

A Guide
to
**A Manual of
Administrative
Operations**



**The Presbytery of
DONEGAL**

for Sessions of
the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Presbytery of Donegal
2015

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Introduction:

The 2013-15 Book of Order mandated that “Every Council¹ shall develop a manual of administrative operations that will specify the form and guide the work of mission in that council.” (G-3.0106) This guide has been developed to assist sessions of the constituent congregations of the Presbytery of Donegal, and especially, the clerks of session, to comply with this mandate.

Our concept of a manual of administrative operations (MAO) is that it should include all the information needed to help either a new ruling elder or a newly called teaching elder (pastor) to function effectively in the ongoing ministry of the congregation they serve. While many things will be similar across most congregations, other facets of “life together” will be particular to the specific situations.

At the outset, most manuals will want to acknowledge that the work of the congregation is done (a) as part of God’s Mission (F-1.01) but also (b) within the framework of three higher human authorities:

- The U.S. Constitution and Federal Laws;
- The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the state laws codified in Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes
- The constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), especially Part II, *Book of Order*.

This guide begins with a discussion of the most general foundational documents of a congregation and moves through documents of increasing specificity until reaching examples of procedures for particular committees or entities within the church. It is recommended that the MAO for a session be organized in a similar fashion—from high level general documents to the most specific. A *session’s Manual of Administrative Operations* should include most of the following content. A few of the following may not be pertinent to the ministry and context of every congregation.

¹ Councils are the session, the presbytery, the synod, and the General Assembly.

FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENTS

ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION: The *Book of Order* provides for a congregation to be incorporated in G-1.0201; Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes describes the process for not-for-profit organizations, including religious bodies, to be incorporated in Title 15, Section 5306. Because of the expense and difficulty of changing anything in the Articles of Incorporation, it is recommended that they be as general as possible and only include the minimum required by the state. If not included in the *Manual of Administrative Operations*, the clerk of session and the pastor should know the location of and have access to this document.

BY-LAWS: By-laws should contain the minimal information needed to define the primary characteristics of the particular church and prescribes how it functions. It includes all rules that are considered so important that they cannot be changed or suspended easily. *Robert's Rules of order, Newly Revised, 11th Edition* (p. 13) recommends the following:

1. Name of the organization
2. Its Object
3. Members
4. Officers
5. Meetings
6. Executive Board (if needed)
7. Committees
8. Parliamentary Authority

Most sessions will choose to include the church's by-laws in the Manual of Administrative Operations for ease of reference.

MISSION STATEMENT: Chapter One (F-1.01—F-1.04) of the *Book of Order* describes "The Mission of the Church" in broad terms and G-1.0101 describes "The Mission of the Congregation" in generalities. However, each congregation should have its own Mission Statement that describes how it engages in the mission of God in its particular context. Such a Mission Statement provides a beacon to guide the ministries of all in the congregation. The mission statement may be reviewed and revised by the congregation as its community changes and as it perceives God's call to undertake other forms of ministry. The current Mission Statement is a critical part of any *Manual of Administrative Operations*.

ORGANIZATIONAL DOCUMENTS

PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY: The *Book of Order* mandates that "Meeting 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 the Constitution of the PCUSA (G-3.0105). Note, however, that the same paragraph provides that "Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body." This means that a session is not limited to doing everything through parliamentary procedure; the session can agree to use another process of discernment in processing a proposal or issue before them. At the completion of the discernment process, session would revert to

parliamentary procedure to confirm and record a decision. It is wise for the *Manual of Administrative Operations* to describe the process that will be used to reach a decision.

STANDING RULES: Standing rules might be thought of as the ground rules for the administration of the particular body, e.g., the session, rather than for the parliamentary process to be followed. Standing rules provide more detail than do the by-laws and can be more easily changed by a majority vote of the body, or suspended for a particular meeting. Standing rules include “housekeeping” functions such as the time at which meetings begin, or the location of the meetings, as well as process questions such as whether an electronic recorder is used by the clerk as an aid toward more accurate minutes.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

CONGREGATION: A description of the membership, how admitted, and their ministry as outlined in G-1.03-.04. It should include congregational meetings, their timing, and the business on which the congregation may act (G-1.05) and the way in which members will be notified of a meeting. Specifying how the congregational nominating committee is to be formed is required (G-2.0401).

SESSION: A description of the composition and responsibilities of the Session (G-3.0201--0205), how often and where it meets, the number needed for a quorum, and a provision for choosing commissioners to the Presbytery. The way in which members will be notified of any special meetings should be specified.

DEACONS: A congregation may choose to have a board of deacons; to commission individual deacons to a particular ministry; or to not use the ministry of deacons (G-2.0202). If the congregation has deacons, the *Manual of Administrative Operations* should describe the number and responsibilities of the board or individual deacons, including duties delegated to them by the session. The ministry of deacons is under the supervision and authority of the session.

