSION

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

For many years, Michael Lochow served as Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains. When he passed away unexpectedly in 2022, the Leadership Pod of the Presbytery asked me to serve as Temporary Stated Clerk, and I was elected to that position in April 2023. The book you are about to read was developed by Michael. I have made a few changes to update the information. This is Michael's introduction:

> Thank you to the Presbyteries of Grand Canyon and Pittsburgh, which at one of the first training sessions I attended as a new stated clerk, provided us with a format for a handbook for clerks of session.
>
> Thank you also to the members of the Association of Stated Clerks who contributed in an anonymous fashion to the various resources made available on the Association's web page which were helpful as well. The balance of this handbook is based upon forms, questions and thoughts of my own, such as they are.
>
> This Handbook has been updated to include the current Book of Order references following the changes in 2011. There are four new sections: Time Lines for Clerks, p. 22; Recommended Policies, p. 22; Rules for Small Boards & Committees, p. 32; and Electronic Meetings, p. 32.
>
> **Bold citations** are to the Book of Order (2013-2015) and Robert's Rules of Order, 12th Edition. References to Robert's Rules of Order are in the form RONR, p. xxx.
>
> This manual explores only some of your responsibilities as the Clerk of Session. It is to be used as a guide. Above all, it has been designed and devised to ease your work in this challenging and rewarding position. It is a map which charts some of the known territory. As we celebrate our Presbyterian journey in praise of the Lord, let us do it with excitement and thanksgiving for all those who have journeyed before us and express enthusiasm to those who will come after.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me.

Rev Richard Francis, Stated Clerk
Presbytery of Northern Plains

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ARE YOU A NEW CLERK?

A successful clerk is not made over night. Knowledge of your resources and diligence in using them will help you to become proficient in your task of clerking. Here follows a list of priorities for you to pursue from the day of your election.

1. Locate the minute book and church register. Locate all previous record books. Are they properly stored? *These records should never be taken from the church (except when being read by Presbytery's Committee on Session Records) and should be kept in a fire proof safe when not in use. <u>You are the only person who can authorize entries into these books.</u>*

2. Locate a <u>*current* Book of Order.</u> Section G-3.02 is about the duties of session and sections G-1.0506 & G-3.0104 are about the duties of the clerk of session. You will find most of the information you need immediately in these sections. The categories of membership are described in G-1.04. Keeping the rolls of membership of the church is a duty of the clerk.

3. Locate copy of your church bylaws and congregational charter. Where the Book of Order is silent, the congregation's bylaws will often tell you what needs to be done.

4. Locate copies of architectural drawings, mortgage papers, church histories.

5. Locate a copy of the "Handbook for Clerks of Session" published by the Presbytery of Northern Plains. You will find a great deal of helpful information in this document. Copies of the Handbook are available from the Presbytery of Northern Plains on their web page at <u>www.northernplainspresbytery.com</u> or from the Stated Clerk.

6. Keep the presbytery address and telephone number close at hand. You will find help on almost every problem at presbytery. The Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Northern Plains is the person to whom you directly relate. For help on your questions and knowledge of whom to call, contact:

Rev Richard Francis, Stated Clerk
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THE CLERK AND THE SESSION

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BEFORE THE MEETING

1. Plan the docket: It is the responsibility of the clerk of session and the moderator of session to prepare the docket so that all business is handled in the most efficient manner. The docket becomes the outline for the session minutes. (A sample docket appears at the end of this section).

2. Meeting notices: send or arrange to have sent, notices of the meeting. It is helpful to accompany these notices with reminders to committee chairs of reports due and docketed, business referred, previous assignments. (*The call of a special meeting must include the exact purpose for which the meeting is called and no business other than that named can be transacted. The phrase, "...and such other business as may come before session," is not adequate in the call of a special meeting.)*

3. Most session have found that written reports enable the flow of business. In such reports historical and informational material always comes first in the report and the recommendations come last. Only the recommendations appear in session minutes unless session orders the entire report spread on the minutes. Many sessions find it very helpful for committees to have their reports ready in time to be sent with the call of the meeting.

TAKE TO THE MEETING

You are responsible for all papers and documents that aid session in reaching its decision. It will be helpful to have at each meeting...

*__current__ Book of Order
*congregational bylaws (contents of a notebook for all session members appear at the end of this section)
*session committee membership lists;
*current - year session minutes;
*a list of all referred and unfinished business.

DURING THE SESSION MEETING

*Session cannot meet without its moderator, who normally is the pastor of the church. If the moderator is absent or ill, the moderator may appoint another minister of Presbytery to moderate over the session, or with the approval of the pastor, may elect one of its own members to preside. If your pulpit is vacant, presbytery will appoint a moderator for session. In this event, please call the presbytery.

*A quorum of session must be present to have a legal meeting at which actions may be taken. *Sessions shall provide by rule for a quorum for meetings; such quorum shall include the moderator and either a specific number of ruling elders or a specific percentage of those ruling elders in current service on the session*. (G-3.0203) Unless provided otherwise in the bylaws, the quorum for a meeting is a majority of the members of session (RONR, p. 347).

* Record only that which is vital to the transaction of the business: minutes should be as brief as possible, but long enough to tell the story.

*Session meetings in most churches are informal. However, as clerk, **require** that **all** actions by session be voted upon. As clerk, you can **require** that all motions be in writing.
* All motions passed should be recorded, using the exact wording of the motion as it was proposed.

* Include the name of the maker of each motion made. The seconder of the motion is not necessary unless required by the session.

* It is not necessary to record the number of votes for or against a motion, except in rare occasions.

*You may find it necessary to help members of session word their motions. Helpful questions to ask about every session action are:

What exactly is going to be done?
Who is going to do it?
When will it be completed or reported?
How much will it cost?
Where will the money come from?
Is the action compatible with the Book of Order? (*If it is not, the action is null and void.*)

* Motions that are lost, or die for lack of a second, are not recorded except in rare occasions.

* Avoid descriptive terms, whether complementary or otherwise, as minutes should not reflect any opinion or promote any particular view of events.

