

Information for Session Clerks

The sessional records committee is providing information to assist clerks and sessions in producing sessional records that are in accord with our church polity.

Frequent errors and the church standard reference:

1. Session minute pages are not numbered appropriately – page numbers must be on session minutes, and they must be sequential. If the minutes of a meeting begin with the date and page 1 it is not possible to determine if a meeting's minutes are missing. (Instruments B.2.)
2. Session minutes are not opened or closed with prayer. (Instruments B.9.)
3. The time of meeting beginning and end are not given. (Instruments B.2.)
4. The minutes are not signed. (Instruments B.2)
5. Minutes are not approved (especially minutes of special meetings). (Instruments B.6)
6. Receiving or dismissing members is not adequately documented:
 - If a transfer, the name of the church (to or from) must be included. (Instruments B.4)
 - If a transfer, the process, specifically the communications from session to session must be complete and documented. (FoG XIII.9)
 - If there is a transfer (to or from) a NAPARC church, the provisions of the NAPARC agreement should be met. (See p. 9)
 - If a reception is by confession of faith, it is preferable to distinguish between a covenant child and a nonmember.
 - If a reception is by reaffirmation, “confession” is too vague a term – it could refer to an initial confession or to a subsequent confession (reaffirmation). It is preferable to use the BoD Chapter II.B.2. reference.
 - If a dismissal is by removal or erasure, the process described in BoD chapter II.B.3. and chapter V.2.a directions must be followed, and it is best to include the specific reference to avoid ambiguity. It is generally preferable to include the BoD reference rather than the DPW chapter 4 reference.
 - When a prospective member is interviewed, the date of their subsequent reception must be given in subsequent minutes. (FoG XIII.8)
7. Request for leave of absence for sessional representation must be an act of the session and documented in the minutes of a session meeting. (Instruments C.4)
8. The moderator of the meeting is not named. (Instruments B.10)
9. There is no record of a review of the church roll during the year. (Instruments B.5)
10. There is no record during a year of the support for the pastor and any changes in the terms of the call. (Instruments B.5)
11. When the minutes of a congregational meeting are incorporated into the sessional record, there is no minute in the session meeting to “order” the incorporation. (Instruments B.5)
12. The minutes must in a physical minute book. (Instruments B.2)

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13. The minutes should be submitted as printed pdfs not scanned pdfs to facilitate searching (realizing that a signature will not be present) – (Committee process)

14. We will accept electronic signatures which can be with a slash-signature-slash (Committee process)

15. The minutes should be submitted to the clerk of presbytery for distribution to the LOASR committee. (Committee process)

Suggestions and notes to keep in mind:

1. The material to be included in the minutes should be complete: Instruments B.3 includes this sentence: “All votes and proceedings which are necessary to give a complete history of the church (a full picture of the life of the congregation) shall be recorded, including statistical reports, elections of elders and deacons, reception and dismissal of members, time of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, baptisms of infants and adults, and marriages.” One former member of our presbytery has spoken disapprovingly of “telegraphic” minutes.

2. A good place to indicate the commitment of the congregation for the support of the pastor is in the annual congregational meeting. A good place to indicate other annual requirements such as the review of the church roll is at the meeting that is preparatory to the annual congregational meeting, or at the first meeting of the calendar year. A good place to elect the moderator and clerk is at the first meeting of the calendar year. If your church bylaws require a board of trustees to meet, a good place for that to happen is the first meeting of the calendar year. If the deacons do not ordinarily meet with the session, an annual meeting early in the year is a good thing.

3. There is a standard requiring prayer but there is not a standard saying that the Bible should be read at the beginning of the meeting, but it is the practice of many sessions to begin with a devotional from Scripture followed by prayer.

