

## **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Congregations**

*The Book of Order has specific things to say about the responsibilities of congregations and sessions of the Presbyterian Church (USA). These selected citations specific mandated practices. However, they are not intended to be a check list but a guide as a part of Presbytery's COM work when it approaches, encourages and supports smaller congregations as they make decisions about their future.*

### **Introduction**

#### *G-1.0101 The Mission of the Congregation*

The congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context. The triune God gives to the congregation all the gifts of the gospel necessary to being the Church. The congregation is the basic form of the church, but it is not of itself a sufficient form of the church. Thus congregations are bound together in communion with one another, united in relationships of accountability and responsibility, contributing their strengths to the benefit of the whole, and are called, collectively, the church.

#### *G-1.0103 Governed by the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

A "congregation," as used in this Form of Government, refers to a formally organized community chartered and recognized by a presbytery as provided in this Constitution. Each congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be governed by this Constitution. The members of a congregation put themselves under the leadership of the session and the higher councils (presbytery, synod, and General Assembly). The session is responsible to guide and govern the life of the congregation. The session leads the congregation in fulfilling its responsibilities for the service of all people, for the building up of the whole church, and for the glory of God.

### **Congregation Responsibilities**

**1. Hold an annual meeting of the congregation called by the session.**

"The congregation shall hold an annual meeting..." G-1.0502

**2. Elect the committee to nominate ruling elders and deacons and receive their nominations.**

"Ruling elders and deacons shall be nominated by a committee election by the congregation... Congregations may provide by their own rule for a congregational nominating committee." G-2.0401

**3. Elect ruling elders, deacons and trustees.**

"electing ruling elders, deacons, and trustees" G-1.0504a.

“Ruling elders and deacons shall be elected to serve terms of no more than three years...may be eligible for reelection according to congregational rule. G-2.0404  
“...no ruling elder or deacon shall be eligible to serve more than six consecutive years...” G-2.0404

**4. Request the presbytery to grant an exemption of elder and deacon term limits.**

“requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption...” G-1.0504e.  
“The presbytery may, upon written request and by majority vote, grant a congregation a waiver of this limitation on terms.” G-2.0404

**5. Maintain incorporation status with the State.**

“Where permitted by civil law, each congregation shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained...” G-4.0101

**Session Responsibilities**

**1. The Session shall meet at least quarterly.**

“The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly.” G-3.0203

**2. Elect a clerk of session to a specific term.**

“Each council shall elect clerk...” G-3.0104  
“The clerk of session shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such a term as it may determine.” G-3.0104

**3. Elect a treasurer to a specific term.**

“The session shall elect a treasurer for such as term as the session shall decide and shall supervise his or her work...” G-3.0205

**4. Prepare and adopt a budget.**

“the session shall prepare and adopt a budget and determine the distribution of the congregation’s benevolences.” G-3.0205

**5. Arrange for annual financial review.**

“A full financial review of all financial books and records shall be conducted every year....” G-3.0113

**6. Maintain Session Minutes.**

“Each council shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings...” G-3.0107  
“They shall contain the minutes of all meeting of the congregation ...” G-3.0204

**7. Maintain Membership Roll and Registers.**

“There shall be rolls of baptized, active, and affiliate members...” G-3.0204a.

“There shall be registers of baptisms, authorized by the session, of ruling elders and deacons, of installed pastors with dates of service, and other registers as the session may deem necessary.” G-3.0204b.

**8. Annually review the roll of active members.**

“reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership” G-3.0201c.

**9. Adopt and implement constitutionally required policies.**

“...a sexual misconduct policy, a harassment policy, a child and youth protection policy, and an antiracism policy. Each council’s policy shall include requirements for boundary training which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse prevention training for its members at least every thirty-six months.” G-3.0106

**10. Obtain property and liability insurance.**

“Each council shall obtain property and liability insurance coverage to protect its facilities, programs, staff and elected and appointed officers.” G-3.0221

**11. Work with presbytery to review and possibly renew a temporary pastoral relationship**

“...the session, with the approval of presbytery, may obtain the services of a minister of the Word and Sacrament, candidate or ruling elder in a temporary pastoral relationship” G-2.0504b.

“...a temporary pastor relationship is invited for a specified period not to exceed twelve months in length, which is renewable with the approval of presbytery.” G-2.0502b.

A Commissioned ruling elder “...commission shall also specify the term of service, which shall not exceed three years but shall be renewable.” G-2.1001

**12. Provide session minutes and records to presbytery for review**

“Each council (presbytery) shall review annually...lower councils (sessions) within its jurisdiction..” G-3.0108a.

**13. Provide that the Lord’s Supper is celebrated at least quarterly.**

“...authorizing the celebration of the Lord’s Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate” G-3.0201b.

**14. Participate in other councils of the church**

“Sessions have a particular responsibility to participate in the life of the whole church through participation in other councils.” G-3.0202

**15. Elect commissioners to presbytery**

“elect, as commissioners to presbytery, ruling elders from the congregation, preferably for at least a year, and receive their reports;” G-3.0202a.

**16. Welcome visits from the presbytery**

“welcome representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits;” G-3.0202d.

**17. Send to presbytery and General Assembly requested statistics**

“send to presbytery and General Assembly requested statistics and other information according to the requirements of those bodies, as well as voluntary financial contributions.” G-3.0202f.