***Do Not** include discussion in your minutes -- only main motions made and subsidiary motions adopted.

***Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised,** (12th Edition) governs all the procedures of session in all cases not specifically provided for by the Book of Order. (G-**3.0105)**

AFTER THE MEETING

1. As soon as possible after the meeting, send copies of the minutes to the pastor or moderator, as there may be items of unfinished business that require thought and preparation before presentation at the next meeting or he/she may have corrections to your initial draft. Next, transcribe or have them transcribed into the minute book. Never include attachments or place inserts in the minute book. If necessary photocopy whatever must be included onto numbered minute paper (**Recommended for reports to be spread on the minutes.)**

2. Make all necessary entries into the rolls and registers. No entry should be made unless a session action which appears in the minutes directs the entry.

3. Complete or dictate all necessary correspondence related to the actions of session. Within the church, **all** communication is from **clerk to clerk** or from **clerk to stated clerk**. The clerk's signature (not the moderator's or the secretary's signature) authenticates any document coming from the session.

Some clerks have secretaries who have the primary responsibility for the minutes and the rolls and registers. **The clerk of session supervises the church secretary in all matters related to the minutes and rolls and register**. The accuracy of these records is the clerk's responsibility, **not** the secretary's.

SESSION'S CONTINUING EDUCATION (G-3.0201)

National studies show that very few ruling elders understand their office, or the history, theology and polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The Book of Order requires the session plan for the continuing education of its ruling elders.

Here is a sample docket of the business which should take place at a session meeting. Use it to guide your preparation of the session docket. This docket can also be used as a sample outline for session minutes.

SESSION DOCKET

1. Heading: The session (church name), of (city, state), held a (regular, stated, called, special, or adjourned) meeting on (day, month, date, year), at (time – a.m. /p.m.) in the (room) of the church. The moderator was (name).

2. The meeting was opened with prayer by (name).

3. Ruling elders present: (names)
   Excused: (names)
   Absent: (names)
   Staff and Guests Present: (names)

4. It was determined a quorum was present.

5. Minutes of the (Insert Regular or Special) meeting held on (date) were approved or approved with the following corrections:

6. The report of the treasurer was received and included the following information (may include a brief summary of financial report).

7. The following report was presented by the pastor/moderator, (name) and received by the session. (Some of this information may be part of the Clerk of Session's report.)

   Weddings: (name(s), date, witnesses); (In the church, conducted by an Installed Pastor); (In the church, not conducted by an Installed Pastor); (Not on church property, conducted by an Installed Pastor)
   Marriages: (Other than above that affect member status on the roll.)
   Deaths: (name, date of death, date of funeral)
   New Members: (received by transfer, reaffirmation, etc.)
   Requests for Letters of Transfer
   Requests for Baptism: (name, parent's names, date of birth, baptismal date)
   Other Changes

8. The Clerk of Session reported that since our last meeting the following information has been received: communication and correspondence (list), changes in rolls and registers of the church, synopsis of presbytery meeting, etc.

9. Committee reports and action taken
10. Special committee and Task Force reports
11. Unfinished business
12. New business
13. Announcements, including time and place of next meeting
14. Items of concern
15. Adjournment with prayer, time

All minutes should be signed by the Clerk of Session after being approved by the session at the next meeting.

A NOTEBOOK FOR SESSION MEMBERS

Some churches have developed notebooks, or manuals, for each session member that includes the necessary documents and information for intelligent decision making. Such a tool is particularly helpful in orienting new session members to their task.

Introduction

Church History

Includes a list of programs and activities with contact people, telephone numbers, meetings times and places.

Church Officers and Staff

Includes names, addresses and telephone numbers

Bylaws of the Congregation

Functions, Duties and Responsibilities Includes

ordination vows

Session Committees - Objectives and Duties Includes

list of committee membership

Other Committees

Deacons

Presbyterian Women

Presbyterian Men

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Church Members

Notes

SESSION AND ITS RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Session supervises all organizations of the congregation. All organizations of the congregation are accountable to session. **All organizations should make a financial and programmatic report to session and the congregation annually**.

Board of Trustees (G-4.0101)
The board of trustees is accountable to the session. Their powers as trustees are listed in G-4.0101 and shall not infringe on the powers of session.

G-4.0101 provides that active ruling elders shall be the trustees of the corporation unless the bylaws provide otherwise. Having such a unicameral board eliminates conflicts between the session and the board of trustees.

(**Recommendation**: It is possible for session to delegate powers to the trustees, although session is still responsible for the delegated powers.)

(Recommendation: the budget should be prepared by the board of trustees and the session together.)

The Board of Deacons (G-2.02)
The board of deacons is under the supervision and authority of the session. The prior Book of Order required an annual meeting of the session and the board of deacons. It is a practice you may want to continue to meet the supervisory responsibility of the session. Regardless, the session should determine how they will review the work of the board of deacons. The pastors are advisory members of the board of deacons.

Nominating Committee (G-2.0401)
The church nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not of the session. It does not report to session; although the committee may wish to consult with session. Congregations may provide for their own rule for a congregational nominating committee. In any case, it shall consist of at least three active members of the congregation and include a ruling elder currently serving on session. The pastor is an *ex-officio* member of this committee.

Pastor Nominating Committee (G-2.0802-05)
The pastor nominating committee is a committee of the congregation, not of session. The committee shall receive and consider presbytery's counsel.

The committee has several points of contact with the session:

*the pastor nominating committee develops the church information form and the longrange plan.
*the session approves both documents
*the committee negotiates the salary of the new pastor in consultation with the session/board of trustees.
*the committee requests session to call a congregational meeting when it is ready to bring a candidate.

Session and Personnel (G-3.0201)
Session employs the administrative staff of the congregation. Session recommends to the congregation the salaries of all ordained personnel. This recommendation must meet the minimum guidelines set by presbytery.

Outside Organizations
Session controls the use of all church property, even to granting permission for the sanctuary to be used for weddings. If outside organizations use your building, please see the cautions under "Legal Questions." The

purpose of an organization using the church should not be contrary to the mission of the congregation or the Presbyterian Church. It is wise to have a written contract with all organizations using the church building, stipulating any rental fee, maintenance standards, and rooms of the church to be used.