4. When official acts of discipline are made, they must be noted, and in some cases it must be recorded that the announcement of discipline must be made to the congregation during a worship service (BD VI.C.1)

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Sample minutes:

Page number

Minutes of the (Regular=Stated, Special=Called) Meeting of Session
XXXXXXXXXX Church, Date - xxxxxxxxxxxx

1. The moderator, XXXX, called the meeting to order at LOCATION at TIME with prayer.
2. Attendance
 - Present:
 - Absent: (generally an explanation for each absence is appropriate)
 - Visitors: (A line item of deacons attending is required regularly during meetings – FoG XI.6)
3. Minutes reviewed: The minutes of the meetings of Date1 and Date2 were approved as (read/amended/corrected) . . . may add by common consent
- 3.b. If the meeting is a (Special=Called) meeting, the purpose(s) of the meeting must be stated, and no other matters may be addressed in the minutes.
4. Matters of record
 - a. Occasions of the Celebration of the Lord's supper:
 - b. Persons leading worship/exhorting/preaching (not a requirement?)
5. Shepherding/membership
 - Here will be all information about receiving and dismissing members and baptisms and marriages (and deaths) and any official acts of discipline. (FoG.XIII.8.)
 - Here can be information about home visitation.
 - Here can be mentioned infrequent attenders or other matters of concern in the membership
6. Pastor Report – not required but appropriate
7. Elder Report – not required, may mention officer training here or elsewhere, also mention significant events in the lives of the elders
8. Board of Deacons' report – required not necessarily at every meeting but regularly if there are deacons, also mention significant events in the lives of the deacons
7. Ministries -
 - Here can be mentioned Sunday School, Bible Studies, fellowships and church social events (some sessions separate out these categories and name them differently)
8. Date and time of next meeting (some sessions review their minutes at the end of the meeting rather than waiting till the next meeting).
9. Adjournment with prayer by xxxxxxxxxxx at time.

Signed by clerk

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Selected Relevant References from the church standards:

FoG XI. Deacons

6. It is desirable that the session and the board of deacons meet together at regular intervals to confer on matters of common responsibility.

FoG XIII. The Local Church and Its Session

4. The session, which is the governing body of the local church, consists of its pastor, its other ministers, and its ruling elders. It shall choose its own moderator annually from among its members.

8. The session shall keep the following records: (1) minutes of its meetings, including a record of the administration of the sacraments and changes in the membership of the congregation; (2) minutes of the meetings of the congregation; and (3) rolls of the members of the congregation, both of communicant members and of their baptized children, with the dates of their reception. Such rolls shall designate those members worshiping with a mission work. Births, baptisms, censures, restorations, deaths, and removals shall be noted on these rolls. The session shall submit its minutes and the minutes of the congregation to the presbytery for review at least once every year.

9. The names of members shall be placed upon or removed from the rolls of the church only by order of the session, and according to the provisions of the Book of Discipline.

When upon the request of a member the session dismisses him to another congregation the clerk shall send a letter commending him to its care, and the clerk of the receiving church shall notify the dismissing church of the date of his reception. When notification is received the clerk shall remove his name from the roll and record the fact in the minutes.

Whenever a member desires dismissal to a church of which the session cannot approve, and he cannot be dissuaded, it shall grant him a certificate of standing, unless the session institutes disciplinary action against him; upon being informed that he has joined such a church the clerk shall erase his name from the roll.

BoD II. Jurisdiction

B. The Session's Jurisdiction

1. The session of a particular church shall have jurisdiction over all those whose names are on the roll of the church.

2. Members shall be received and their names placed on the roll of the church only by order of the session and according to the following provisions:

a. Members may be received by a letter of transfer from another Orthodox Presbyterian church. The session shall acquire jurisdiction over him by virtue of its vote of reception (see the Directory for the

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Public Worship of God, Chapter IV, Section C), and at that time he shall become invested with all the rights and privileges of membership therein, which rights and privileges shall not be impaired by the filing of a complaint, unless and until such complaint shall be sustained by the highest judicatory to which such complaint is made.

