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1. What are the two books that make up the constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA circle the correct books: [Answer Preface]
   a. The Bible
   b. The Book of Confessions
   c. The Book of Common Worship
   d. The Book of Order

2. Please list at least three essential tenets of the reformed faith: [Answer F-2.05]
   1.
   2.
   3.

3. What are the four councils (governing bodies) of the Presbyterian Church? [F-3.0203]
   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.

4. True or False: Deacons are ordained to office not to function  [G-2.0104]

5. True or False: Only the session can authorize the Lord’s Supper [W-2.4012]

6. True or False: Congregations are required to have a Board of Deacons [G-2.0202]

7. True or False: The Clerk of Session must be an active ruling elder. [G-3.0104]

8. True or False: The pastor has both voice and vote in a congregational meeting. [G-1.0501]

9. True or false: the congregation approves the annual budget of the church including the budget for the Board of Deacons

10. True of false: The Membership Rolls of the church include Active, Baptized, and Affiliate members.

11. True of false: the pastor has direct oversight of the worship of the congregation. [W-1.4004e]

12. True or false: The Marks of the Reformed church: we are one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. [F-1.0302]

13. True or false: The session must prepare and examine ruling elders-elect and deacons-elect prior to their ordination and installation. [G-2.0402]
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW
This document is primarily an enumeration of the responsibilities of elders (Teaching and Ruling) and deacons placed in the context of policies and procedures. This is about how Presbyterians do things decently and in order, as we are often reminded. It is easy to get involved in the business of the church and forget to stop and think about the reasons behind our involvement. We are children of God and committed to doing the work of God. Our thoughts should not stray from the Word of God. Our actions need to be founded on a sound theological basis, and rooted in the Love of God.

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church
The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church is composed of two books. The Book of Confessions and the Book of Order.

The Book of Order is divided into four sections:
1. The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity
2. The Form of Government
3. Directory of Worship
4. Rules of Discipline

Relationships
However, the real place to start is with the Bible, which is our reference for faith and practice, and one place to start is to consider the question, "What does God require of me?" rather than "What does my local church, or the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) require of me?" The Bible asks this question in two places and gives two complementary answers. *Deuteronomy 10:12* gives as the answer: *only to fear the Lord your God,* - *to walk in all his ways,* - *to love him,* . *to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,* and *to keep the commandments.*

Later in the history of Israel, social issues had emerged and *Micah 6:8* gives as the answer: - *to do justice,* - *to love kindness,* to *walk humbly with your God.*

These passages remind us that our first responsibilities are to God. Then we must consider our interaction with our fellow human beings, showing them justice, kindness, and love. Elders (presbyters) and deacons are the servant leaders of the congregation and this means, not only to lead in financial and governing matters, but also to lead in matters of love and kindness and justice. Just as we stop to think about the wisdom of spending money for a project, we need to stop and think how we interact with our fellow church members, our family, our fellow workers, those we know casually, and others whom we do not know but come in contact with. Consider an example. The Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ, as given in the *Book of Order,* includes a section that states, "The Church demonstrates the new reality in Christ by the love of its members for one another" As members of the Church, we are called to demonstrate this love. As elders and deacons, we are called to be leaders in demonstrating this love. We are representatives first of God and then of our local church.
Church Government
The polity (the form of government) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is unique among the
various polities of other denominations. Within a particular congregation, the pastor is just
one among many serving on the local Council (governing body) called the session. The next
higher Council is the presbytery, which generally encompasses a limited geographical area
with an average of about 66 churches. The presbytery that we belong to is the (Presbytery of
Northumberland) with forty-four congregations and around 5,000 members.

The representatives or commissioners to the presbytery include Teaching Elders (Ministers of
Word and Sacrament) generally within its borders that are members (clergy are not members of
the local churches) and an equal number of Ruling Elders representing the churches. The next
Council (higher governing body) is the synod, our presbytery is located within the bounds of
(The Synod of the Trinity) which encompasses a larger geographical area (all of Pennsylvania,
West Virginia, and the Eastern Section of Ohio). There are sixteen synods in the United States.
Again, there is equal representation between Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders. The highest
Council (governing body) is the General Assembly, which again is composed of equal numbers
of Teaching and Ruling Elders who are elected by the 173 presbyteries and meets every other
year.

Each Council (governing body) from the session through the General Assembly has responsibilities.
In general, above the local level the Councils (governing bodies) are charged with accomplishing
things that apply to its region that the next lower Council (governing body) is not able to do. For
example, the presbytery is to develop programs and provide resources to the congregations that are
under its care. The unique aspect of this polity is the significant representation of laypersons in the
Councils (governing bodies) above the local level emphasizing the “Priesthood of All Believers”. 1
Peter 2:5

Commissioning, Certification, and Ordination
The Presbyterian Church recognizes the biblical principle that we each have different talents or gifts, as
given in I Corinthians 12:4-31, and we should utilize the talents we have. During worship or other
services, individuals (usually as part of a group) are commissioned\(^1\) for special work such as Sunday
school teacher through a service of dedication. The Book of Order calls this “commissioning for specific
acts of discipleship”. The Church recognizes persons in Christian education with skills and training both
in the Bible and in education by the process of certification\(^2\). Persons elected to be presbyters
(Teaching and Ruling Elders) and deacons are set apart through an act called ordination.\(^3\) The ordination is carried out with prayer and with the laying on of hands and focuses on Christ and the joy
and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the Church. Teaching Elders
(clergy) are ordained and installed by the presbytery; Ruling Elders and Deacons are ordained and
installed by the session.

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\(^{1}\) W-4.3000  
\(^{2}\) G-2.1101  
\(^{3}\) G-2.01
The officers of the church are chosen to fulfill particular functions. This does not diminish the importance of the commitment of all members to the ministry of the church (see again 1 Cor. 12:4-31).

**Ordained officers differ from other members in function only.** This is illustrated each time communion is celebrated in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): the ruling elders and deacons serve the members, then they serve the Teaching Elder (clergy), and then Teaching Elder serves the Ruling Elders and Deacons. This also illustrates the standard shown by Jesus in his ministry, as he came "not to be served but to serve."

The importance and equality of all presbyters is demonstrated above the local level by the requirement that all councils (governing bodies) be composed of 50% Teaching Elders and 50% Ruling Elders. This is extended to committees and commissions of those councils (governing bodies), as well as the bodies themselves.

**Meaning of Membership and Ordination**

**Membership**

We must begin by confessing our faith in Jesus Christ. Our baptism and public profession of faith are signs that we are Christians. The Book of Order lists ways in which Christians are called to be involved in the ministry of the Church.

- proclaiming the good news.
- taking part in the common life and worship of a particular church.
- praying and studying Scripture and the faith of the Christian church.
- supporting the work of the Church through giving of money, time, and talents.
- participating in the governing responsibilities of the Church.
- demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the Church.
- responding to God’s activity in the world through service to others.
- living responsibly in all relationships of life.
- working for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment.

Members may be unable to be fully involved in all these ways but, within our own abilities, we should strive to increase our participation and to make it more meaningful.

**Ordination**

Ordination is the act by which the Church sets apart persons to special specified offices; in the case under consideration here, the office is that of Ruling Elder and Deacon. Prior to ordination, the persons elected to the office of Ruling Elder and Deacon must undergo a period of study and preparation. This includes gaining knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the Church (The Book of Order is part of the constitution) and of the duties of the office.

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4 G-2.0104
5 G-1.0304
6 G-2.0402
They must also be examined by the Session to certify that the period of study and preparation has been completed and to inquire into their faithfulness in fulfilling their responsibilities.\(^7\)

The service of ordination and installation\(^8\) is to focus on the joy and responsibility of serving Christ through the mission of the church.