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*The clerk of session is secretary to the congregational meeting, both ecclesiastical and corporate. **G-1.0505**

*The congregation **minutes**, both ecclesiastical and corporate, are signed by the clerk and the moderator. (RONR, p. 471) If your congregation does not have a unicameral board the congregation elects the secretary of the corporate meeting. The person elected may be the clerk.

*Check your bylaws or manual of operations for what constitutes "**due notice**" for the congregational meeting. **G-1.0502**

*A congregational meeting may be **called** only by session, presbytery or one-fourth of the members of the congregation on the active roll. **G-1.0502**

*What **business** may be done at a congregational meeting? (Very little) **G-1.0503**

As clerk you should take particular care to alert the moderator of the congregational meeting when business is out of order. You will find a careful listing of such business in the Book of Order. **<u>The budget is adopted by session, not the congregation</u>**. However, session must inform the congregation of the budget. If the congregation does not approve of the use of its gifts, the members will not give. (**Recommendation**: at an informal meeting of the congregation after worship or a church supper, session should present the budget, invite comment, and solicit suggestions. **<u>No actions should be taken at this meeting</u>**.

*The pastor(s) salary must be approved annually by the congregation. **G-1.0503**

***Proxy voting** is not permitted in church meetings, ecclesiastical or corporate.

*Always be prepared for a **ballot vote** to elect officers. Be sure to allow for nominations from the floor. If there is more than one nominee for an office, the election must be by ballot. (**Recommendation to avoid trouble**: Since only members on the active roll can vote, have your roll book current. Bring it with you to the meeting. If there is considerable tension about a particular vote, have active members of the congregation come to your desk to pick up a ballot.)

*Check bylaws or your manual of operations for the **quorum** of the congregational meeting. See also prior discussion on page 6 of this Handbook regarding a quorum. **G-1.0501**

*If your congregation does not have bylaws, please contact the stated clerk for information about how to establish them.

Docket Form for Annual Congregational Meeting

Minutes of Annual Congregational Meeting
Month, Date, Year

1. The congregation of (church name), of (city, state), held its annual meeting on (day, month, date, year), at (time), in the (room) of the church. The moderator was (name).

2. The purpose of the meeting was to (state the express purpose of the meeting-the same purpose given in the invitation to the congregation to attend).

3. Notice of the meeting was given by (oral announcement, and/or bulletin, and/or letter).

4. The meeting was called to order and opened with prayer by (name).

5. A quorum was declared with (number) members present. (Quorum is 10% of active members.)

6. The following minutes of congregation meeting(s) were noted as having been approved by the session: Minutes of Meeting(s) on (Date(s) were approved by session on (Date(s).

7. Reports heard, actions taken: Include election of officers, nominating committee, etc.

8. Review of pastor's compensation.

9. Motion to grant authority to session to approve minutes of this meeting.

10. Adjournment, closing prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Minutes Approved: (Initials)

Date of Approval: (Insert Date)

____
Clerk of Session

____
Moderator (Name)
(If requested)

THE CLERK AND RECORDS

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HOW TO KEEP THE CHURCH ROLLS AND REGISTER

Church Rolls and Registers are Legal Documents

Presbytery checks your rolls and registers annually. The roll and registers are checked against session minutes. You will find your responsibilities related to the rolls and registers in the Book of Order **(G-3.0204, G-1.04**) Read these pages carefully.

There are only three ways a person can join the Presbyterian Church: profession of faith, transfer, and reaffirmation of faith. All three ways require formal session action.

ROLLS G-1.04 & G-3.0204

The church rolls record every member who has ever belonged to your church. These rolls must be kept current. The official church rolls may **not** be kept in a card file or on a computer. There are three church rolls which are required. The session should determine what information is included on each roll. Previously there were five rolls but the inactive roll was eliminated and the chronological and alphabetical rolls were combined into the active roll. You may still wish to maintain the five rolls. Many churches keep the inactive roll as it is a good way to track members who may be on the membership fence. Descriptions of the former chronological, alphabetical, and inactive rolls are available from the Stated Clerk.

A. Active Roll: This is the roll of persons who have been received into membership and participate in the church's work and worship. The only way a name can be removed from the Active Roll is by a transfer to another church, transfer to the inactive roll (if maintained), death, ordination to the position of Teaching Elder, deletion or removal from membership.

B. Baptized roll: For most churches in the Presbytery of Northern Plains, the baptized roll is the same as the register of baptisms. The baptized roll lists all those who have received the Sacrament of Baptism, whether in this congregation or elsewhere, and who have been enrolled as a baptized member by the session but who has not made a profession of faith.

C. Affiliate roll: An affiliate member is a member of another congregation 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 a certificate of good standing from the appropriate council or governing body of the that congregation, and has been received by the session as an affiliate member. Participation is limited by the right to vote at congregational meetings or be elected to ordered ministry.

Inactive roll (optional): The inactive roll lists the names of members of the church, who in the judgment of session, have willfully let their active membership in the church lapse. The session should determine what constitutes being 'inactive' and may attempt to discover the cause of the member's non-participation.

GUIDELINES FOR KEEPING MINUTES

SESSION RECORDS BOOK APPEARANCE

1. Clerks may use the standard loose-leaf minute book or a three-ring binder. Archival paper used in a three-ring binder should be what is called "acid-free" paper. The Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS) describes the 'acid-free paper' as

> lignin-free paper with a minimum pH of 8.5 and a buffer of calcium carbonate of about 3% to supply alkaline reserves. Paper that is at least 25% cotton or rag will supply additional durability.

The paper is sold loose in reams; therefore, you will need to maintain a personal chronological numbering of each page as you continue in your record keeping procedure. Some archival supply stores are:

Gaylord Bros	800-448-6160	www.gaylord.com
Hollinger Metal Edge, Inc.	800-634-0491	https://www.hollingermetaledge.com/
Light Impressions	888-222-2045	www.lightimpressionsdirect.com
University Products, Inc.	800-628-1912	www.universityproducts.com

Some local office supply stores may have it as well. Be sure to check that the paper meets the proper requirements.