TRUSTEES: *Pennsylvania Statutes, Title 15, Chapter 1503* provides for the incorporation of religious bodies. Therefore, every congregation in Donegal Presbytery should be incorporated and have a board of trustees. The normative situation in PCUSA congregations is for the ruling elders on the session to also serve as the trustees of the corporation. The corporation may, however, choose to have a separate board of trustees elected by the congregation in the same manner as the election of deacons and ruling elders. The *Manual of Administrative Operations* should describe which pattern has been chosen by the particular congregation, the composition of the board and how the officers of the corporation are chosen. The powers and duties of the trustees are described in G-4.0101 and the limitations on the disposition of church property in G-4.0201--0208. The ministry of any separate board of trustees is under the supervision and authority of the session.

COMMITTEES: Much of the work that is done within a Presbyterian church is done by a committee or commission. G-3.0109 states that “Councils [i.e., the Session] may designate by their own rule such committees and commissions as they deem necessary and helpful for the accomplishment of the mission of the church....” The *Manual of Administrative Operations* should provide a comprehensive list of all committees active within the life of the congregation. For each committee there should be a description of the scope of its responsibility and whether it is, in actuality, a commission, i.e., empowered to consider and conclude matters referred to it by the Session.

ORGANIZATION CHART: Although not required, an organization chart showing the relationships among the several boards, committees, and staff members can provide a helpful visual representation of who works with whom.

POLICIES

Fulfilling the responsibilities of a Session as outlined in G-3.0201 will often require the development and adoption of policies to guide the ministry and operation of a particular church. Such policies may be amended or revoked by action of the session. A session may delegate to a board of deacons or a board of trustees (if any) the responsibility for developing policies within the scope of their particular area(s) of ministry.

POLICIES REQUIRED BY THE *BOOK OF ORDER*

The PCUSA has included in the *Book of Order* a mandate to each session to adopt and implement a policy in each of the following areas:

- **Sexual Misconduct Prevention:** (G-3.0106) All levels of the church must have a policy that identifies behaviors that are considered sexual misconduct and the steps that will be taken if such behaviors are alleged (D-10.0103). All councils are urged to implement a training program to help prevent sexual misconduct from occurring.

Every Session is urged to adopt and implement the Presbytery of Donegal’s Model Policy on Sexual Misconduct as its own.

- **Child Protection:** G-3.0106 also requires all councils to adopt and implement a child protection program. In addition, Pennsylvania state law provides for background clearances for all who work with children and, further, mandates the reporting of suspected child abuse by all clergy and most church employees.

Every Session is urged to adopt and implement the Presbytery of Donegal’s Model Policy on Child Protection as its own.

- **Preservation of Records:** The Clerk of Session is mandated to recommend to the session a plan for the permanent safekeeping of session records (G-3.0107). It is advisable for a session to also make provision for the safe-keeping of other church documents and artifacts of its life and witness over the years.

POLICIES FOR THE GOOD ORDER AND SMOOTH FUNCTIONING OF A CHURCH

Many sessions and congregations have found it wise to have explicit policies about common facets of their life together. Among the areas for which it is useful to have a written policy are:

- **Building Use:** As part of its responsibility for “managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission” (G-3.0201c), a session should provide clear guidance regarding who may use church property, for what purposes, and under what conditions, including fees.
- **Personnel:** As part of its responsibility for “employing the administrative staff of the congregation” (G-3.0201c), a session should establish a policy detailing the terms of employment, including job descriptions for each position, expected behavior, compensation and benefits, accountability, and grounds for dismissal. Those serving in a staff position for which certification is available should be encouraged to “meet, or be prepared to meet the certification requirements in a handbook provided by a national certifying body approved by the General Assembly. (G-2.1101--.1102)

Persons in a pastoral or Christian educator relationship to the congregation are accountable to both the presbytery and to the congregation (G-2.0503a (4), G-2.1103). Session shall ensure that the terms of call for such persons meet or exceed the minimum requirements for compensation and benefits established by the presbytery. Session should develop a policy regarding regular review and accountability meetings with such persons.

- **Church Finances:** The financial resources of a congregation reflect the tithes and gifts that present and past members have returned to God in gratitude for God’s gracious gifts to humankind. Consequently, Session has both a moral obligation and a fiduciary duty to ensure that all financial transactions are carried out in a transparent and accountable fashion. A clear policy, based on the requirements in G-3.0113 and G-3.0205, is a necessity. A session may delegate some or all of these responsibilities to a board of deacons or trustees.
- **Special Fund Raising:** As part of its responsibility for “encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources” (G-3.0201c), a session should provide clear guidance regarding if and when it is appropriate to permit a fund-raising effort for a particular mission or program.