During the service, the newly elected elders are asked to promise or make a covenant:

1. to affirm their faith;
2. to attest to Scriptures;
3. to be led by the Confessions of the Church;
4. to fulfill the office of Ruling Elder or Deacon;
5. to be governed by the church's polity (form of government);
6. to follow Jesus and love our neighbors;
7. to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church;
8. to serve the people of the congregation with imagination and love;
9. to be a faithful Ruling Elder or Deacon.

A part of this service is the laying on of hands which some versions of the New Testament use as a synonym for ordination (see I Timothy 5:22).

There are some parts of these ordination questions that could be looked at more closely. The question about fulfillment of the office bothers some people. They might question their worthiness or their ability. We should look to Scripture and read about Moses and about Peter. Both felt inadequate for the job and Peter even made public denials of his relationship with Jesus. But God used them and their abilities to do wonderful things. We need to trust God. The question about serving the people implies your willingness to be a servant-leader. Jesus set an example that we are to follow when he took a towel and washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:1-10). To be a Ruling Elder or Deacon you need to have a humble spirit in which God can use you to be God's voice and God's hands in providing the spiritual leadership necessary to build the Kingdom of God here on earth.

**The Mission of the Church**

We must look at the mission of the church in order to understand what is required of Ruling Elders, Deacons and of Sessions. Reading mission statements seems, at times, to be lessons in futility because they tend to be couched in such general terms. However, it is possible to move from the general to the specific and we will attempt to do that. The mission statement that follows about the Church of Jesus Christ is paraphrased and summarized from the Book of Order. Although it is taken from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Constitution, it seems to express the mission of the universal church.

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\(^7\) G-2.0402  
\(^8\) W-4.4000
The Mission of God—F-1.01

The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people. This one living God, the Scriptures say, liberated the people of Israel from oppression and covenanted to be their God. By the power of the Spirit, this one living God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, who came to live in the world, die for the world, and be raised again to new life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the nearness of God’s kingdom, bringing good news to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed, and proclaiming the Lord’s favor upon all creation. The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God’s mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God’s love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God’s mission.

The Mission of Your Presbyterian Church

The mission of your Presbyterian Church is to be determined by your session. It is important to ask your pastor and other members of the session to review with you the mission or vision statement for your congregation. These two statements should be complementary. The mission of the local church should encompass the mission of the whole Church but can emphasize one or more aspects of that mission. Look at your church’s mission statement and compare it to these statements. Does it emphasize what you believe to be important to your Session and to your church in your local context and culture?

Responsibilities of Teaching and Ruling Elders, Session, and Congregation

Ruling Elders as members of the Session—G-2.03 and 3.02

The Book of Order outlines the duties of Ruling Elders both individually and jointly as the Session.

Generally, Ruling Elders together with the pastor (Teaching Elder) are to strengthen and nurture the faith and life of the congregation through their leadership and service.

- Encourage the people in the worship and service of God.
- Equip and renew the people for their tasks within the Church.
- Equip and renew the people for their mission in the world.
- Visit, comfort, and care for the people with special attention to the sick and the lonely and to those who are oppressed.
- Inform the Session and the Pastor of those who may need special attention.
- Cultivate the ability to teach the Bible.

All Christians have duties they are bound to perform by the law of love. These are especially incumbent upon ruling elders because of their calling to the office.
In addition, Ruling Elders are to:

- Exercise leadership.
- Have responsibility for both the particular church, which they serve, and the Church at large.
- Serve faithfully as a member of the Session.
- Serve as commissioner to higher governing bodies when so elected.
- In addition, Ruling Elders and Deacons are to be persons of faith, dedication, and good judgment.

While members of the church have a great deal of freedom of conscience, officers of the church must adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity 9.

**Suggested Essentials of the Reformed Faith (not inclusive)** 10

- *The Mystery of the Trinity* (Catholic)
- *The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God—Jesus* (Catholic)
- *Justification by Grace through Faith* (Protestant)
- *The Authority of the Scriptures* (Protestant)
- *The Sovereignty of God* (Reformed)
- *The Election of God's People* (Reformed)
- *The Covenant Life of the Church* (Reformed)
- *Stewardship of God's Creation* (Reformed)
- *Total Depravity* (Reformed)
- *Obedience to God's Word directs us to work for Justice and the transformation of society* (Reformed)

In becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the exercise of freedom of conscience is placed under limitations. *The officer is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church.* 11

**The Teacher Elder (Ministers of Word and Sacrament)—G-2.05**

Teaching Elders (Ministers of the Word and Sacrament) who are called to be pastors are responsible for:

- Studying, teaching, and preaching the Word.
- Administering Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- Praying with and for the congregation.
- Encouraging the people in the worship and service of God.
- Equipping and enabling the people for their tasks within the church and their mission to the world.
- Exercising pastoral care, devoting special attention to the poor, the sick, the troubled and the dying.
- Participating in governing responsibilities including leadership of the congregation in implementing the principles of participation and inclusiveness in the decision making of the church, and its task of reaching out in concern and service to the life of the human community as a whole.
- Sharing in the ministry of the church in the governing bodies above the session.

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9 G-2.0105
10 F-2.01-2.05
11 F-3.0101
The Teaching Elder as pastor has responsibilities with respect to the worship of the people that are not subject to the authority of the session or the congregation.\(^{12}\)

- The selection of Scripture to be read and its translation.
- The preaching of the sermon or the exposition of the Word.
- The prayers to be offered.
- The music to be sung.
- The use of drama, dance, and other art forms.

The Session—G-3.02

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 all installed 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 is responsible (through the Clerk) to keep accurate minutes and membership rolls. The Session elects a clerk for a specified period of time, such as one year as determined by the session. The clerk must be a Ruling Elder but does not need to be an active member of session. In the absence of the clerk at a meeting of the session, one of the session members is elected to be acting clerk for that meeting.\(^{13}\)

The Session as a council of the church is responsible for the mission and government of the particular church and has the responsibility and power, as summarized here, to:

- receive members into the church
- lead the congregation in participation in the mission of the church
- provide for the worship of the people of God including preaching and the sharing of the Sacraments
- provide for the spiritual growth of its members
- develop and supervise the educational program
- lead the congregation in ministries of personal and social healing
- challenge the people of God in stewardship of money and time
- establish the annual budget and other special offerings
- lead the congregation continually to discover God’s working in the world
- instruct, examine, ordain, install, and welcome new elders (and deacons, where applicable)
- supervise the board of deacons (where applicable) and all other organizations within the congregation
- provide for the administration of the church’s program
- provide for the management of the church’s property
- maintain regular and continuing relationships with higher governing bodies
- establish and maintain all necessary ecumenical relationships
- serve in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline
- keep an accurate roll of members

\(^{12}\) W-1.4005
\(^{13}\) G-3.0104 and 3.0204
MEETINGS—G-3.0105 and G-3.0203

Regular meetings of the Session are called stated meetings. A Session is required to have at least four stated meetings (once each quarter). Special meetings, or called meetings, can be held upon request of the pastor (the moderator) or in writing by two members of the Session. Reasonable notice of all special meetings must be given when other than routine business is to be transacted. The most common agenda for these meetings is to receive new members. Meetings of councils shall be opened and closed with prayer. Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised, except when it is in contradiction to this Constitution. Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body.

Typical Session Agenda
1. There may also be a brief devotional, Scripture reading, or time of sharing.
2. The roll is taken and a quorum declared.
3. Session is then asked to approve granting excused absences to those elders who have requested them.
4. Minutes of previous session meetings are approved as well as minutes of any congregational meetings (unless previously approved by the congregation).
5. For stated meetings, the agenda must be approved; changes can be made in the agenda, by Session vote, at any time during the meeting. For called meetings, the purpose of the meeting must be declared and that is the agenda.
6. The Pastor’s Report is received and action taken on items in the report, as appropriate.
7. The Clerk’s Report is received. Action is taken on recommended items, as appropriate.
8. Committee or Ministry Team Reports are received. Committees should be encouraged to have written reports submitted in advance and items that require Session action should be clearly marked. Committee or Ministry Team Chairpersons should not read their reports; it should be assumed that each Ruling Elder has read the report and is familiar with its contents.
9. Old and New Business. Any items not previously considered may be brought before the Session at this time. Ruling Elders are encouraged to bring up only items of a pressing nature. Other issues should be submitted to the appropriate Committee or Ministry Team for due consideration before being brought to Session.
10. Closing: Session meetings are closed with prayer.