2. The leaves should be:
   a. Of uniform size and style
   b. Numbered consecutively and uniformly
   c. Held in place in an automatically locking binder or in the three-ring binder.
   d. Ultimately bound in permanent book form of not more than 400 pages or stored in an appropriate box to preserve "acid-free" paper.

3. All minutes and records should be typewritten, not handwritten.

4. Do not leave blank pages or blank space of more than two inches on any page. If space is left, cross it out with pen and ink or type in "The Remainder of this Page is Blank".

5. Do not insert into records any written or printed matter on separate sheets of paper.

6. Do not use glue, tape, Post-it Notes® (some adhesive remains on the page even after the paper tag is removed) on permanent records. The glue will accelerate deterioration of the paper.

7. Do not curl or fold the paper or use staples, paper clips or other paper fasteners. These accelerate the deterioration of the paper.

8. Minutes should be typed into the official record book only after review, correction and approval. If, however, a later revision becomes necessary, an entry in ink can be made in the margin, indicating the entry changed, the type of change, and reference forward to the new page where the change is authorized. The Clerk should initial the marginal note.

A. ENTRIES TO BE RECORDED AT EVERY MEETING

1. **RECORD DATE, TIME, AND THE TYPE OF MEETING**. The type of meeting should be identified: session, congregation, regular, special, annual.

2. **INDICATE THAN THAT MEETING OPENED WITH PRAYER**

3. **IDENTIFY MODERATOR OF MEETING.** Ordinarily the Pastor, Interim or Stated Supply, is the moderator. In cases where another moderator is present the reason and name of person should be given.

4. **RECORD RULING ELDERS PRESENT, ABSENT AND EXCUSED.**

5 **INDICATE THAT A QUORUM IS PRESENT**. The Book of Order defines a quorum for the session (**G-1.0501**), but gives the session authority to establish a higher quorum for its own meetings. The moderator should be familiar with what constitutes a quorum in the church for both bodies, and minutes confirm that a quorum was present. (Also, see page 6 of this Handbook)

6. **RECORD APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES**. Ordinarily, minutes shall be approved at the next regular meeting of the session. They should be identified by date and type of meeting, and any corrections noted. While not required, it is expedient for the congregation to authorize approval of its minutes by the session. To avoid the need for confusing corrections, it is suggested that minutes not be entered in the Record Book until after their approval.

7. **ENTER MINUTES OF CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS IN THE RECORD BOOK.** Minutes from the annual congregational meeting and any specially called congregational meeting shall be entered in the session's minute book, and signed by the Clerk and the Moderator, if requested. (**RNOR, p. 471**)

8. **RECORD ALL ADOPTED MOTIONS**. Defeated motions need not appear in the minutes except by actions of the session. Record motions with all pertinent information included. Reference to other documents, which do not appear in the minutes, should be avoided whenever possible. Record presentation of committee reports **without** including the content of the report unless directed to do so by the session. Record only that which is vital to the transactions of the meeting or of historical value.

9. **INDICATE THAN THAT THE MEETING CLOSED WITH PRAYER.**

10. **SIGN THE MINUTES**. When the minutes have been entered in the Record Book, Session minutes must be signed by the clerk or the moderator. Congregational meeting minutes must be signed by the clerk and the moderator, if requested. (**RNOR, p. 471**) Minutes entered in the Record Book should appear without erasures and interlineations. If corrections must be made, the corrected section appears in the minutes following discovery of the error, with a handwritten signed or initialed note

in the margin by the error indicating the page where the correction has been made. Under no circumstances may a page be permanently removed from the Record Book. Permission to open new records book is done through conversation with the Stated Clerk of Presbytery.

B. **ENTRIES TO BE RECORDED <u>AS NEEDED OR INDICATED</u>.**

1. **RECORD THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**
Observance of the Lord's Supper should be authorized by session. All regular and special celebrations of the Lord's Supper should be recorded in the minutes of the next regular session meeting. While it is required to report only that the Supper was served, it may be advantageous for the church's historical record or worship attendance, to record how many people partook.

2. **RECORD THE PRIVATE ADMINISTRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**
When the Lord's Supper is administered privately with the sick the minutes should record it, and who was present.

3. **RECORD THE CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM**. All celebrations of Baptism should be recorded in the minutes of the next regular meeting of the session, indicating who was baptized and when. Note that the session shall authorize baptisms. (**W-2.0311**)

4. **RECORD PERSONS WHO ARE BAPTIZED**. When an infant is baptized, the minutes shall record the infant's full name, the name of parents, and date of birth. The information is then recorded on the Roll of Baptized Members. The Baptized member Roll includes the children baptized in your church and names of children of members who were baptized in other congregations. When an adult is baptized, the minutes include the full name of person and is recorded on roll of adult baptisms.

5. **RECORD NEW MEMBERS RECEIVED**. When new members are received by the session, the minutes shall record the individual's full name; the name of their baptized children, if any; the date and place of previous ordination as ruling elder or deacon, if any, how they were received (profession or reaffirmation of faith or letter of transfer), and name of dismissing church. This information shall then be entered in the Roll and Records.

6. **RECORD MEMBERS DISMISSED.** When church members are dismissed, the minutes shall record the individual's full name; names of their baptized children, if any; the record of their ordination as ruling elder or deacon if any; how they were dismissed (transfer, removal of inactive roll, dropped from rolls); and in the case of person dismissed by letter of transfer, the name and location of the church receiving them (the number assigned to each member in the Active Roll should be recorded with the name.) This information shall then be entered in the Rolls and Records. The Book of Order **G-3.0204a** outlines the grounds and process for dismissal of church members. Effective date of dismissal is date of reception in receiving church.

7. **RECORD THE DEATH OF CHURCH MEMBERS**
When a member dies, that death should be reported to the session, and the minutes should note the individual's full name, date of death, and if he or she was a ruling elder. This information shall then be entered in the Active Roll. [Note: each year the presbytery prepares a necrology report to be part of the worship service at the

first presbytery meeting of the year and will ask for the names of any ruling elders from your church who died in the previous year.]

