



The Presbytery of
DONEGAL

Clerk of Session Manual

Clerk Manual Introduction

Welcome

Welcome to this important ministry of your congregation! We are grateful for your service and look forward to the partnership in ministry the develops as you fulfill this vital function. You have joined a unique and important group of people within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In the Presbyterian Church (USA), every council has a moderator and a clerk. (G-3.0104) Clerks of Presbyteries, Synods, and the General Assembly are called Stated Clerks. Those serving Sessions are called Clerks of Session.

The Handbook for Clerks of Session is written for clerks by clerks as a guide to the responsibilities of the Clerk of Session. It is offered with the conviction that:

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. (G-1.01)

The Clerk serves in a particular way towards and for the mission of God for the healing of God’s world. Thank you for taking on this task.

Clerk Duties

Each council shall elect a clerk who shall record the transactions of the council, keep its rolls of membership and attendance, maintain any required registers, preserve its records, and furnish extracts from them when required by another council of the church. Such extracts, verified by the clerk, shall be evidence in any council of the church. The clerk of the session shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine. (G-3.0104)

Clerks have particular duties – some of which are shared among all clerks. Many clerks also have unique duties, depending on the local congregation and the gifts of the moderator with whom they are working.

All Clerks:

- Maintain the records of the Church (G-3.0107)
- Session Minutes (G-3.0204)
- Congregational Meeting Minutes (G-1.0505)

- Rolls and Registers (G-3.0204a, b)
- Assist the Session in producing and maintaining key policies of the congregation
- Manual of Administrative Operations (G-3.0106)
- Sexual Misconduct Policy and Child Protection Policy (G-3.0106)
- Evidence of property and liability insurance
- Keep this information secure and readily available for use by:
 - The Pastor (G-3.0201)
 - Higher Councils of the Church (G-3.0202)

Many Clerks have other duties, depending on their location. These can include:

- Preserve the records of the Board of Deacons and the Board of Trustees
- Inform the Session and Congregation of Special Meetings
- Complete the Annual Statistical Form
- Bring all official correspondence to the attention of the Session and Pastor
- Respond to questions of parliamentary procedure
- Communicate with other governing bodies
- Assist in creating the agenda for Session meetings
- Assist in church officer training
- Remind moderator of required annual actions of the Session
- Prepare a statement of Session highlights for the newsletter
- Other duties as assigned

Being a Clerk can be a demanding vocation. It has a substantive impact on the life and ministry of a congregation. As you undertake this task, we want to encourage you with these words:

Christ Calls and Equips the Church

Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills.

(F-1.0202)

God bless you in your ministry.

A Suggested Calendar of Annual Clerk of Session and Session Duties

Annually

- Bylaws, Manual of Administrative Operations, liability and property insurance, sexual misconduct policy, child protection policy, audit/financial review should be reviewed. Such documents may be considered for amendment and/or used to assess areas of improvement toward the successful functioning of the ministry.
- A completed *Annual Statement-Non-Profit Corporation* form is submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of State Bureau of Corporations and Charitable Organizations. Alternatively, a decennial filing is made, however this costs money whereas the annual statement is free of charge.

Every Month

- Clerk of Session
 - A report is given detailing correspondence, baptisms performed, communions celebrated, and weddings or funerals the clergy have conducted, or which have taken place at the church building since the previous meeting
 - A draft of minutes of the last meeting is written and distributed for correction and approval by Session; the approved minutes are entered into the permanent minute book
 - The Roll Book is updated with new members, transfers, baptisms, deaths, weddings, and ordinations.
- Session
 - The draft of the minutes from the last meeting is corrected and/or approved.
 - Any pending requests for baptisms or weddings to take place on church property are addressed

January-February

- Clerk of Session
 - Required at this time - The statistical report is submitted to the General Assembly (Due early February).
 - Required at this time – The necrology report, which details ruling elders who have entered the Church Triumphant in the previous year, is submitted to Presbytery before the first Presbytery meeting of the year.
 - In the event of a minister's significant (5, 10, 20, etc.) ordination anniversary or a significant anniversary of the minister's time of service to the congregation, a letter will be sent from the Presbytery to the Clerk of Session. October is a good time to celebration this as a congregation.