14 G-3.0203
15 G-3.0105
MEMBERSHIP ROLLS—G-3.0204a

There shall be three rolls of members

1. **Baptized**: Those who have not professed their Faith in Christ publically.
2. **Active**: Those who have professed their Faith in Christ Publically.
3. **Affiliate**: Those whose membership are in another church.

If a Session determines it is important to maintain a register for inactive members it is their option with the understanding that the names on the inactive register are no longer considered to be members of the congregation and in order to be restored to active membership they must be received into the life of the congregation by a re-affirmation of their faith.\(^\text{16}\)

Session Organization

The sessions of different churches can have different ways of organizing themselves. Some Sessions have moved to Ministry Teams rather than Committees. Each church adapts its own structure or no-structure to suit its own needs and available resources. **The only committee required by the Book of Order is a Nominating Committee.**\(^\text{17}\)

If a Session determines that Committees or Ministry Teams are needed they will be organized by an action of the Session to enhance the mission of the church. Different churches organize themselves in different ways; no one way is the best for everyone. In most, but not all, churches, each of the Standing Committees or Ministry Teams will have an active Ruling Elder as the chairperson and usually one or more active Ruling Eelders serving on the committee or team. In addition, each Committee or Ministry Team can recruit other church members or friends to serve as the Holy Spirit gifts them.

Each Committee or Ministry Team carries out the business related to its area of responsibility and oversees its budgeted line items. Committees or Ministry Teams should report to the Session as directed by the Session and seek permission for items not specified in their budget or agreed upon responsibilities.

Every Session will create a **Manual of Operations** that should include the following:\(^\text{18}\)

1. The Articles of Incorporation
2. Church Bylaws
3. Standing Rules or Church Policies: i.e. personnel (including job descriptions), weddings, funerals, memorials, property use, etc.
4. Sexual Misconduct Policy for Staff and Volunteers
5. See Appendix A for a sample of a Manual of Operations

A copy of the **Manual of Operations** should be kept in the office and be made available to anyone who wants to see it.

\(^\text{16}\) G-3.0204b  
\(^\text{17}\) G-3.0111  
\(^\text{18}\) G-3.0106
Responsibilities of Being a Good Ruling Elder

• **Absences.** If you need to be absent from a stated Session meeting, notify the pastor, the Clerk of Session, or the church office, you will be given an "excused absence".

  **Note:** Sessions can make a rule or policy that if a Ruling Elder has more than three or more unexcused absences that Ruling Elder will be counseled by his or her peers and be requested to step down for a lack of commitment if their absences continue.

• **Decisions and Actions.** It sometimes takes a while after a new class of ruling elders joins the session for the group to learn how best to work together. We are all working toward the same goals so our discussions should take place in an atmosphere of Christian love and respect. We will not always agree but we all have agreed to abide by the church’s polity which is that we abide by the *majority's vote*. *Sometimes we need to agree to disagree.*\(^{19}\)

Required Session Actions

The *Book of Order* is written so that a Council’s actions can be done decently and in order. The intent is to ensure that the church's government functions fairly and efficiently with careful consideration being given to all issues and that biblical principles are followed.

In this *Book of Order*

1. **SHALL** and **IS TO BE** signify practice that is mandated,
2. **SHOULD** signifies practice that is strongly recommended,
3. **IS APPROPRIATE** signifies practice that is commended as suitable,
4. **MAY** signifies practice that is permissible but not required.
5. **ADVISORY HANDBOOK** signifies a handbook produced by agencies of the General Assembly to guide synods and presbyteries in procedures related to the oversight of ministry. Such handbooks suggest procedures that are commended, but not required.\(^{20}\)

Some Special Cases

There are times when it is the duty of Session to see that all requirements of the *Book of Order* are met. This is sometimes difficult because the requirements may be distributed in various places. There are four important examples.

1. **Receiving New Members.** Members are received into a congregation by Session action. Session may not deny membership to anyone if the basic conditions are met, namely profession of faith in Christ. This condition can be met by actual profession of faith, by reaffirmation of faith, or by letter of transfer from another Christian church. It is assumed that a person who is a member of another Christian church has previously made a profession of faith. The procedure by which a new member is received includes welcoming and recognizing that person during a service of worship.\(^{21}\)

\(^{19}\) F-3.0205

\(^{20}\) Preface to the Book of Order

\(^{21}\) G-1.0301-G-1.0303 and F-3.0102 Corporate Judgment; W-4.2000—services of welcome and reception
2. **The Lord’s Supper.** The Session is given the responsibility to authorize the Lord’s Supper at appropriate times. This appears to mean that the Session must take the responsibility to see that all conditions are met. While there is a lower limit to the number of times in a year (once per quarter) the Lord’s Supper is to be observed, there is no upper limit other than what is reasonable. The responsibility of the Session is to see that this sacrament is observed and is observed in an appropriate atmosphere and setting. Other requirements include the following. The bread and cup may be served by those in the ordered ministry of the church, *or by other church members on invitation of the session or authorizing council.*\(^{22}\) Also, when both wine and grape juice are served (if wine is served, grape juice must also be served), the *Book of Order* requires that they be clearly distinguished. Some churches place a statement in the bulletin "light is wine, dark is juice" (using white wine and regular grape juice, of course). The Sacrament must be administered by an ordained minister or commissioned ruling elder (when approved by Presbytery).\(^{23}\) The observance must be announced at least one week in advance.\(^{24}\) The procedure for the actual ceremony is given with parts of that being suggested and parts mandatory. This means that many variations in the ceremony are possible. The Lord’s Supper may be taken to shut-ins by the pastor, ruling elders, deacons, and members of the congregation authorized to represent the church.\(^{25}\) *For missional concerns, a presbytery may authorize Ruling Elders to administer the Lord’s Supper if a Teaching Elder or Commissioned Ruling Elder is not available.*\(^{26}\)

3. **Baptism:** The Session is to authorize all baptisms. The *Book of Order* states that the reason for having Session authorize all baptisms is "for reasons of order". It is this author’s opinion that this means that it is the Session’s responsibility to see that all requirements of the *Book of Order* have been met just as in the case of the Lord’s Supper. A person is to be baptized only once; the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) accepts all forms of baptism with water. The Sacrament is to be administered in a public service of worship but arrangements can be made for other situations as long as the congregation is represented. Baptism must be administered by an Teaching Elder or Commissioned Ruling Elder when approved by presbytery. The procedure for the sacrament is set and is mandatory. There are parallel portions for the person being baptized (or the parents of the child being baptized) and the congregation. Both confess their faith followed by declarations of intent. Following this section, the *Book of Order* lists the Session’s responsibilities and the Church’s responsibilities toward the person just baptized.\(^{27}\)

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\(^{22}\) W-3.3616d  
\(^{23}\) W-2.4012  
\(^{24}\) W-3.3609  
\(^{25}\) W-2.4010  
\(^{26}\) W-2.4012c  
\(^{27}\) W-2.3000 and W-3.3600
4. **Examination of Ruling Elders-Elect and Deacons-Elect.** The congregation elects church officers (Ruling Elders and Deacons) but before ordination/installation the Session is charged with examination of those persons to ascertain that they are ready, willing, and able to serve. It is appropriate to use the nine questions in the ordination/installation service as a guide to cover the pertinent topics of personal faith, knowledge of doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the Church, and duties of the ministry appropriate to the order.28

**The Congregation**

The Session has full responsibility for the areas of the church listed in the previous section. The congregation cannot usurp those responsibilities. For example, the Session is responsible for the finances of the church and the congregation cannot tell the Session how to set the annual budget or how to spend, or not spend, funds. If the congregation has serious concerns, the Session would be wise to listen to the congregation’s counsel.29 Some Sessions allow the congregation to vote on the budget to show their agreement in supporting the budget for the coming year. This is not the normal procedure as outlined below, but if the Session believes it is important to have congregational agreement an exception to the rule can be made by the Session.

