

1. THE SESSION

The Presbyterian Church is one of the few denominations named after its form of government. Our name stems from the Greek “presbuteros”, which among several definitions is elder, a term of rank or office, and among the Christians, those who presided over the assemblies (or churches.) The New Testament uses the term bishop, elders, and presbyters interchangeably. *“The church shall be governed by presbyters, that is, ruling elders and teaching elders. Ruling elders are so named not because they “lord it over” the congregation... but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith in life.” (BOO F-3.0201)*

The Constitution of our denomination affirms the vital role of each particular church and points out the central role of the Session in the Life of the church:

Ministry: The particular church carries a vital responsibility in the mission of the church. There God's people perform especially the ministries of worship, proclamation, sharing the Sacraments, evangelism, nurture, counseling, personal and social healing and service. Without this basic ministry to persons, neighborhoods, and communities, and the support given at the congregational level through prayer, personnel and money, any other significant ministry of the church becomes impossible. Congregations serve as essential mission arms of the presbytery and of the larger church.

Government: The members of a Presbyterian Church voluntarily put themselves under the leadership of their officers, whom they elect. The Session, which consists of the Teaching Elders (pastor & associate pastors) and the Ruling Elders in active service, is the governing body of the church. (see also 1.2d) The law and government of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presuppose the fellowship of women and men with their children in voluntary covenanted relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests upon this fellowship, which will not work without trust and love.

The work of the TCPC Session is accomplished in a large part through the Diaconate, its various Ministry Teams and other committees. The Session functions as a policy making and governing body. Most of the day-to-day work is done in the Diaconate and the Ministry Teams. Therefore, responsibilities are outlined in this Manual for clarity of understanding of the mutual tasks and responsibilities.

The Presbyterian understanding of the nature of church office:

Christ's Ministry: All ministry in the church is a gift from Jesus Christ. Members and Officers alike serve mutually under the mandate of Christ who is the chief minister of all. His ministry is the basis of all ministries; the standard for all offices is the pattern of the one who came "not to be served but to serve." (Matt. 20:28)

Offices of Ministry: One responsibility of membership in the church is the election of officers who are ordained to fulfill particular functions. The existence of these offices, Ruling Elders and Deacons, in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church. These ordained officers differ from other members in function only.

Ruling Elders and Deacons should be persons of faith, dedication, and good judgment. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel, both within the church and in the world.

Biblically, it is noted that each leader had to be empowered in order to be coworkers with God. None of us is born qualified to work with God. Thus, we acknowledge that God chooses to call forth, equip, support and use human leadership as a means of accomplishing divine business. Jesus shared leadership; so must we.

1.2 THE PERSONNEL OF THE SESSION AND THEIR DUTIES

COMPOSITION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service as Ruling Elders, together with Teaching Elders (ordained pastors, co-pastors and associate pastors.) All members of the Session are entitled to vote. The pastor shall be the moderator of the Session, and the Session shall not meet without the pastor or designated moderator. If there is no installed pastor, or if the installed pastor is unable to invite another moderator, the presbytery shall make provisions for a moderator. Presbyteries shall provide by rule for moderators when the Session is without a moderator for reasons of vacancy or inconvenience. The Session shall have responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the Session shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have identified themselves throughout history (F-1.0303), and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

In light of this charge, the Session has responsibility and power to:

- a. *provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.* This responsibility shall include providing a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, education, and spiritual nurture; providing for regular preaching of the Word by a Teaching Elder or other person prepared and approved for the work; planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world with the message of salvation and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship; planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community in accordance with the prophetic witness of Jesus Christ; and initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to the love and grace of God.
- b. *provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received.* This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord’s Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate, in accordance with the principles of the Directory for Worship; and exercising pastoral care among the congregation; in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the congregation may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments
- c. *nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.* The Session is responsible for receiving members into the life and ministry of the TCPC congregation. Every effort shall be made to encourage new members to become immediately involved in some aspect of the congregation’s ministries and services, beyond the expected attendance at Sunday worship service. The Session shall also be responsible for dismissing members; reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership; encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources; managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission; directing the ministry of Deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation; employing the administrative staff of the congregation; leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

Serving Ruling Elders, as elected representatives of the congregation, share equal responsibility with the Teaching Elders (pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors) for the government, ministries, programs, finances, and all other aspects of the local church. Each Session member is morally bound to be present at all meetings unless providentially hindered.