b. Members may be received by a letter of transfer from another church of like faith and practice approved by the session. The session may examine the candidate for membership to assure itself so far as possible that he possesses the knowledge requisite for active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, relies for salvation on the work of Christ alone, is trusting Christ for salvation, and is determined by the grace of God to lead a Christian life. The session shall acquire jurisdiction over him by virtue of its vote of reception and his public profession of faith before the congregation according to the Directory for the Public Worship of God, Chapter IV, Section D, and at that time he shall be invested with all the rights and privileges of membership therein, which rights and privileges shall not be impaired by the filing of a complaint, unless and until such complaint shall be sustained by the highest judicatory to which complaint is made.

c. Members may be received by reaffirmation of faith. Reaffirmation of faith is made by an individual who has previously confessed his faith and united with a church other than a church of like faith and practice, and now desires to become a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The session shall examine the candidate for membership to assure itself so far as possible that he possesses the knowledge requisite for active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, relies for salvation on the work of Christ alone, is trusting Christ for salvation, and is determined by the grace of God to lead a Christian life. The session shall acquire jurisdiction over him by virtue of its vote of reception and his public profession of faith before the congregation according to the Directory for the Public Worship of God, Chapter IV, Section E, and at that time he shall be invested with all the rights and privileges of membership therein, which rights and privileges shall not be impaired by the filing of a complaint, unless and until such complaint shall be sustained by the highest judicatory to which complaint is made.

d. Members may be received by confession of faith. Confession of faith is made by an individual who has not previously been a communicant member of the church, and now desires to become a communicant member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The session shall examine the candidate for membership to assure itself so far as possible that he possesses the knowledge requisite for active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, relies for salvation on the work of Christ, is trusting Christ for salvation, and is determined by the grace of God to lead a Christian life. The session shall acquire jurisdiction over him by virtue of its vote of reception and his public profession of faith before the congregation according to the Directory for the Public Worship of God, Chapter IV, Section B or F (as the case may require), and at that time he shall be invested with all the rights and privileges of membership therein, which rights and privileges shall not be impaired by the filing of a complaint, unless and until such complaint shall be sustained by the highest judicatory to which complaint is made.

e. Noncommunicant unbaptized children whose parent(s) are members of the church shall be received by baptism.

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f. Noncommunicant baptized members may be received with their parent(s).

3. The names of members shall be removed from the roll of the church only by order of the session and according to the following provisions:

a. Members may be removed by a letter of transfer to another congregation approved by the session. When upon the request of a member the session dismisses him to another congregation, the clerk shall send a letter commending him to its care, and the clerk of the receiving church shall notify the dismissing church of the date of his reception. When notification is received the clerk shall remove his name from the roll and record the fact in its minutes. He shall be considered subject to the jurisdiction of the session which dismissed him until the time when he actually is received by the body to which he has been dismissed.

b. Members may be removed when they desire to be dismissed to a church of which the session cannot approve as a church of like faith and practice. If it appears to the session that the spiritual interests of the members will be advanced by their uniting with such a church, it shall grant them certificates of standing, and, upon being informed that they have joined such a church, shall remove their names from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

c. Members shall be removed from the roll of the local church by ordination as a teaching elder, according to the Form of Government, Chapter VI, Section 4.

d. Members may be removed by erasure according to the following provisions:

(1) When a member desires dismissal to a church of which the session cannot approve as a church of like faith and practice, nor a church which will advance his spiritual interests, and he cannot be dissuaded, it shall grant him a certificate of standing, unless the session institutes disciplinary action against him; on being informed that he has joined such a church the clerk shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(2) When a member of a particular church, whether or not he be charged with an offense, informs the session that he does not desire to remain in the fellowship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the efforts of the session to dissuade him from his course have failed, it shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes, unless the session institutes or continues other disciplinary action against him.