Business to be transacted at meetings of the congregation shall be limited to matters related to the following:

1. electing ruling elders, deacons, and trustees;
2. calling a pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor;
3. changing existing pastoral relationships, by such means as reviewing the adequacy of and approving changes to the terms of call of the pastor or pastors, or requesting, consenting to, or declining to consent to dissolution;
4. buying, mortgaging, or selling real property;
5. requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption for terms of service as permitted in this Constitution (G-2.0404).

*Whenever permitted by civil law, both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting.*

The pastor moderates all congregational meetings **without vote** since the pastor is not a member of the congregation and the Clerk of Session is the secretary of all meetings.30 If it is impractical for the pastor to moderate the meeting (the most common occurrence of this is when changes to the pastor’s call are discussed), another pastor or a member of the session may preside at the invitation of the moderator.

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28 G-2.0402
29 G-3.0205
30 G-1.0504 and G-1.0505
General Information: (annual and called)

Just as there are two kinds of Session meetings (stated and called), there are two kinds of congregation meetings (annual and called). While Stated Session meetings can consider almost any topic on the agenda, the annual congregation meeting has definite limitations (see list above) G-1.0504 and G-1.0505.

Called congregational meetings are limited to the topic for which the meeting is called.

If the church is incorporated as a nonprofit organization, the annual meeting of the congregation is also the annual meeting of the corporation. If there is not a quorum present, the meeting must be adjourned and rescheduled in order to meet legal requirements.

Congregations shall provide by rule the quorum necessary to conduct business; normally this should be stated in the church bylaws. The same is true for the meeting at which officers are elected, if the election is not held at the annual meeting.

Special meetings may be called for any of the purposes listed above or to conduct other business as appropriate.

Sample Agenda for a Congregational Meeting

1. Opening—Congregational meetings always open with prayer.
2. There is a count of members present and a quorum declared by the clerk of session.
3. Minutes of previous congregational meetings are approved unless they have been approved by session (see church bylaws).
4. The agenda is approved. If the meeting is the annual meeting, the agenda can include any or all of the items listed above and the agenda may be modified (by vote) during the meeting.
5. If the meeting is a called meeting, the agenda is limited to the topic announced in the call.
6. The Business. Reports are received, elections held, and so forth as appropriate. The Book of Order is rather specific at times, such as the voting procedure for electing officers.
7. Closing: The meetings are closed with prayer.
G-2.04 GENERAL PROVISIONS FOR RULING ELDERS AND DEACONS

G-2.0401 Election of Ruling Elders and Deacons

Ruling elders and deacons are men and women elected by the congregation from among its members. The nomination and election of ruling elders and deacons shall express the rich diversity of the congregation’s membership and shall guarantee participation and inclusiveness (F-1.0403). Ruling elders and deacons shall be nominated by a committee elected by the congregation, drawn from and representative of its membership. Congregations may provide by their own rule for a congregational nominating committee, provided that the committee shall consist of at least three active members of the congregation, and shall include at least one ruling elder who is currently serving on the session. The pastor shall serve ex officio and without vote. When elections are held, full opportunity shall always be given to the congregation for nomination from the floor of the congregational meeting by any active member of the congregation. A majority of all the active members present and voting shall be required to elect.

G-2.0402 Preparation for Ministry as a Ruling Elder or Deacon

When persons have been elected to the ordered ministry of ruling elder or deacon, the session shall provide a period of study and preparation, after which the session shall examine them as to their personal faith; knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church; and the duties of the ministry. The session shall also confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the ministry appropriate to the order. If the examination is approved, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation.

G-2.0403 Service of Ordination and Installation

The service of ordination and installation shall focus upon Christ and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church, and shall include a sermon appropriate to the occasion. The moderator of session or person authorized to preside shall state briefly the nature of the ministry of ruling elder and deacon. The act of ordination and installation takes place in the context of worship. The order for that service of worship in the Directory for Worship (W-4.4000) shall be followed.

G-2.0404 Terms of Service

Ruling elders and deacons shall be elected to serve terms of no more than three years on the session or board of deacons, and may be eligible for reelection according to congregational rule. However, no ruling elder or deacon shall be eligible to serve more than six consecutive years, and a ruling elder or deacon who has served six consecutive years shall be ineligible for election to the same board for at least one year. Election shall be to classes as nearly equal in number as possible, with the term of only one class ending each year. The presbytery may, upon written request and by majority vote, grant a congregation a waiver of this limitation on terms. Once ordained and while they are
active members of any congregation of this denomination, ruling elders or deacons not in active service on a session or board of deacons continue to bear the responsibilities of the ministry to which they have been ordained, except as provided in G-2.0406, G-2.0407, or in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

G-2.0405 Dissolution of Relationship
A ruling elder or deacon may resign from the session or board of deacons, with the session’s consent. On ceasing to be an active member of a congregation, a ruling elder or deacon ceases to be a member of its session or board. When a ruling elder or deacon, because of change of residence or disability, is unable for a period of one year to perform the duties of the ministry to which he or she was installed, the active relationship shall be dissolved by the session unless there is good reason not to do so, which shall be recorded.

G-2.0406 Release from Ministry as a Ruling Elder or Deacon
If a ruling elder or deacon who is in good standing, against whom no inquiry has been initiated, and against whom no charges have been filed, shall make application to the session to be released from the exercise of the ordered ministry, the session of the congregation in which he or she holds membership, upon granting the release, shall delete that person’s name from the appropriate register of ruling elders or deacons of the congregation. No judgment of failure on the part of the ruling elder or deacon is implied in this action. Release from the exercise of the ministry of ruling elder or deacon requires a discontinuation of all functions of that ministry. The status of one so released shall be the same as any church member. Should a person released under this section later desire to be restored to that ordered ministry, that person shall make application to the session that granted the release, and upon approval of the session, that person shall be restored to the exercise of the ministry from which he or she was released without re-ordination.

G-2.0407 Renunciation of Jurisdiction
When a ruling elder or deacon submits to the clerk of session a written statement renouncing the jurisdiction of this church, the renunciation shall be effective upon receipt. When a ruling elder or deacon persists in work disapproved by the session, the session shall consult with him or her and shall give notice of its disapproval. If, after having been provided opportunity for consultation and upon written notice of its disapproval, the ruling elder or deacon persists in the work, the session may then conclude that the ruling elder or deacon has renounced the jurisdiction of this church. Renunciation of jurisdiction shall remove the ruling elder or deacon from membership and ordered ministry and shall terminate the exercise of the ministry. The renunciation shall be reported by the clerk of session at the next meeting of the session, which shall record the renunciation, delete the name of the ruling elder or deacon from the appropriate register, and take such other administrative actions as may be required by this Constitution.
ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION SERVICE

**What is a vow?**  What are the commitments you are vowing or promising to make when you are ordained or ordered ministry?

1. **W-4.4003a.** Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
   
   Q: Can you share your spiritual journey?
   Q: What does it mean for you that Jesus is the Head of the Church?

2. **W-4.4003b.** Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?
   
   Q: How is the Bible different from any other book?
   Q: Do you read or study the Bible regularly?

3. **W-4.4003c.** Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
   
   Q: What does it mean to be reformed?
   Q: Do you believe in the following Reformed doctrines?
   