8. **RECORD ANY TRANSFER OF MEMBERS ON THE CHURCH ROLLS**. When church members are transferred from one membership to another, the minutes should record the individual's full name (the number assigned to each members in the Active Roll should be recorded with the name) and the session's actions.

9. **RECORD MARRIAGE.** All marriage of church members, all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the church, and all marriages performed on church property shall be reported to the session and included in its minutes. This information (if one of the partners is a member of the church, the number assigned to each member in the Active roll should be recorded with the name) shall then be entered in the Register of Marriages.

10 **RECORD RULING ELDERS AND DEACONS ELECTED TO SERVICE** When new ruling elders and deacons are elected to be ordained and installed, the minutes shall record the individual's full name, completion of period of study, and session examination, the date of ordination and installation. This information shall then be entered in the appropriate Register of Ruling elders or Deacons. The installation of pastors should also be noted, with the dates of their service in the present church.

11. **RECORD COMMISSIONERS TO OTHER GOVERNING BODIES OF THE CHURCH.** When elders are elected by session as commissioners to Presbytery, or nominated as commissioners to Synod or General Assembly, the minutes shall record the individual's name and how long they have been elected to serve. It may also be advantageous, upon completion of the term of service, to record the individual's attendance and fidelity to the task.

12. **RECORD DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS.** When the session finds it necessary to exercise discipline, the Book of Order, "Rules of Discipline" should be carefully studied. If discipline be administered, the minutes must contain such a record of the proceedings so the Presbytery will know who was disciplined, why and how. Check with Stated Clerk for any questions on procedure.

13. **REPORT TO SESSION ON PRESBYTERY'S REVIEW OF SESSION RECORDS.** When the session's records have been reviewed by the Presbytery, that report should be received by the session and appropriate actions taken to adjust or correct the records as indicated.

14. **FURTHER SUGGESTIONS**: It would be helpful, when referring to church members in the minutes, to identify them by the number where they may be found on the Membership Roll. In addition, it is advantageous when actions are taken in specific compliance with the Book of Order (e.g. disciplinary action, removal of members, etc.) for the appropriate paragraph number to be identified.

C. **ENTRIES TO BE RECORDED ANNUALLY**

1. **RECORD ANNUAL REVIEW OF PASTOR'S COMPENSATION**
   It is the responsibility of the session to review annually the adequacy of compensation which the church provides its pastor(s). (**G-1.0503**). It should be reported to the session when this review has taken place, and the session minutes should note it.

2. **RECORD ANNUAL FINANCIAL AUDIT OR FULL FINANCIAL REVIEW**
   The church's financial records shall be subject to a full financial review each year by a public accountant or firm or a committee of members versed in accounting procedures (**G-3.0113**). It should be reported to the session when this has been done, and the minutes should note it. The review itself does not need to be in the minutes.

3. **RECORD ANNUAL JOINT MEETING WITH BOARD OF DEACONS**
   This joint meeting of the session and the board of deacons is no longer required by the Book of Order. However, as noted earlier, because of the requirement that the session supervise the board of deacons some process to document that supervision is recommended. Whatever method the session uses to supervise the board of deacons should be noted in the minutes.

4. **RECORD ANNUAL REPORTS RECEIVED FROM OTHER BOARDS AND ORGANIZATIONS.** It is the session's responsibility to supervise the work of all other boards and organizations within the church - deacons, trustees, men's and women's groups, etc. (**G-2.0202, G-3.0204, & G-3.0205**). The minutes should show at least annually, when these other groups have reported to the session on their work and their finances. The reports themselves need not appear in the minutes.

5. **INCLUDE THE ANNUAL STATISTICAL REPORT.** It is a requirement of the Presbytery that a summary of the statistical and financial information reported to the General Assembly each year be entered in the minutes. (**G-3.0202f**) This summary should include at least the following: # baptisms (adult and infant), # members received (by profession or reaffirmation of faith or letter of transfer), #members removed (by letter of transfer, death or other cause), the total number of active church members as of December 31; and a summary of the church's finances.

7. **FURTHER SUGGESTION**: For entries recorded annually in the session minutes, it is suggested that the Clerk keep an index or table of contents, so that these items may be easily located when needed, either by the church or the Presbytery.

TIMELINES FOR CLERKS
Mandated Actions

Things to be done Annually (reported in the minutes)

1. Conduct and audit or financial review of financial statements
2. Meet at least quarterly
3. Review work of deacons and other committees and organizations
4. Review terms of call of pastor(s)
5. Review insurance coverage
6. Elect commissioner(s) to presbytery
7. Hold annual meeting
8. Receive the report of the nominating committee
9. Submit minutes and rolls/registers to presbytery for review
10. Report the results of the presbytery review of minutes/rolls/registers
11. Set dates for communion
12. Plan special offerings
13. Set date for installation/ordination of officers

1st Quarter

1. Approve statistical report
2. File statistical report with the Office of General Assembly

4th Quarter

1. Approve budget for next calendar year
2. Elect the clerk of session
3. Elect the treasurer
4. Review and update rolls and register
5. Set annual meeting date

RECOMMENDED POLICIES

1. Sexual Misconduct Policy (Required)
2. Child Care Policy (may be required, 2015 amendment)
3. Personnel Policies
4. Wedding Policy
5. Funeral Policy
6. Youth Field Trip Policy
7. Financial Policies
8. Memorial Fund Policy
9. Endowments
10. Building Use
11. Newsletter Policies
12. Audit Committee Policy
13. Grievance Policy
14. Library Policy
15. Memorial Services

THE CLERK AS HISTORIAN

Creating a History

Department of History of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Records and Computers

Records of Permanent Value

Vital Records

Records of Temporary Value

WHEN AND HOW TO PRESERVE YOUR RECORDS

The Clerk, as he or she is keeping records, is creating the history of the church for posterity. Please see suggestions below for preserving your records. There are other documents which you, or a person you appoint, may wish to collect and preserve:

videos of anniversary sermons
bulletins from major worship services
photographs of the church and church property
photograph albums
videos of important events
interview with your oldest members
old church artifacts (communion services, bibles...)
formal and informal photographs of former pastors

Most churches publish a church history at each important anniversary date. Add these to your collection and each time you publish such a history, **please send two copies of the history to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Northern Plains**. If you find gaps in your history, please check with the Stated Clerk's office. We may have information to help fill in that gap.