- **Social Media:** The growing use of the Internet and related forms of electronic communication have opened a wide range of opportunities for communication both within a congregation and with those who may be interested in learning about the congregation. However, these tools may also be miss-used in ways that hurt individuals and hurt the witness of the congregation. Sessions should have clear policies about the appropriate use of these tools.
- **Security:** As part of its responsibility to manage the physical property (G-3.0201c), a session should have a policy regarding access to various portions of the church property and to the contents of the property, including confidential information about members or other persons, e.g., a pastor's counseling notes. The growing use of electronic communications and storage suggests that a session should develop a policy regarding cyber-security that covers both the protection of confidential information and files stored electronically, and the practices, e.g., passwords, to avoid the unauthorized use of computers, Wi-Fi networks, or other electronic gear.
- **Weddings:** Although the use of church property for a marriage ceremony falls under the broader rubric of Building Use, some sessions may choose to develop a policy specific to this use. Because a marriage ceremony held on church property is a service of Christian worship, the session has the authority and responsibility to supervise it (W-1.4004e, W-4.9003-.9004).
- **Vehicle Use:** Because automobiles and vans are frequently used in the ministry of a congregation, it is advisable for a session to develop a policy that covers both vehicles owned by the congregation and those owned by volunteers. Issues of who may drive congregational vehicles and for what purposes should be defined; if vehicles owned by volunteers are to be used in the ministry, minimum requirements for age of driver and insurance coverage should be specified. Particular attention should be paid to the restrictions imposed by Pennsylvania law on drivers under the age of 18.

PROCEDURES

To help create a non-anxious atmosphere in the life of a congregation, it is helpful to have written procedures for things that occur regularly. The following are some of the areas that many congregations find it useful to have written directions or guidelines. Some of them may not be appropriate to your congregation and there may be other areas where you have found the need for a set of procedures. The procedures may be documented as appendices to the *Manual of Administrative Operations*—indicating the relative ease with which a procedure may be modified.

- **Preparation of the Sacraments:** One of the key responsibilities of the session is to “provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received” (G-3.0201b). This responsibility is exercised

in accordance with the principles of the *Directory for Worship*, esp. W-2.3000 and W-2.4000. The task of making preparation for the celebration of baptism or the Lord's Supper may be delegated to the Deacons or a committee of Session. A clear set of instructions helps ensure that the sacraments are celebrated in an orderly and worshipful way.

- **Welcoming and Ushering:** The manner in which people arriving for a worship service are greeted and welcomed has an important role in shaping the perception that a congregation is “friendly” –or not. The number, location, and other responsibilities, i.e., checking heat and ventilation, should be clearly articulated for those serving as greeters and/or ushers.
- **Receiving the Offering:** It is important that offerings be collected and presented in a manner that maintains a worshipful atmosphere in the service. To do this detailed instructions are helpful; describing the number of people involved, the portions of the sanctuary for which they are responsible, and the manner in which the collected offerings are presented as a response to God's grace.
- **Supporting those who are differently abled:** As a sign of the church's commitment to the full inclusion of all God's people, the leaders, greeters, ushers, etc. need clear guidance regarding the accommodations that are available, e.g., hearing assistance, elevators or ramps, space for wheelchairs, large print copies of the Order of Worship.
- **Use of the Church Kitchen:** Virtually every Presbyterian congregation enjoys fellowship over food—yet stress frequently develops over how the church kitchen or other preparation area is used. It is important to have clear guidelines about the designated location and use of equipment, safety procedures, clean-up of utensils, dishes, and cutlery, storage of food, and the disposal of garbage and trash, etc.
- **Audio/Visual Support:** Increasingly congregations make use of a variety of technologies for sound amplification, image projections, recording of services, etc. It is important to have clear directions and guidelines for the operation and maintenance of such equipment, including designated operators and/or trouble-shooters.
- **Bulletin Boards, Websites, and Social Media:** There is an ongoing need for the session, committees, and other groups in the church to communicate with the friends and members of the congregation as well as with the community and prospective worshipers. Documenting the authority and responsibility for maintaining and updating various means of communications helps to ensure that accurate current information is accessible to all who are interested.

10-1-15

- **Calendar of Annual Actions:** There are many actions or events that are mandated by state law, the *Book of Order*, or the congregation's bylaws. Moderators, clerks, and session members find it useful to have these documented in one place as a guide for calling meetings, creating dockets, etc.

CURRENT INFORMATION

It is very convenient to include in The Manual of Administrative Operations the current contact information for members of Session, the board of Deacons, the board of Trustees (if any); staff members, the chairs of committees and other leaders in the life of the congregation.