March-May

- Clerk of Session
 - Required at this time – The Clerk participates in the Donegal Presbytery Minute Review (April or May)

➤ Session

- The Sexual Misconduct and Child Protection Policies of the congregation may be reviewed for content and implementation.
- An audit of volunteers needing to renew, or secure clearances may be conducted.

June-July

➤ Clerk of Session

- A report may be submitted to the nominating committee detailing officers whose terms are ending and if they are eligible for another term. (depending on timing of terms)

September-October

➤ Session

- An annual stewardship letter may be sent to families of the congregation asking for pledges to inform the budget writing process.
- The budget writing process begins (depending on timing of budget calendar).

November-December

➤ Clerk of Session

- Required at this time - The coming year's shared proportional (per capita) commitment form is submitted to Donegal Presbytery.
- Required at this time – The PC(USA) Research Services' Clerk's Annual Questionnaire (CAQ) is completed online.
- The clerk serves as secretary for the annual congregational meeting (G-1.0505).

➤ Session

- Required at this time - A plan for disbursement of shared proportional (per capita) funds to Donegal Presbytery is approved.
- A request may be made that members contribute to the payment of the shared proportional (per capita) obligation.
- The budget for the coming year finalized and approved.
- The annual congregational/corporate meeting may be scheduled to elect officers (if officers are beginning terms in January), receive budget, approve pastoral terms of call for coming year (G-1.0501, G-1.0503).
- After new officers are elected the Session provides elders and deacons elect with a period of study and preparation (G-2.0402). (It is advisable that a course of formal training for those undertaking ordered ministries be developed and/or adopted by each Session).

➤ Other

- The nominating Committee completes slate of officers for presentation in the call for the congregational meeting (G-2.0401) (if officers are beginning terms in January).

December-January

➤ Clerk of Session

- Required at this time - The statistical report for the General Assembly is completed so that session can approve it before it is submitted.
- Required at this time – The mission pledge form is submitted to Donegal Presbytery.
- The clerk may write a submission for the annual report of the congregation.

➤ Session

- Commissioner(s) to the presbytery are elected for the coming year (G-3.0202a).
- The dates of celebration of the Lord's Supper for the coming year, the methods for celebration, and who will assume organizational responsibility on particular dates may be approved and scheduled.
- Required at this time – A decision is made on the congregation's commitment to mission support for Donegal Presbytery, Synod of the Trinity, and General Assembly for the coming year.
- Committee and Board Chairs write reports for the annual report of the congregation.
- Those elected to the ordered ministries of elder and deacon may be examined (G-2.0402) and a service of ordination and/or installation may be scheduled (G-2.0403).
- If the elders serve as trustees of the corporation (G-4.0102) corporate officers including a President, Treasurer (G-3.0205), and Secretary may be elected/appointed.

Session Minutes

The goal is to produce an accurate, informative record of proceedings which can be of use to the congregation, other councils of the Church, and generations that will follow after us. The Minutes are also the official document of the actions of the Session for legal and ecclesiastical purposes.

General Guidance:

Each clerk must use her or his own best discretion about what and how much information is included in the minutes.

Discussion, unless imperative to the understanding of the decision, is not to be included, nor are the names of those seconding motions.

Minutes of each session meeting must include:

1. Whether the meeting is a regular (stated) or special (called) meeting.
2. The name of the church, the place, date and time of the meeting.
3. The name of the moderator of the meeting.
4. The opening and closing of each meeting with prayer.
5. The roll -- listing elders present, elders absent and any who are excused; the clerk, moderator and other staff present or excused; others present and their identity. (Please use first and last names.)
6. The affirmation of a quorum (G-3.0203). The session or the bylaws of the congregation set the quorum for the session. A suggested quorum of the session might be the pastor or other presiding officer and one third of the elders or a specific percentage. Your Session's rule might even (for the reception and dismissing of members) set the quorum as the moderator and two members of the session as it was in the in the *Book of Order* prior to 2011. Unless the quorum is lost during the meeting, the Clerk's certification of a quorum at the beginning meets this requirement; if the quorum is lost, the minutes should report that the Clerk advised Session and its Moderator of that fact.
7. The approval of the agenda. (In case of a special meeting, the call to the meeting stating the purpose becomes the agenda.)
8. The approval of the minutes of the previous meeting. (Any corrections of previous meeting minutes may be listed, or the minutes may be considered as a draft until the corrections are made and the minutes are approved.)
9. Clerk's report: may include correspondence, announcements, and report of the serving of the Lord's Supper, in addition to listing of baptisms, marriages, changes in membership rolls.
10. Reports of pastor, other staff, and the treasurer and committee chairpersons may be summarized in the minutes. A carefully selected inclusion makes the minutes a more valuable historical record