   - Jesus the Head of the Church
   - Saved by faith Alone and Grace Alone
   - Two Sacraments: Baptism & Communion
   - Scripture alone is the authority for doctrine
   - The Priesthood of all believers

   Q: What are the essential tenets of the Presbyterian Church?
   1. The Mystery of the Trinity (Catholic)
   2. The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God—Jesus (Catholic)
   3. Justification by Grace through Faith (Protestant)
   4. The Authority of the Scriptures (Protestant)
   5. The Sovereignty of God (Reformed)
   6. The Election of God’s People (Reformed)
   7. The Covenant Life of the Church (Reformed)
   8. Stewardship of God’s Creation (Reformed)
   9. Total Depravity prone to idolatry (Reformed)
   10. Obedience to God’s Word directs us to work for Justice and the transformation of society (Reformed)
4. W-4.4003d. Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?

Q: What is the difference between a Creed and a Confession?

hex 2 Creeds = What We Believe (universal).

hex 4 Confessions = Why we believe and what we believe.
   (what we believe   will affect our interpretation of scriptures)

hex 3 Catechisms = A study of what we believe by asking questions and providing Scriptural answers.

hex 2 Statements of Faith = declarations of faith.

Q: What is in the Book of Confessions?

1. The Nicene Creed   4th C.
2. The Apostles Creed   2nd C.
3. The Scots Confession   1560
4. The Heidelberg Catechism   1563
5. The Second Helvetic Confession   1566
6. The Westminster Confession   1647
7. The Shorter Catechism   1647
8. The Larger Catechism   1647
9. The Barmen Declaration   1934
10. The confession of 1967   1967

5 W-4.4003e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?

The language in the Book of Order is specific

hex SHALL and IS TO BE/ARE TO BE signify practice that is mandated

hex SHOULD signifies practice that is strongly recommended

hex IS APPROPRIATE signifies practice that is commended as suitable

hex MAY signifies practice that is permissible but not required

6 W-4.4003f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?

7 W-4.4003g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

8 W-4.4003h Will you seek to pray for and serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
W-4.4003i (1) (For ruling elder) Will you be a faithful ruling elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

W-4.4003i (2) (For deacon) Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need? In your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

Q: What does it mean to be a faithful Ruling Elder or Deacon?
Q: How can we show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?
Q: What might be a teaching opportunity for a ruling elder or deacon?
LIFE TOGETHER IN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH:
STANDARDS OF ETHICAL CONDUCT FOR
ORDAINED OFFICERS IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

As an ordained officer in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture and guided by our Confessions, I affirm the vows made at my ordination, confirm that Jesus Christ is the pattern for my life and ministry and, relying on God's grace, commit myself to the following standards of ethical conduct.

I

I will conduct my life in a manner that is faithful to the gospel and consistent with my public ministry. Therefore I will:

1. Practice the disciplines of study, prayer, reflection, worship, stewardship, and service;
2. Be honest and truthful in my relationships with others;
3. Be faithful, keeping the covenants I make and honoring marriage vows;
4. Treat all persons with equal respect and concern as beloved children of God;
5. Maintain a healthy balance among the responsibilities of my office of ministry, my commitments to family and other primary relationships, and my need for spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual renewal;
6. Refrain from abusive, addictive, or exploitative behavior and seek help to overcome such behavior if it occurs;
7. Refrain from gossip and abusive speech; and
8. Maintain an attitude of repentance, humility, and forgiveness, responsive to God's reconciling will.

II

I will conduct my ministry so that nothing need be hidden from a governing body or colleagues in ministry. Therefore I will:

1. Preach, teach, and bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ with courage, speaking the truth in love;
2. Honor the sacred trust of relationships within the covenant community and observe appropriate boundaries;
3. Be judicious in the exercise of the power and privileges of my office and positions of responsibility I hold;
4. Avoid conflicts of interest that might compromise the effectiveness of my ministry;
5. Refrain from exploiting relationships within the community of faith for personal gain or gratification, including sexual harassment and misconduct as defined by Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) policy;
6. Respect the privacy of individuals and not divulge information obtained in confidence without express permission, unless an individual is a danger to self or others;
7. Recognize the limits of my own gifts and training, and refer persons and tasks to others as appropriate;
8. Claim only those qualifications actually attained, give appropriate credit for all sources used in sermons, papers, music, and presentations, and observe copyrights;
9. Refrain from incurring indebtedness that might compromise my ministry;
10. Be a faithful steward of and fully account for funds and property entrusted to me;
11. Observe limits set by the appropriate governing body for honoraria, personal business endeavors, and gifts or loans from persons other than family;
12. Accept the discipline of the church and the appropriate guidance of those to whom I am accountable for my ministry;

13. Participate in continuing education and seek the counsel of mentors and professional advisors;

14. Deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and upon leaving a ministry or office speak and act in ways that support the ministry of my successor;

**15. Participate in the life of a ministry setting I left or from which I have retired only as directed by presbytery;

**16. Provide pastoral services for a congregation I previously served only as directed by the presbytery and provide pastoral services to members of other congregations only with the consent of their pastors; and

**17. Consult with the committee on ministry in the presbytery of my residence regarding my involvement in any ministry setting during my retirement.

III

I will participate as a partner with others in the ministry and mission of the Church universal. Therefore I will:

1. Participate in the mission and governance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and work for the unity of the holy catholic church;

2. Show respect and provide encouragement for colleagues in ministry;

3. Recruit church members responsibly, respect existing congregational relationships, and refrain from exploiting persons in vulnerable situations; and

4. Cooperate with those working in the world for justice, compassion, and peace, including partners in ministry of other faith traditions.

** These standards apply only to pastors; they also apply to commissioned lay pastors when they are performing pastoral functions.
HANDBOOK FOR Deacons IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

Complied by in 2012 by Rev. Dr. William K. Knudsen
Executive Presbyter
Northumberland Presbytery
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ROLE OF THE DEACON DEFINED

The word deacon is defined by Wikipedia as:

*The word deacon is derived from the Greek word diakonos, which is often translated servant or more specifically waiter. Some believe that the office of deacon originated in the selection of the seven men (among them Stephen) to assist with pastoral and administrative needs of the early church (Acts of the Apostles, chapter 6). Deaconesses are mentioned by Pliny the Younger in a letter dated c. 112. The exact relationship between Deacons and Deaconesses is ecclesiologically unclear; in some traditions, a deaconess is simply a female deacon; in others, deaconesses constitute a separate order.*

The role of deacon in the New Testament is indeed somewhat ambiguous. As it has been stated previously, the word literally means servant, but the word can also be translated as minister and there is no further elaboration of the office given. The role of deacon in the Christian Church is generally associated with service of some kind, but the type of service rendered by the deacons varies among theological and denominational traditions.

Some may argue that the deacons administered the physical needs of the church because of the example of the seven men selected in Acts 6. While the word deacon is used in v. 1 (ministry or distribution), and the verb form is used in v.2 (to serve) the noun form is also used in v. 4 to refer to the apostles proclamation (ministry of the word). Therefore, there is reason to believe that the ministry of the deacon is limited to administration.

Deacons are usually thought of as under-shepherds who were responsible for shepherding a smaller group of people within the local church, while the elders were responsible the overall leadership of the church. Deacons are to be under the authority of the elders, which is evident from the fact that they are always mentioned after the elders, and also because the requirements for deacon are slightly less strict than for elders (ruling and teaching presbyters).

DEACONS IN SCRIPTURE

The office of the deacon is introduced in the New Testament in Acts 6. Although, the seven men appointed in Acts 6 were not actually called “deacons”, most students of the Bible generally agree that the “seven” were the prototype of today’s deacons. In the early days of the church, the tremendous growth through the ministry of the apostles was accompanied by many demands of service, which the apostles could not adequately provide. Specifically mentioned were the increasing complaints by the Grecian Jews
against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Thus, the appointment of these dedicated individuals provided support and service for the ministry of the gospel by meeting practical needs within the church body.