THE MODERATOR

The Moderator convenes and presides at all meetings of the Session; calls meetings when deemed necessary or when requested to do so under the conditions set forth in the Book of Order. The moderator, in conjunction with the Administration Ministry Team, names Session members to permanent Ministry Teams, and reports to the Session any problems, whether spiritual, administrative, or personal, which relates

to the welfare of the church, including special or temporary committees or task forces.

THE RULING ELDERS

Persons elected to the office of Ruling Elder must be committed to the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and must be willing to set priorities so that sufficient time is available for them to perform the duties of their office.

Before Ordination and Installation, Elders-elect are expected to attend all Officer Training Classes, after which the Session will examine them in the following areas: personal Christian experience, knowledge of doctrine, government, discipline of Presbyterian Church (USA), the duties of the office of Ruling Elder and confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the ministry appropriate to the order. After the Session examination and upon favorable vote, Ordination and Installation will be scheduled at Sunday morning worship.

After Ordination and Installation the expectations of Ruling Elders are:

- to attend all Session Meetings, both regular and called, unless excused. Session currently meets the second Monday of each month.
- to serve as assigned on Session Ministry Team(s) which ordinarily meet once a month
- to attend officer retreats for spiritual growth, planning, sharing, and goal setting
- to regularly attend worship services and actively participate in the nurture and mission of the congregation
- to serve communion several times during the year
- to willingly work as needed in the stewardship program
- to prayerfully consider working toward the biblical tithing of one's wealth for Three Chopt Presbyterian Church

Additional specific expectations of Ruling Elders (and the Session) are listed later (see section SELECTED RESPONSIBILITIES.)

THE CLERK

The Clerk, who may be a serving or non-serving Ruling Elder, is elected by the Session for a two year term, ordinarily, and is eligible for reelection for additional terms. The Clerk records the transactions of the governing body, keeps its rolls and membership and attendance, preserves its records carefully, and provides extracts of them when required by another governing body of the church. These extracts, verified by the clerk, are evidence in any governing body of the church.

Other duties of the clerk are to see that such transactions, records and minutes are approved and properly endorsed; and make and keep records of reports for the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly. The Clerk handles the necessary correspondence of the Session, including dismissing of members, and keeps other necessary or required records, and has available at all meetings orders of procedure. The Clerk notifies members of the Session of date, time, and place of meetings; creates as feasible a list of adopted policies for ease of reference; issues baptismal and membership certificates to those who are baptized and/or received into the church.

The Clerk shall keep an up-to-date membership roll, which shall include an accurate list of active, affiliate and Baptized members [Note: the "inactive" roll is discontinued and merged into the "active" roll as of 12/31/2012.] in accordance with G-1.0401, G-1.0402, and G-1.0403. The Session shall delete names from the roll of the congregation upon the member's death, admission to membership in another congregation or presbytery, or renunciation of jurisdiction. The Session may delete names from the roll of the congregation when a member so requests, or has moved or otherwise ceased to participate actively in the work and worship of the congregation for a period of two years. The Session shall seek to restore members to active participation and shall provide written notice before deleting names due to member inactivity.