of the church. The clerk has wide discretion but should be sure that the inclusion represents the wishes of the session. Often the person giving the report reviews that section related to his/her report for clarification or that person provides their section of the minutes.

11. All motions and amendments, if any, and whether they passed or failed. (Details of discussion should not be recorded, except when needed to give a sense of the action.) **Please ignore anything you have been told to the effect that failed motions do not need to be recorded; you are to record the disposition of ALL motions.**
12. Be especially careful and diligent in recording all actions taken to hire, compensate, evaluate, discipline, or terminate non-ordained staff.
13. When a previous action of the session is referred to, the page on which it is recorded, or the date of the meeting at which it occurred, should be designated.

When appropriate, include the following:

1. The prior authorization by the Session of the celebration of the Lord's Supper (W-2.4012). Note: The administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper must be reported at the next succeeding regular meeting. When the sacrament has been administered to those unable to attend public worship, the name of the minister officiating and the name of the elder or elders assisting should be noted.
2. The prior authorization by the Session of each Baptism (W-2.3011). The administration of the Sacrament of Baptism at the next succeeding regular meeting, giving the full name of adults baptized; the record of infants baptized, noting the name of the child, date of birth, and the names of the parents or the one rightly exercising parental responsibility (W-2.3014).
3. The full name of applicants for church membership and the manner of their reception:
 - i. By profession of faith, previously baptized
 - ii. By profession of faith and baptism
 - iii. By re-affirmation of faith
 - iv. By letter of transfer, giving the name of the church from which received
4. The full title of the church to which a certificate of transfer is granted and the full name of the person transferred with the date of transfer.
5. Record the job descriptions for employed personnel, both clergy and non-clergy, as they are approved.
6. Name of elders elected to be commissioners to meetings of the Presbytery, and the exact period for which elected (G-3.0202).
7. Record that commissioner(s) to a Presbytery meeting made a report on that meeting to the session. The report may be summarized.

8. When the session finds it necessary to exercise discipline, the Form of Government and the Rules of Discipline should be carefully studied by a committee of the session and if discipline is to be administered, the minutes of the session must contain such a record of the proceedings, which will enable the Presbytery to know who was disciplined, why and how. In this situation, we highly recommend contacting the Stated Clerk of the presbytery for support and guidance.
9. In case of a sale, mortgage, gift or lease of property, the session records must show (in addition to the record of congregational approval as stated in G-1.0503d. & G-4.0101):
 - i. Name, address and legal description of the property
 - ii. Name of buyer/lessee
 - iii. Sale price
 - iv. Loan amount purpose and terms, including the name of the lender
 - v. Lease terms and liability insurance
 - vi. Concurrence of the Presbytery
10. If a report is received, note that in the minutes. If the report contains recommendations for actions, those become main motions of the body and are acted upon.
11. If the session endorses, approves, or otherwise adopts a report, or a policy they become the position of the adopting body. The full text of **adopted** reports and policies must be placed in the minutes. They may be added as attachments to the minutes.

Be sure the following are included each year:

1. Approval of the annual budget (and include budget itself in minutes).
2. Approval of the distribution of the church's benevolences.
3. The annual review with each pastor of the adequacy of compensation.
4. The recommendation to be made to the congregation for changes or for no change in the terms of call for each pastor.
5. The annual review by the personnel committee (or other responsible body appointed by the session) of the adequacy of compensation of all paid staff.
6. The training and examination of incoming officers. (G-2.0402)
7. The ordination and/or installation of elders and deacons at the next succeeding meeting.
8. The recognition of trustees (if any) at the next succeeding meeting.
9. That property and liability insurance has been obtained. (G-.0201)
10. An Annual Audit or Review of Financial Records (G-3.0113) and Annual Review of the work of the Deacons (if any) – G.2.0202.