Acts 6:1-7 (NRSV)

1Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. 2And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, 4while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” 5What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 7The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

The work of Stephen and Phillip strongly suggests that gifted deacons became a permanent part of the church's outreach to the world very early in its history. The thrilling activities of these servants of the church sound much like the work of a traveling evangelist, missionary, or lay preacher. Stephen is described as a man "full of faith and power" who "did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). So convincing were his words and miracles that "they were not able to resist the wisdom and Spirit by which he spoke" (Acts 6:10). While some responded in faith, Stephen's zeal for Christ stirred up powerful enemies (Acts 6:11-13). Undaunted by false witnesses, Stephen glorified the Lord even as he was put to death for his convictions (Acts 7:59-60). Phillip was also an evangelist who "preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:9-13). After preaching to eager crowds in Samaria, Phillip witnessed to a solitary Ethiopian in the desert and baptized him (Acts 8:26-38).

It is important to note that, in the first introduction, emphasis is placed upon the character of the men chosen to serve as deacons. Seven men were chosen who were “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom”. Among those chosen was Stephen, “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit”. No matter what the ministry to be performed was to involve, in this case the waiting of tables and service to the widows, the life, and character of the man chosen to perform it was the determining factor.
In addition to the passages Acts 6, which refer to the role of the deacon, there are two other passages that make reference to deacons: Philippians 1:1 and I Timothy 3:8-12. The primary focus of these passages is the order and structure in the church. The appointment of a deacon can best be understood in relation to the role of co-worker and fellow servant in the Gospel.

**NRSV) Philippians 1:1.** ¹Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

**NRSV) I Timothy 3:8-13.** ⁸Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; ⁹they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. ¹¹Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. ¹²Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; ¹³for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

In summary, there are several aspects of the position of deacon, which are referenced in the New Testament, that need to be understood. First, the deacon is selected to serve by their fellow members of the church and church leaders. Next, he or she should be recognized to faithful. Finally, the deacon is to be seen as an extension of the pastoral ministry. The deacon has the responsibility of making the truth of God’s Word come alive within the church.

These standards are essential to the services that the deacon is expected to perform. In our life and indeed, in our Christian walk, what we do is normally a reflection of who we are and each deacon is expected to nurture his or her own personal life and relationships so that they are able to fulfill the responsibilities of ministry that have been outlined by God in the New Testament. **A deacon must demonstrate a heart for God through scriptural attributes and demonstrated spiritual maturity and service as described above.**

**QUALIFICATIONS OF A DEACON**

**Spiritual Qualifications**

*Acts 6:3*(Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom)

- Someone with a Good Reputation – Known by the community
- Someone who is Full of the Spirit
- Someone who demonstrates Godly Wisdom.
Moral Qualifications

1 Timothy 3:8-13 (NRSV)

8 Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; 9 they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. 11 Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; 13 for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Worthy of respect – The deacon is to be a person whose moral and spiritual character evokes esteem from others; a person that is considered honorable or noble. A deacon should be a person that has a respectful reputation especially in spiritual matters.

Sincere – The deacon is to be truthful and trustworthy. They should not say one thing to one person and something different to another. A deacon’s word must be honest; not a person that takes part in gossip, tale bearing, idle talking, or slander and does not use manipulative, insincere, or deceitful speech. A deacon is not a liar.

Not indulging in much wine – For the deacon, there is to be no abuse or dependence on any drug – may include the regular use of alcohol even though not getting drunk, if inappropriate dependence is demonstrated. There should be a demonstrated freedom not to drink. Paul is prohibiting the abuse of wine or any other substance that could damage a deacon’s testimony and make ineffective his or her Christian witness.

Not pursuing dishonest gain – Not willing to manipulate or resort to illegitimate means for personal gain, either for money or for recognition, especially in the area of ministry. A deacon should demonstrate a proper values system, including a willingness to give up money making opportunities for the sake of the gospel. The deacon is not to be controlled by a greedy obsession to obtain all the material possessions he or she can.

Must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience – The words “keep hold” speaks of knowing the Word of God and “clear conscience” speaks of doing the Word of God. This simply means that a deacon’s life must be consistent with Christian doctrine. The deacon should believe in sound doctrine, and should hold firm to his or her convictions. A deacon’s spiritual integrity should be beyond reproach.

Must first be tested – The deacon must demonstrate their spiritual qualifications before being elected to serve in the position of deacon. The elders of the church should observe their daily attitude, speech, and conduct for an appropriate period. The deacon should have a proven ability to do the work of caring for the sick, the needy,
Married only once – It means in principle that the deacon has his or her sexuality resolved and under control. This should not be interpreted to mean that a man or woman must be married in order to serve as a deacon or that a man or woman that has been divorced is ineligible to serve as a deacon.

Manages children and household well – The primary application is to those who are married meaning that their family life is good. The deacon should act as a responsible Christian father, mother, husband, wife and household manager providing for their family financially, emotionally, and spiritually in an active ever-present role through example and service. Because the home is often referred as a microcosm of the church, it is imperative a deacon is able to care for his or her family before they can care for the church of God. In the case of the unmarried, it means that they have close relationships and that those relationships are generally healthy and stable.

When a Nominating Committee is looking for Deacons they should consider the following:

- Faithful attendance at the worship services of the church.
- Faithful steward of their time, talents, and treasurers.
- Faithful in their attendance at the meetings of the Board of Deacons.
- Faithfully participates in the life and ministry of the church.
- Demonstrate Christ-like behaviors and attitudes with others.
- Is willing to visit the sick and needy of the church and community at large.
- Is willing to take on additional responsibilities as requested by the session.

THE BOOK OF ORDER AND THE DEACONATE

G-2.02 Deacons: The Ministry of Compassion and Service

G-2.0201 Deacon Defined

The ministry of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion, and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry.
**G-2.0202 Under Authority of the Session**

Deacons may be individually commissioned or organized as a board of deacons. In either case, their ministry is under the supervision and authority of the session. Deacons may also be given special assignments in the congregation, such as caring for members in need, handling educational tasks, cultivating liberality in giving, collecting and disbursing monies to specific persons or causes, or overseeing the buildings and property of the congregation. Deacons shall assume other duties as may be delegated to them by the session, including assisting with the Lord’s Supper. (W-3.3616). A congregation by a majority vote may choose not to utilize the ordered ministry of deacons. If the congregation has neither a board of deacons nor individually commissioned deacons, the function of this ordered ministry shall be the responsibility of the ruling elders and the session.

**SOME ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS:**
1. Why did you decide to become a deacon when the nominating committee contacted you?
2. What talents or gifts do you have that especially qualify you to become a deacon?
3. When you look at the list of responsibilities listed in the Book of Order which is the most important which is the least significant to you?

To minister to those who are in
1. need (physically, emotionally, financially)
2. to the sick
3. to the friendless
4. to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith
5. lead the people in worship through prayers of intercession
6. read the Scriptures
7. present the gifts of the people
8. assist with the Lord’s Supper

**HOW WILL WE CARRY OUT OUR MINISTRIES AS DEACONS?**

- Do you support the Mission or Vision Statement of the Church?
- Do you agree with the Core Values of the church?
- Are you sensitive or compassionate to the needs of the people who attend your church (nurture).
- Are you sensitive or compassionate to the needs of the people in your community who do not attend your church (mission or evangelism through caring)?
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: DEACONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

1. It be necessary for elders and deacons to be more active in taking the roles currently reserved for ordained clergy?
   a. There will be a shared ministry rather than a pastor dependent or dominated ministry as we move into the 21st century
   b. More pastoral care will be done by the deaconate
   c. More pastoral visitation will be done by the deaconate

2. Deacons will need to share in the responsibilities of church administration which may include financial and clerical (shared responsibilities)

3. Deacons will need to do more than just provide meals for funerals? How can deacons provide pastoral ministry more effectively to the bereaved? (Stephens Ministry)

4. Deacons will need to do more than just hand out money to the needy? What about providing classes in budget management, or developing skills for new employment opportunities?

5. Deacons will need to know the resources that are available in the community to help the needy especially in times of disaster.