156 The Clerk shall ensure that registers are maintained of all Baptisms authorized by the Session, of ordination
157 and installation of Ruling Elders and Deacons, to include those ordained officers who have transferred into
158 the TCPC membership, and all installed Teaching Elders [Pastors, co-pastors, Associate Pastors] with dates
159 of their installed service. A register shall also be kept of all deaths of members.
160

161 These responsibilities may be delegated to other Ministry Teams, committees or groups when feasible.
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163 **1.3 GENERAL STRUCTURE, DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TCPC SESSION**

164 **MEMBERSHIP**

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166 The Session of a particular church consists of the pastor or co-pastors, the associate pastors, and the serving
167 Ruling Elders. All members of Session, both Teaching (pastor, co-pastors, and associate pastors) and
168 serving Ruling Elders are entitled to vote.
169

170 **MEETINGS**

171 The Session has a stated meeting the second Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. The Session has called
172 meetings for reception of new members as needed. Session may change this schedule for a particular
173 meeting or permanently. The Session may also meet on call according to the Book of Order. A called
174 meeting may occur “electronically” when an urgent matter which does not require face-to-face discussion
175 must be handled with dispatch.
176

177 The Session has called meetings, as needed, for the reception of new members.
178

179 The Moderator shall convene a special, called meeting when he or she deems necessary or when requested
180 in writing by any two members of the Session. The business to be transacted at special meetings shall be
181 limited to items specifically listed in the call for the meeting. There shall be reasonable notice given of all
182 special meetings.
183

184 The Session shall also meet when directed by presbytery.
185

186 **QUORUM**

187 A quorum for stated and called meetings shall ordinarily be two-thirds of the Session, except for called
188 meetings for reception of new members, when the quorum shall be the pastor or other presiding officer and
189 two serving Ruling Elders. Session members are required to be in-person or present in a live, virtual meeting
190 to have the authority to vote. This does not apply to Session approved email votes.
191

192 **VOTING**

193 Session meetings follow Roberts Rules of Order (newly revised.) A simple majority vote is necessary to
194 approve an item, except a two-thirds majority vote is required to change the basic stated and called meeting
195 quorum of two-thirds. When electronic voting is employed, the same quorum and voting rules are followed.
196 Session members are required to be in-person or present in a live, virtual meeting to have the authority to
197 vote. This does not apply to Session approved email votes.
198

199 **AGENDA**

200 All groups offering items for the agenda shall provide input to the Clerk no later than four days prior to the
201 meeting. The agenda for stated and called Session meetings shall ordinarily be provided to all members via
202 electronic communication at least three days prior to each meeting. This time frame may be shorter when
203 Session meets electronically to handle an urgent matter.
204

205 A Consent Docket* may be employed for recommendations which appear to be routine. When used for
206 stated meetings, the Clerk may distribute the Consent Docket items prior to the meeting and call for a “yes”
207 or “no” vote on these items electronically, e.g. via email. Any item that an individual Session member
208 requests (“votes”) to remove from the Consent Docket will cause that item to be considered at the next face-

209 to-face meeting or as the item sponsor desires.

210 * The Consent Docket is for recommendations which appear to be routine...realizing, of course, that
211 "routine" is a judgment call on the part of the Clerk and persons preparing the agenda. If any
212 recommendation needs to be questioned, discussed, debated, or clarified, the session member simply
213 requests ("votes") that recommendation "x" be removed from the Consent Docket. There is no need
214 for a reason to remove the item from the Consent Docket. Any recommendation removed will be
215 considered during that particular Team or Committee's regular report, if desired. Items remaining on
216 the Consent Docket are voted on as a whole prior to regular business (without discussion.) If
217 electronic voting prior to the actual meeting is practiced, then at the actual meeting the clerk will
218 report the revised Consent Docket based on the voting results. (This technique could allow more time
219 in the face-to-face meeting for other discussions.)
220

221 **SELECTED RESPONSIBILITIES**

222 As noted earlier, the TCPC Session is responsible for the mission and government of the particular church.
223 Specific responsibilities and powers the Session assumes are:

- 224 a. To provide opportunities for evangelism to be learned and practiced in and by the church, that
225 members may be better equipped to articulate their faith, to witness in word and deed to the saving grace
226 of Jesus Christ, and to invite persons into new life in Christ;
- 227 b. To receive members into the church upon profession of faith, upon reaffirmation of faith in Jesus
228 Christ, or upon satisfactory certification of transfer of church membership, provided that membership shall
229 not be denied by any person because of race, economic or social circumstances, or any other reason not
230 related to profession of faith;
- 231 c. To lead the congregation in participation in the mission of the whole church in the world;
- 232 d. To provide for the worship of the people of God, including the preaching of the Word, the sharing
233 of the Sacraments, and for the music program, in keeping with the principles in the Directory for Worship;
- 234 e. To provide for the growth of its members and for their equipment for ministry through personal and
235 pastoral care, education programs including the church school, sharing in fellowship and mutual support,
236 and opportunities for witness and service in the world;
- 237 f. To develop and supervise the church school and the educational program of the church;
- 238 g. To lead the congregation in ministries of personal and social healing and reconciliation in the
239 communities in which the church lives and bears its witness;
- 240 h. To challenge the people of God with the privilege of responsible Christian stewardship of money
241 and time and talents, developing effective ways for encouraging and gathering the offerings of the people
242 and assuring that all offerings are distributed to the objects toward which they were contributed;
- 243 i. To establish the annual budget, determine the distribution of the church's benevolences, and order
244 offerings for Christian purposes, providing full information to the congregation of its decisions in such
245 matters;
- 246 j. To lead the congregation continually to discover what God is doing in the world and to plan for
247 change, renewal, and reformation under the Word of God;
- 248 k. To engage in a process for education and mutual growth of the members of the Session;
- 249 l. To instruct, examine, ordain, install, and welcome into common ministry Ruling Elders and Deacons
250 on their election by the congregation. The Session shall ensure that preparation and training is provided for
251 elected Ruling Elders and Deacons, and such shall include the officers-elect faith journey, The Book of
252 Confessions and the Book of Order. The officer training curriculum shall ordinarily include substantial
253 material addressing reformed and Presbyterian theology, church polity, and a review of the TCPC Manual
254 of Administrative Operations;
- 255 m. To delegate and to supervise the work of the board of Deacons and the board of trustees and all
256 other organizations and task forces within the congregation, providing for support, report, review, and
257 control;
- 258 n. To provide for the administration of the program of the church, including employment of non-

- 259 ordained staff, with concern for equal employment opportunity, fair employment practices, personnel
260 policies, and the annual review of the adequacy of compensation for all staff, including all employees;
- 261 o. To provide for the management of the property of the church, including determination of the
262 appropriate use of church buildings and facilities, and to obtain property and liability insurance coverage to
263 protect the facilities, programs and officers, including members of the Session, staff, boards of trustees, and
264 Deacons;
- 265 p. To maintain regular and continuing relationship to the higher governing bodies of the church,
266 including:
- 267 1. Electing commissioners to presbytery and receiving their reports; Sessions are encouraged to elect
268 commissioners to the presbytery for at least one year, preferably two or three;
 - 269 2. Nominating to presbytery Ruling Elders who may be considered for election to synod or General
270 Assembly;
 - 271 3. In both the above responsibilities, implementing the principles of participation and inclusiveness to
272 ensure fair representation in the decision-making of the church;
 - 273 4. Observing and carrying out the instructions of the higher governing bodies consistent with the
274 Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
 - 275 5. Welcoming representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits;
 - 276 6. Proposing to the presbytery and, through it, to the synod and the General Assembly such measures
277 as may be of common concern to the mission of the whole church;
 - 278 7. Sending annually to the stated clerk of the presbytery statistical and other information according to
279 the requirements of the presbytery.
- 280 q. To establish and maintain those ecumenical relationships necessary for the life and mission of the
281 church in its locality;
- 282 r. To serve in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline;
- 283 s. To keep an accurate rolls of the membership of the church, in accordance with the Book of Order,
284 and to grant certificates of transfer to other churches, which when issued for parents shall include the names
285 of their children specifying whether they have been baptized, and which when issued for a Ruling Elder or
286 Deacon shall include the record of ordination.