A frequent question clerks ask is how to manage records; which records to keep and for how long. A management chart may be found at the end of the section.

The Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS) 425 Lombard Street Philadelphia, PA 19147 www.history.pcusa.org 215-627-1852

PHS is the national archives for the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is an exciting place to visit and is *the* place to visit to do research. The records of many of our churches are held in the archives, either in original form or on microfilm. The Department will do ecclesiastical research for you on any original books stored with the Department. The Department will not do genealogical research under any circumstances; however, you may send people directly to the Department to do their own research. They are available to answer your questions about preserving your records and getting copies of records.

RECORDS AND COMPUTERS

Many churches keep their current membership on computers for mailing convenience. This is entirely appropriate but computer membership records **do not** replace the rolls, registers and the minute book and computer print-outs are not acceptable at the annual administrative review of church records.

The Presbytery is in the process of developing a policy regarding maintaining church rolls and registers electronically. A policy is necessary to provide uniformity within the Presbytery regarding maintenance of records. The PHS offered this advice about electronic records:

2. Beware of proprietary church-membership software
3. Make sure you can get your date back-out
4. Export at least annually to CSV (comma-separated values)
5. There's nothing wrong with paper

Financial records can be kept on the computer but always have a hard copy of each new record.

VITAL RECORDS

Records of Permanent Value

Below is a list of records possessing administrative, legal or historical value. It is recommended that these records be stored in a fireproof, waterproof safe **at the church**. They should **never** be removed from the church or stored in members' homes.

Session Minutes	Annual Budget & Financial Review
Congregational Minutes	Financial ledgers of final entry
Rolls and Register Books	Deacons' Minutes and Reports
Charter and/or incorporations papers	Church School Minutes and Reports
Congregational Bylaws	Presbyterian Women's Minutes

Miscellaneous

Property deeds	Blueprints, architectural drawings and sketches
Photographs - identified	Scrapbooks
Manuals and Directories	Worship bulletins
Newsletters	Histories
Anniversary publications	Ministers' biographies and photographs

Vital Records

Example of records that document the legal and financial position of the local congregation and that are essential for the continuation or resumption of operations following a disaster. Such records seldom constitute more than approximately two percent of an office's total list of records. Vital protection records may be found in both the temporary and permanent categories of records.

Accounts payable	Accounts receivable
Annual reports	Audits
Bank Balances	By Laws
Canceled checks	Certificate of incorporation
Charter and amendments	Contractual agreements
Cash books	Deeds
Employees' Directory	Financial statements
Insurance policies and schedules	Invoices
Leases	Mailing lists
Minutes	Purchase orders
Suppliers' directories	Trial balance (monthly)
Wills, bequests	

Records of Temporary Value

Any records not possessing permanent value would, of course, automatically fall into the "Temporary" category. The following list presents only a few examples of the many such records. Realistically evaluated, there should be many more records judged "temporary" than "permanent" in most offices.

Few temporary records should be retained beyond seven years: an example of an exception would be Worker's Compensation Reports which should be held ten years before destruction. When in doubt, check with your auditor regarding retention periods for financial records.

Account payable invoices	Accounts receivable ledger
Bank deposits slips	Budgets
Canceled checks	Cash Receipt records
Correspondence re: speaking engagements	Data for updating mailing lists
Employee withholding records	Excerpts from documents retained elsewhere
Expense reports	Invitation
Letters of acknowledgment	Payroll checks
Periodic financial statements	Petty cash records

Receipts of purchases Requests for information and responses thereto Routine notices of meetings Travel plans and arrangements.

THE CLERK AND THE PRESBYTERY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Session and Presbytery

- Commissioners to Presbytery
- Nominations to Permanent and Program Committees of Presbytery
- Reports to Presbytery
- Presbytery Review of Minutes, Rolls, and Registers

THE PRESBYTERY

The organization of Presbytery is found in the Directory & Manual of Administrative Operations. Each Minister and clerk should have a copy of the Directory. The Directory and Policies of the Presbytery are updated regularly online as the Presbytery approves changes and additions.

THE SESSION AND PRESBYTERY

The relationship of the session to Presbytery is contained in the Book of Order. A list of specific responsibilities of session to the Presbytery follow:

COMMISSIONERS TO PRESBYTERY

Presbyterian polity is a representative polity. It works only when each church takes seriously its responsibility to elect ruling elder commissioners to attend the meeting, stay through the end of the meeting, and report to the Session.

There are two regular presbytery meetings each year held in the spring and fall. The spring meeting is the annual meeting.

The number of commissioners to which a congregation is entitled depends upon the size of the congregation and the plan adopted by the Presbytery found at B-2.0300 in the Presbytery Manual. (**G-3.0301**). Each congregation is entitled to at least one commissioner.

Each commissioner should report to their session about the meeting:

*significant actions taken by the presbytery
*a summary of issues deliberated upon
*policy decisions made
*implications of presbytery action for the congregation
*concerns and opportunities open to the congregation through presbytery
*raising of consciousness of the congregation's participation in the total ministry of Jesus Christ

Nominations to Presbytery Units and Standing Committees

Presbytery is always looking for particular skills and interest among the members of our congregations. The Presbytery of Northern Plains is also committed to find racial/ethnic minority members of our churches with skills and interest in serving on a presbytery committee. Please share the gifts of your congregation with your presbytery.

Reports to Presbytery

Annual General Assembly Statistical Report

The annual General Assembly Statistical Report is session's report to the General Assembly and is the specific responsibility of the session and the clerk of session. It is sent by the stated clerk of the presbytery to the church, addressed, "Moderator/Clerk at the church address. The report is sent early in December. **It is important for the clerk to locate this report. If it has not arrived by Christmas, please call the stated clerk's office immediately.** The report is usually due in mid-February. Reports are entered online with the use of a user name and password. If you are not able to enter your data online, please contact the office of the stated clerk for assistance.