6. Deacons will need to take advantage of the internet and email to provide a better communication between those who have and those who need, and establish communities of caring people connected by social media like twitter and facebook.

7. Deacons will need to have a strategic plan to help those who are socially & financially impoverished? Can the church provide opportunities for free clinics with lawyers, doctors, and CPA’s for legal, medical or tax needs?

8. Deacons will need to identify the social injustices in their communities that need to be addressed and challenged?

Additional thoughts to be considered:

1. Encourage your Board of Deacons to adopt some specific goals and objectives that deal specifically with the needs of the people who attend your church or live in your community.

2. Yearly evaluate your ministry or service projects to determine those that are really effective and truly meet the needs of your community.

3. Prayerfully ask God to show you some of the needs that need to be addressed in your church and in your community, and ask yourself if you are willing to move out of your comfort zone in order to meet those needs.

Pre-test answers:

APPENDIX—A

SUGGESTED MANUAL OF OPERATIONS

(1) Originating Documents
   (a) organizing covenant,
   (b) list of charter members,
   (c) articles of incorporation,
   (d) bylaws,
   (e) mission and vision statement
   (f) core values

(2) Nominating, Electing, and Ordaining/Installing
   (a) description of the work of the church officer nominating committee,
   (b) elements in the examination by the session of those elected,
   (c) procedure on the day for ordination/installation.

(3) Membership
   (a) procedures for contact and invitation for membership,
   (b) procedures for removing names from the roll.
   (c) procedures for notifying members who were on the inactive roll that they are
      no longer members of the church
   (d) baptismal policies for infant or adult baptisms

(4) Committees or Ministry Teams and other Organizations i.e. PW, Sunday school, Youth, VBS, choir
   (a) job description of the work of each committee and organization,
   (b) description of annual sequence of the work required for each committee and organization,
   (c) time, place, and frequency of meetings of each committee and organization,
   (d) expectations of persons serving on committees and organizations.

(5) Contact with the Presbytery (call the Presbytery to get these forms if you include in your manual)
   (a) description of the procedure and report from the triennial visit,
   (b) catalogue of resource library,
   (c) directory of committee membership,
   (d) list of presbytery commissioners,
   (e) form to nominate persons to serve on presbytery committees.

(6) Personnel
   (a) position description for each church staff position—paid or volunteer,
   (b) personnel policies,
   (c) forms used in hiring, including disclosure forms for prior charges or conviction in sexual misconduct
      and sexual abuse,
   (d) criminal background check for all volunteers
   (e) description of performance review and compensation review procedure.
   (f) sexual misconduct policy for church staff and volunteers

(7) Finances
   (a) church budget,
   (b) description of procedure for stewardship and pledging,
   (c) procedures for counting the offering,
   (d) procedures for annual financial review (we have a samples at the presbytery)

(8) Calendar: church calendar of events during the year.

(9) Annual Meeting Instructions: description of preparation for the annual meeting with copy of last meeting.

(10) Property
    (a) church building use policy
    (b) key control policy
    (c) maintenance policy
    (d) insurance coverage policy

(11) Worship and Sacraments
    (a) instructions for ushers,
    (b) instructions for greeters,
    (c) instructions for those serving communion,
    (d) instructions for those preparing communion,
    (e) procedure for elder assisting in baptism.
    (f) funeral policies or guidelines
    (g) wedding policies or guidelines
Chart #1

**RANKING MOTIONS**
AND THEIR FIVE SALIENT PARLIAMENTARY POINTS. THE ORDER IN WHICH THE THIRTEEN MOTIONS ARE LISTED.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIVE PRIVILEGED MOTIONS</th>
<th>Must Be Sec.</th>
<th>May Be Debated</th>
<th>May Be Amended</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>Must Be Reconsidered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. To Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maj</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. To Adjourn</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Maj</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. To Take a Recess</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maj</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Question of Privilege</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Call for Orders of the Day</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SEVEN SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS**

| 8. Lay on Table | Yes | No | No | Maj | No |
| 7. Previous Questions | Yes | No | No | 2/3 | Yes |
| 6. Modify Debate | Yes | No | Yes | 2/3 | Yes |
| 5. To Postpone Definitely | Yes | Yes | Yes | Maj | Yes |
| 4. To Commit or Recommit | Yes | Yes* | Yes | Maj | Yes |
| 3. To Amend | Yes | Yes | Yes | Maj | Yes |
| 2. Postpone Indefinitely | Yes | Yes | No | Maj | Yes |

Examples of Incidental Main Motions: 
Recind
Ratify
Amend By-Laws

*Only re. desirability of referral or details of referral. The merits of the question cannot be debated.
### Chart #2

**NON-RANKING MOTIONS AND THEIR FIVE SALIENT PARLIAMENTARY POINTS.**

These motions (incidental motions) have no rank among themselves. Their being in order depends upon their necessity at the time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motion</th>
<th>Must Be Seconded</th>
<th>May Be Debated</th>
<th>May Be Amended</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>May Be Reconsidered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appeal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes**</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>MAJ</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspend Rules</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of Order, Call to Order</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>MOD</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objection to Consideration of a Question</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>Yes, No Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>MAJ</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of Assembly</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Read a Paper</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>MAJ</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Withdraw a Motion (to be used only before debate)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>MAJ</td>
<td>Yes, No Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Divide the Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>MAJ</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Close Nominations or Polls</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Consider Seriatim</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>MAJ</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TO UNCLASSIFIED MOTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motion</th>
<th>Must Be Seconded</th>
<th>May Be Debated</th>
<th>May Be Amended</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>May Be Reconsidered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reconsider</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes**</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>MAJ†</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Take From the Table†</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>MAJ</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescind</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>MAJ*</td>
<td>NEG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† same presbytery meeting
* with previous notice
†† before the end of the next regular presbytery meeting

** if main motion is debatable

Neither the chart nor references are inclusive but are to be used as an abridgement of Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ORDAINED?

By J. Frederick Holper

What Presbyterians believe about ordination has changed—sometimes rather significantly—over time. For example, the ordination of women as ministers, elders and deacons—something considered unthinkable earlier in our history—has become not only acceptable but expected.

Three unchanging beliefs
Presbyterians have remained open to change regarding our understanding of ordination because of three unchanging beliefs:

1. We believe that God is the source and summit of all ministry in the church. For Presbyterians ordination is not synonymous with ministry. We believe all Christians are called by God and equipped by the Spirit for service in the world when they are joined to the ministry of Jesus Christ at their baptism. On the other hand, not every member is called or equipped by God for the exercise of particular offices of ministry within the church.

2. Presbyterians hold the conviction, voiced in chapter 1 of the Book of Order, that “truth is in order to goodness.” Truth includes our shared convictions about who should be ordained, to
what offices, for what purposes, and with what preparation and standards of accountability. The measure of this truth, however, does not depend upon logical coherence or philosophical argument, but from the character of the fruit it bears.

3. Presbyterians believe that ordained ministry should be collegial (shared with others), non-hierarchical (shared by clergy and laity), and communal (representing the whole church and not merely a congregation).

We also believe those called to ordained offices in the church should be subjected to a process in which their calls are tested and confirmed by the church.

Men and women together?

In 1789, when the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America met in Philadelphia, all church officers—deacons, elders and ministers—were, by both custom and church law, male. The very notion of women holding office was considered preposterous. Indeed, some early 19th-century church “worthies” became quite worked up over the possibility that women might lead prayer in “promiscuous assemblies” (gathering where men would be present).

Women were prohibited from serving as elders or deacons until the 1930s—or the 1960s in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (PCUS). Ordaining women to the gospel ministry took an additional 20–30 years.

Today, however, the proportion of women and men serving in ordained offices is nearly 50 percent each, a development that is mirrored in the enrollment figures of the 10 Presbyterian theological institutions.

Whose hands?