(3) When a member unites with a church of another denomination without a certificate of dismissal, the session may erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(4) When a member cannot be found, the session may, after two years, erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(5) When a member, without adequate reason, persists in attending a church of another denomination in preference to his own, or persistently and over an extended period of time absents himself from the stated services of the church, his name may be erased from the roll according to the following procedures: he shall be earnestly and personally dealt with by the session. If this effort fails, he shall be notified that at a meeting of the session not less than two months later his standing shall be reviewed. The session shall inform him of the time, date, and place of this meeting and invite him to

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show why his name should not be erased from the roll. If satisfactory reasons are not presented, the session shall erase his name from the roll, record the circumstances in its minutes, and send notification to him.

(6) When a noncommunicant member neglects the ongoing exhortation of the session to profess faith in Christ and rejects the covenantal responsibility of submission to home or church, the session may upon prior notification erase his name from the roll.

e. Noncommunicant members may be removed with their parent(s).

f. Members shall be removed at their death. The session shall remove the name of the deceased from the roll and record the fact in its minutes.

g. Members may be removed by excommunication according to this Book of Discipline, Chapter VI, Sections B.5, C.1, and C.2.

Bod, Chapter V. Cases Without Full Process

2. Erasure is an act of discipline without full process.

a. The names of members may be removed from the roll of the church by erasure according to the following provisions:

(1) When a member desires dismissal to a church of which the session cannot approve as a church of like faith and practice, nor a church which will advance his spiritual interests, and he cannot be dissuaded, it shall grant him a certificate of standing, unless the session institutes disciplinary action against him; on being informed that he has joined such a church the clerk shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(2) When a member of a particular church, whether or not he be charged with an offense, informs the session that he does not desire to remain in the fellowship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the efforts of the session to dissuade him from his course have failed, it shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes, unless the session institutes or continues other disciplinary action against him.

(3) When a member unites with a church of another denomination without a certificate of dismissal, the session may erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(4) When a member cannot be found, the session may, after two years, erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(5) When a member, without adequate reason, persists in attending a church of another denomination in preference to his own, or persistently and over an extended period of time, absents himself from the stated services of the church, his name may be erased from the roll according to the following procedures: he shall be earnestly and personally dealt with by the session. If this effort fails, he shall be notified that at a meeting of the session not less than two months later his standing shall be

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reviewed. The session shall inform him of the time, date, and place of this meeting and invite him to show why his name should not be erased from the roll. If satisfactory reasons are not presented, the session shall erase his name from the roll, record the circumstances in its minutes, and send notification to him.

(6) When a noncommunicant member neglects the ongoing exhortation of the session to profess faith in Christ and rejects the covenantal responsibility of submission to home or church, the session may upon prior notification erase his name from the roll.

b. The names of ministers may be removed from the roll of the presbytery by erasure according to the following provisions:

(1) When a minister, whether or not he be charged with an offense, informs the presbytery that he desires to renounce the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by abandoning his ministry and membership therein, or by declaring himself independent, or by joining another body without a regular dismissal, the presbytery shall seek to dissuade him from his course, and, if these efforts fail, it shall erase his name from its roll and record the circumstances in its minutes unless the presbytery institutes or continues disciplinary action.

B.D.VI.C. Censure and Restoration. Procedural Considerations

1. Pronouncement of Censure

The indefinite suspension, deposition, or excommunication of an officer or other member of the church shall be announced to the church in which the officer holds office, or in which the member holds membership. These censures shall always be accompanied by prayer to God that he may graciously use the discipline for the restoration of the offender, the edification of the church, and his own glory.

PSW Instruments

B. Rules for Sessional Records

1. The records of the session shall conform to the ordinate and subordinate standards of the Church (e.g. Form of Government XIII:7-8).

2. The records of the session shall be legibly written or typed on numbered pages, with a margin of at least one inch on the left side. They shall state the time and place of meeting and the names of the members present and absent, the time of adjournment, and the minutes shall be appropriately signed.