PRESBYTERY REVIEW OF SESSION MINUTES, ROLLS AND REGISTERS

"Every governing body above a session shall review the records of the proceedings of the next lower governing body. Presbyteries shall review the records of sessions annually or biennially. If a session shall fail to submit its records for this purpose, the presbytery shall order them to be produced at a specific time.

"In reviewing the proceedings of a lower governing body, the higher governing body 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 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. (**G-3.0108**)

The Presbytery's committee on Session Records will conduct several meetings throughout the year (to be announced) when the Clerks of Session or Moderators can gather to accomplish the task of review. Please review P-6.0108 - Session Records Committee Procedures in the Manual of Operations on P-79.

In preparation for the review session each Clerk is asked to fill out the review form noting the pages in their records where the required actions were recorded. This greatly assists the reviewer in completing the review. You, as a Clerk, will appreciate this as you will be in the role of an examiner as well, examining the records of another session.

INSURANCE

Helpful ideas to keep your information up-to-date:

1. Perform at least an annual review of the insurance program with the session's committee that is responsible for the insurance coverage of the church.

2. A summary of the insurance coverage and premium(s) should be entered in the minutes of a meeting at which time the session approved the program/plan.

3. Perform annual safety inspections of your building with fire officials to identify hazards. Check with your local fire department, as they are often very pleased to assist with inspections and provide fire prevention ideas. Part of this safety inspection includes the placement and current operative performance of all fire extinguishers.

4. Create a detailed inventory of all furniture and equipment. The inventory list should include additions and deletions of items as they occur. A photographic inventory of all furniture, equipment and rooms of the church is an excellent inventory tool. A video recording is also an effective tool in providing documentation in the event of loss. All inventory records should be stored offsite preferably in a safe deposit box or similar secure location.

5. Conduct periodic appraisals to update the values of all property; appraisals should be conducted at least every three years.

6. Obtain at least two quotations for your insurance program. You should begin your quotation process at least 90 days prior to policy expiration.

7. Be confident that all realistic insurance premiums are included in the annual budget.

8. Always retain all insurance policies, no matter how old.

BASIC PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

On Making a Motion at a Meeting of Presbytery

Ruling elder or clergy commissioners to the Presbytery of the Northern Plains, have the right to make motions. To make a motion, rise from your seat, wait until the moderator recognizes you, state your name and affiliation, then simply and clearly state: "Mr/Mrs Moderator, move the following motion and if seconded will speak to it." State your motion. It is not discussion time until the motion has been seconded and the moderator invites you to speak to the motion. All motions of any length must be given in writing to the stated clerk. This is imperative if debate is lengthy. Only one motion will be considered at a time.

A motion, whether at a presbytery or a session meeting should clearly state: what is the motion, who is affected, when it is to be done, how it will be done and why it will be done.

Motions

Main Motion: Any motion which proposes an action to be taken by the governing body. Main motions are debatable.

To Amend: A motion to amend is to perfect the main motion; therefore an amendment contrary to the intent of the main motion is out of order. A motion to amend a motion takes precedence over the main motion. It must be adopted or rejected before the main motion is considered. If adopted, it becomes a part of the main motion. It is debatable.

To Substitute: A motion to substitute is a form of amendment. It takes precedence over a main motion. If approved, it replaces the main motion.

To Postpone Indefinitely: This is a motion to kill consideration. It is debatable.

To Postpone Definitely: This motion includes a specific time and/or date on which this motion will be presented to the deliberative body. It is debatable and may be amended.

To Commit or Refer: A motion to refer must include the body to which this action is referred. The desirability or the details of the referral are debatable, but the matter being referred is not under debate.

To Reconsider: Once a question has been decided, it must not be reconsidered again at the same assembly, unless a motion to reconsider it made by a person who voted with the majority. It is debatable.

To Move the Previous Question: This is a motion to close debate and to bring the issue to vote. The motion must say, "I move the previous question." A voice calling out, "Question" is not appropriate and should be ignored. This motion requires a 2/3 vote and should not be used to close off debate or opposition prematurely. The moderator can rule, prior to the vote, that in their judgment there has not been sufficient debate and that the motion is out of order. This motion requires a second and is not debatable.

RULES FOR SMALL BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

Robert's Rules recognizes that you need different rules for smaller boards or committees than for a large convention. Therefore, less stringent rules were established a meeting of a board or committee with no more than 12 members present. Those rules include:

1. It is not necessary to rise in order to make a motion or when seeking to be recognized.
2. There is no limit on the number of times a person can speak.
3. The presiding office does not have to leave the chair to make a motion or participate in the debate.
4. Motions to close or limit debate are not allowed.
5. Motions do not need to be seconded.
6. A motion can be reconsidered, regardless of when the motion was made.
7. A motion can be reconsidered by anyone who did not vote on the losing side (so a member who was not present can move to reconsider, as can a member who abstained).
8. If the motion to reconsider is made at a later meeting, it requires a two-thirds vote without notice or a majority vote if all committee members who voted with the prevailing side are present or have been notified.

ELECTRONIC MEETINGS – PROCEDURE

Except as authorized in the bylaws, the business of the session can only be validly transacted at a regular or properly called meeting. That meeting is a gathering in one room or area of the session at which a quorum is present. An electronic meeting is one in which the members communicate through some electronic means such as the internet or by telephone. Meetings held by electronic means are still a deliberative body as long as there is an opportunity for simultaneous aural communication among the participants.

Electronic meetings must be authorized by the church's bylaws. It is also advisable to adopt additional rules pertaining to the conduct of these meetings. A group that attempts to conduct a deliberative process in writing (such as postal mail, e-mail, "chat rooms" or fax) does not constitute a deliberative meeting. Absent bylaw language authorizing electronic meetings it is possible for a committee to meet by electronic means pursuant to a standing rule of a parent organization or by a motion establishing a particular committee to hold electronic meetings. One of the most common ways in which this rule is violated is the holding of committee votes by e-mail. See Presbytery bylaw B5.0700, Voting by Mail, for some parameters for voting by e-mail.