Until the 1830s no one seriously challenged the notion that only pastors (also called bishops until 1957) were permitted to join in the laying on of hands in the ordination of new pastors, elders and deacons. Professor Charles Hodge of Princeton Theological Seminary, who opposed letting elders take part in the process, was fond of quoting an old Latin proverb: Nemo det quod non habet (no one may give what he does not have). Hodge’s argument was cast aside by the PCUS in the 1860s, but Presbyterians in the “Northern” stream steadfastly clung to it until the 1950s.

Today ordination is explicitly defined as an act done by a governing body made up of ministers and elders who jointly exercise the power of jurisdiction, rather than as an act done by persons who possess a power of order only they can transmit.

Service for life

For the first century of American Presbyterianism, congregations were unable to change entrenched leadership on the session or board of deacons. Elders and deacons served on their boards until they died (or were convicted of an offense that stripped them of their ordination). Finally, in the middle of the 19th century, churches were given permission to opt out of the lifetime service model in favor of a rotating limited-term service (the PCUS would take nearly a century to provide the same option to its congregations).

Today, limited-term service is now mandatory, and congregations that wish to be exempted from this requirement must make their request to the presbytery.

Radical roles for elders

During the same general era a then-radical notion began to take root: that elders should be able to be moderators of governing bodies above the level of the session. Although the idea eventually carried the day, a debate opened up almost immediately: How, it was asked, could a lay person serve as moderator since the retiring moderator each year was required to preach? Because elders had not been given the power of order needed to preach, any retiring elder-moderator was expected to deputize a minister member or commissioner to preach the retiring moderator’s sermon!

Today elders are not only regularly elected
The Awesome Task of Elders

By Cindy Bolbach

Parity between Ministers and Elders

I was baptized and raised Lutheran. When I joined a Presbyterian church as an adult I gradually became aware of Presbyterian polity and the way we structure our life together. I was especially taken by the insistence on an equal division of responsibility in the governance of the church between elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

That parity is reflected in the proposed new Form of Government (often called “nFOG”) that has been submitted for approval to the upcoming 219th General Assembly. The nFOG uses the terms “ruling elder” (rather than simply “elder”) and “teaching elder” (rather than “minister of the Word and Sacrament”) to underscore the fact that, although ruling and teaching elders perform different functions, they share equally in the leadership and spiritual direction of the faith community. “Ruling” elders are so named not because we “rule,” but because we are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God. Teaching elders are committed to teaching the faith and equipping the saints for the work of ministry. Together, ruling and teaching elders lead the community of faith as it seeks to proclaim the gospel with passion and integrity.

Privilege and Responsibility

For those of us who are ruling elders, this parity of leadership is a privilege and a responsibility.

It is a privilege because we are entrusted with the matchless opportunity to step out in faith—trembling as we go—to give nurture and direction to God’s people, to help them on their journeys of faith. No task set before us as Christians is more important.

It is also a responsibility—a somewhat daunting responsibility—because stepping out to lead is not easy. Discerning and measuring our faith community’s “fidelity to the Word of God” is an awesome task.

Every person who gets a call from a nominating committee needs to confront some essential questions: Am I suited to this task? Can I do it? Do I really want to do it? Let’s be honest: all who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to ministry, but not all of us are called to be ruling elders, just as not all of us are called to be teaching elders or deacons.

Challenges for Ruling Elders

A critical problem in the church today is that we have allowed the role of ruling elder to be diminished. It has changed from the awesome task of measuring a
congregation’s fidelity to the Word of God into the mundane task of serving on just another nonprofit board of directors, receiving reports and approving budgets.

The session is not just another board of directors. Every nominating committee needs to make that clear to potential ruling elders. The problem is that a nominating committee all too often feels pressure to fill a certain number of slots, so it glosses over what it really means to be a ruling elder in order to persuade someone to serve. We need to be crystal clear with candidates about the commitments that comes with being a ruling elder: a time commitment, a leadership commitment, and a spiritual commitment.

Being a ruling elder means much more than attending a meeting on the day of the month the session meets. Ruling elders need to be willing to take risks, to accept the fact that we will sometimes make decisions with which others disagree. Ruling elders need to be willing to confront dysfunction and dysfunctional people and need to be willing to accept that some dysfunction, to a greater or lesser degree, lurks in every congregation. Ruling elders need to be able to set aside their own predilections and preferences and instead ask, “What is best for this community of faith, even if I might not like it?”

Ruling elders need to be spiritual leaders in their congregation. This is our high calling. We need to be able to provide pastoral sustenance to the members of our community, to lead worship, and to preach as needed. We need to be confident enough about all of this so that we don’t fall back on the easy assumption that the pastor—the teaching elder—does all the “spiritual” stuff; because we ruling elders are as responsible for our congregation as are teaching elders.

Ruling elders also are called to be leaders not only in our congregations but throughout our connectional system: at presbytery, synod, and GA. Ruling elders often view presbytery as a somewhat mysterious “them.” The active involvement and leadership of ruling elders in presbytery can transform the amorphous “them” into a dynamic “us”—an “us” that will enable our strengths and resources to be shared imaginatively and creatively across all our congregations. Our presbyteries, synods, and GA function at their best when all ruling elders, not just so called presbytery “geeks” or GA “junkies,” bring their insights and experience to the table.

Following Jesus is life-changing. But following Jesus is not easy, and it can’t be done alone: one person can’t do it alone; one congregation can’t do it alone. We follow Jesus together as a community of faith, coming together with all our strengths and weaknesses. Those of us who have accepted the privilege and responsibility of serving as ruling elders walk alongside every person who makes that life-changing commitment. We say to them, “I will be there with you every step of the way.” And we find ourselves given strength for the journey. Thanks be to God.

About the Writer

Cindy Bolbach is an attorney in Arlington, Virginia, and an elder at the First Presbyterian Church, Arlington. She currently serves as Co-Moderator of the Form of Government Task Force and has been endorsed by National Capital Presbytery as a candidate for Moderator of the 219th General Assembly (2010).
“Can-Do”
Winning Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAN’T</th>
<th>CAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We’ve never done it before</td>
<td>We have the opportunity to be first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s too complicated</td>
<td>Let’s look at it from a different angle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We don’t have the resources</td>
<td>Necessity is the Mother of invention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will never work</td>
<td>We’ll give it a try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s not enough time</td>
<td>We’ll re-evaluate some priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We already tried it</td>
<td>We learned from the experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s no way it’ll work</td>
<td>We can make it work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s a waste of time</td>
<td>Think of the possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s a waste of money</td>
<td>The investment will be worth it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We don’t have the expertise</td>
<td>Let’s network with those who do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We can’t compete</td>
<td>We’ll get a jump on the competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our congregation won’t go for it</td>
<td>Let’s show them the opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s good enough</td>
<td>There is always room for improvement!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We don’t have enough money</td>
<td>Maybe there’s something we can cut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’re understaffed</td>
<td>We’re a lean, mean machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We don’t have enough room</td>
<td>Temporary space may be an option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will never fly</td>
<td>We’ll never know until we try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We don’t have the equipment</td>
<td>Maybe we can sub it out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not going to be any better</td>
<td>We’ll try it one more time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It can be done</td>
<td>It’ll be a challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one communicates</td>
<td>Let’s open the channels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isn’t it time to go home?</td>
<td>Days go so quickly around here!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have any idea</td>
<td>I’ll come up with some alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let somebody else deal with it</td>
<td>I’m ready to learn something new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’re always changing direction</td>
<td>We’re in touch with our community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s too radical a change</td>
<td>Let’s take a chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It takes too long for approval</td>
<td>We’ll walk it through the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our congregation won’t buy it</td>
<td>We’ll do better at educating them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our congregation is the wrong size</td>
<td>We’re perfect for this project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It doesn’t fit us</td>
<td>We should look at it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s contrary to policy</td>
<td>ANYTHING’S POSSIBLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not my job</td>
<td>I’ll be glad to take the responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I CAN’T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>