3. All votes and proceedings which are necessary to give a complete history of the church (a full picture of the life of the congregation) shall be recorded, including statistical reports, elections of elders and deacons, reception and dismissal of members, time of the celebration of the Lord's Supper, baptisms of infants and adults, and marriages. Separate records should also be kept of baptisms, marriages, and deaths.

4. All records of the reception of members by letter shall state from what church the member came; and records of dismissal shall state to what church the member is recommended.

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5. Church sessions shall order the incorporation of proceedings of congregational meetings with their own record so as to exhibit the actions taken and shall indicate the commitment made by the congregation each year for the support of its pastor, and any changes in the terms of the call.
6. The records of sessions shall be read and approved by the session, and the fact of such approval shall be entered in the minutes.
7. Two copies of sessional records shall be annually submitted for examination and approval to presbytery at the stated meeting designated for each session by the Leave of Absence & Sessional Records Committee . The sessional records book shall be presented to the subsequent presbytery meeting, at which the Leave of Absence & Sessional Records Committee presents its report on the reviewed minutes. The expense of the committee is to be covered by that church which fails to comply with number six (6) of the “Rules for Sessional Records”.
8. The session shall take note in its minutes of exceptions taken by the presbytery to its minutes, together with the corrections or explanations adopted by the session to rectify them.
9. All meetings should be opened and closed with prayer and that fact should be noted in the minutes.
10. The minutes of a meeting of session should inform the reader as to who was moderating the meeting.

PSW Instruments

C. DUTIES OF SESSIONS

1. The presbytery recommends that each session hold at least four regular meetings each year.
2. The session in granting letters of dismissal must address them to some particular evangelical church.
3. Each session shall review its roll of members annually.
4. A request to be excused from ruling elder representation at a stated meeting of presbytery shall include in the request the statement that this was an official action of the session and the date of the meeting at which it was taken.
5. The session shall communicate to the stated clerk the name and address of the clerk of session.

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10. NAPARC Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations (1987) - Adopted at the 13th (1987) Meeting:

Recognizing that the churches of NAPARC have on occasion unintentionally received members or ordained officers who were under various states of discipline in another NAPARC church, thus creating tension between the churches, and at the same time recognizing the need for mutual freedom and openness on the part of the churches, we agree to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern of the other denominations as follows:

1. Regular Transfer of Membership.

That in the regular transfer of membership between NAPARC churches, the session/consistory or presbytery/classis not receive a member until the appropriate document of transfer is in the hands of the receiving church.

2. Transfer with Irregularities.

a. That upon request for a transfer of membership by a person under discipline, the sending session/consistory or presbytery/classis inform the receiving body of the nature and extent of the disciplinary procedure before implementing the requested transfer, thus enabling informal consultation between the pastors and elders of both churches.

b. That such a person not be received officially until the judicatory/assembly of the receiving church has taken into serious account the discipline of and the information supplied by the sending church.

c. That such a person not be received officially until the judicatory/assembly of the receiving church is satisfied that proper restitution has been made and/or reconciliation has been seriously attempted.

d. That a "fugitive from discipline" who is no longer a member of a church or who is no longer on the roll of a presbytery shall not be received until the former judicatory/assembly has been contacted to determine if proper restitution has been made and/or reconciliation has been attempted.

3. Recourse and Appeal.

Where communication or action regarding the sending/receiving of a member or ordained officer/office bearer does not satisfy either the dismissing or receiving judicatory/assembly, communication may be submitted to the interchurch relation committees of the denominations involved with a view to mediation of the problem. If this proves unsatisfactory, the session/consistory or presbytery/classis may register its concern to the appropriate judicatory/assembly of the other denomination.

4. Congregational Transfer.

That a congregation seeking to leave a NAPARC church to become affiliated with another NAPARC denomination be received only after it has complied with the requirements of the form of government of the church from which it is separating, and the receiving church shall be responsible to see that this is done.