Additional rules to consider regarding an electronic meeting are:

1. The type of equipment or computer software required for participation
2. Methods for determining a quorum
3. Conditions under which a member may raise a point of order
4. Conditions under which the continued presence of a quorum is presumed
5. Methods for seeking and obtaining the floor
6. Means by which the speaker is identified
7. Method by which motions may be submitted in writing during a meeting
8. Methods for taking and verifying vote
9. How to insure non-members cannot participate in an executive session

WHEN YOU HAVE PROBLEMS

Contrary to popular belief and probably what you have been told, Clerks of Session do have problems and questions. These questions may come out of meetings or from individual members about our system of government. Finding suitable answers is not always easy, but is always vital.

Step 1: Try to find the answer in the *Book of Order*. This book has evolved over many years and is always your first guideline. In it you will find guidance and potential answers. The experience of familiarizing yourself with the *Book of Order* will also aid in finding other answers ahead of time.

Step 2: If appropriate, discuss these problems or questions with the pastor or moderator.

Step 3: If you still have a question, do not hesitate to call the stated clerk. They are well acquainted with polity and policies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Presbytery of the Northern Plains.

An important point is that Clerks of Session <u>should seek help when a problem first arises</u>, rather than wait for it to become a detriment to the life and work of the church. Seek guidance and use the tools as noted in this document. It is much easier to invite help when situations first materialize, than to invite presbytery to step in when the problem becomes too great for the session and congregation to manage alone. In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we are all part of the connectional family.

<u>RESOURCE BOOKS</u>

<u>Book of Confessions</u>

This book contains our historic Christian Confessions basic to the theology of the Church. All ordained officers are to affirm that they will be instructed by these Confessions; therefore it is essential that this book is available for individual and group study as well as to be used at times of ordination and installation of officers.

Book of Order

This book contains three sections: (a) Form of Government, (b) Directory for Worship, and (c) Church Discipline. The *Book of Order* explains the polity and orderly workings of the Church. We turn to the *Book of Order* to find answers to our frequent questions, and it is one of the standards under which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) makes decisions.

The *Book of Order* might be considered our denomination's bylaws as well as its standing rules. It is essential for the Clerk of Session to have a good working knowledge of the *Book of Order* and be familiar with its use because it contains the fundamental working within the Church. The *Book of Order* is revised following each General Assembly meeting (held biannually in June or July) and every Clerk of Session should have the most current copy.

The Book of Confessions and the Book of Order are both available in digital form as free downloads, and in paperback format. All are available here: https://www.pcusastore.com/

Robert's Rules of Order

This book is mandated for use by the *Book of Order*, except where the *Book of Order* provides otherwise. (G-3.0105) The current book is the 12th Edition. Keep a version with your *Book of Order* for easy reference. There are shortened versions available, including of course, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Robert's Rules, Robert's Rules for Dummies*, and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Parliamentary Procedure*. Other books include *Notes and Comments on Robert's Rules* and *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised in Brief*.

Companion to the Constitution - Polity for the Local Church

This book is a guide to Presbyterian law and procedures that addresses the needs of the members of a church session. It concentrates on the material useful and essential to officers and members carrying out their duties and ministries in their particular church.

Presbyterian Polity for Church Leaders, 4th Edition (Gray & Tucker)

This detailed, comprehensive interpretation of the *Book of Order* and Presbyterian polity is the most complete resource of its kind since the church's reunion. It explains principles and procedures of church government and includes changes since reunion.

These publications are available from Cokesbury (www.cokesbury.com) or Amazon (www.amazon.com). The Presbytery office has a limited supply of the *Book of Order*. If you have any questions regarding these resources please contact the Stated Clerk or the Presbytery office.

DIRECTORY INFORMATION

For complete directory information of the staff and committees as well as the leadership of local congregations of Northern Plains Presbytery, make sure that you have in your possession a current copy of the **DIRECTORY & MANUAL OF OPERATIONS** of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains. You may obtain one from the office of the presbytery. A complete directory of the staff, commissions, and committees of the General Assembly are found in the current **PRESBYTERIAN PLANNING CALENDAR**. For quick reference a few of the most frequently used offices/individuals are as follows:

Northern Plains Presbytery

Office of Northern Plains Presbytery

Jennifer Kolodka, Communications Director
pnpoffice@gmail.com

5555 South Washington

Grand Forks, ND 58201
701-248-0227

Email: pnpoffice@gmail.com
Web: www.northernplainspresbytery.com

Office of the Stated Clerk
Rev. Richard Francis
712-265-1167
Email: pnpstatedclerk@gmail.com

Office of the Treasurer
Ellen Misialek
701-520-3220
http://emisialek@invisimax.com

Other email addresses and location information of presbytery leadership may be found in the presbytery's *Directory*.

Synod of Lakes and Prairies

2115 Cliff Drive
Eagan, MN 55122-3327
800-328-1880
651-357-1140
Fax: 651-357-1141
Web: www.lakesandprairies.org

Elona Street-Stewart - Synod Executive
Rev Deb DeMeester, Director of Leadership Development
Rev. Pam Prouty - Stated Clerk
Jim Koon - Treasurer

Other email addresses and location information of the synod leadership may be found in the presbytery's *Directory* or the *Directories* which is located in the "**Presbyterian Planning Calendar**."

Office of the General Assembly

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Bronwen Boswell – Interim Stated Clerk (Ext. 5375)
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202-1396
888-728-7228
Web: www.pcusa.org
Stated Clerk's Office: https://oga.pcusa.org/contactus/

Other email and location information of the General Assembly leadership may be found in the *Directories* which is located in the "**Presbyterian Planning Calendar**."

Board of Pensions

200 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-3298
800-773-7752
Web: www.pensions.org

Our Regional Representative
Rev Ken Green
215-587-7384
http://kgreen@pensions.org

More detailed information regarding names/telephone extension numbers, etc. is located in the "**Presbyterian Planning Calendar**."

Presbyterian Historical Society

425 Lombard Street
Philadelphia, PA 19147
215-928-3886
Email: refdesk@history.pcusa.org
Web: www.history.pcusa.org

More detailed information regarding names/telephone extension numbers, etc. is located in the "**Presbyterian Planning Calendar**."

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation

200 E. Twelfth St.
Jeffersonville, IN 47130
812-288-8841
800-858-6127