Congregational Meetings

Minutes of Congregational Meeting

Minutes of all congregational meetings shall be included in the session record book along with session minutes in one chronological order. Minutes of these meetings shall include:

1. Indication of whether the meeting is “regular” or “special”, and if it is a “rolling” congregational meeting.
2. If it is a “special meeting,” the minutes shall include the call to the meeting. The business to be transacted is limited to those items listed in the call for the meeting. [G-1.0501]
3. Name of the church.
4. Date, time, and place of the meeting.
5. Name of the moderator or presiding officer.
6. Presence of a quorum. Indicate the number of active members needed to satisfy the quorum requirement [G-1.0501], and record the actual number of active members present. (Congregations shall provide by rule the quorum necessary to conduct business. The quorum must be specified in the bylaws of the congregation.)
7. Opening and closing of the meeting with prayer.
8. A record of all actions, whether adopted or not (bylaws should indicate that there is no voting by proxy and that *Robert’s Rules of Order* (latest edition – presently 11th published in 2011) will be used for parliamentary matters).
9. At a congregational meeting for the purpose of calling a pastor, in order for each person to be able to vote his/her conscience and to record the vote in case of remedial challenge, a written ballot must be used.
10. Action by the congregation on each pastor’s terms of call (this is done individually if there is more than one pastor).
11. Minutes of the meeting of the congregation or corporation at which the annual financial reports are made should indicate, at least:
 - a. Report of a full financial review of the financial records (G-3.0205)
 - b. A complete, itemized report of income and expenditures for the year
 - c. Provide the complete, itemized proposed budget adopted by the session for the coming year
 - d. Details of the status of loans from the General Assembly, Synod, or Presbytery, if any are outstanding

12. If the congregation does not approve the minutes before adjournment, session may approve the minutes at its next scheduled meeting (if this provision is part of the by-laws).
13. The clerk must attest (in ink) congregational meeting minutes. The moderator may also sign the minutes if the congregation has expressed its wish for him/her to do so.

Other notes about Congregational Meetings

1. An annual meeting of the congregation is required (G-1.0501). Special meetings must/shall be called by the Session when it deems it necessary; when requested in writing by one-fourth of the members on the active role; and when Session is directed by presbytery to call a meeting.
2. The nature of the business to be conducted governs the notice of meeting requirement. The *Book of Order* requires that “adequate public notice be given” and that the By-laws provide a “rule for minimum notification requirements” (G-1.0502). Ordinarily, two Sundays of notice, which may be written in the bulletin or made verbally, or both suffice – and the meeting can be held on the second Sunday. But when the purpose is to elect a pastor nominating committee, or to hear its report and vote on its candidate, a suggested notice requirement is at least ten (10) days including two Sundays.
3. Meetings of the congregation related to the pastor nominating committee are special meetings, and there are to be no other agenda items. Other special meetings may be called to consider matters related to the powers and responsibilities of the congregation (G- 1.0503), and will have limited agendas.
4. A congregational petition for the Session to call a congregational meeting, in addition to the requirement that it must be signed by one-fourth of the members on the active roll, must be called to consider one of the matters outlined in G-1.0503. If it is called to consider any matter outside the scope of this provision of the Form of Government, Session is to decline the petition, with full explanation.
5. If a quorum is not present as the meeting begins, notify the Moderator; the members present may recess and seek a quorum, or the Moderator may adjourn the meeting. If the meeting proceeds in the absence of a quorum, absolutely no votes are to be taken.
6. A rolling congregational meeting is one in which a church has two or more services on a day when a pastoral candidate is heard and will be voted upon, or an item of business is considered that cannot be amended. A vote is taken at each service when the congregational meetings take place. Votes will be kept in a locked box until the last congregational meeting and then counted together.

Rolls and Registers

Rolls

The Rolls of the church should contain information about those who are members of the local church. It is the responsibility of the Clerk of Session to maintain, or to oversee the maintenance of the Rolls as required in G-3.0204a. Names of members shall be placed upon, removed, or deleted from the rolls of the church only by order of the Session (G-3.0204a)

There shall be rolls of baptized, active, and affiliate members in accordance with G-1.0401, G- 1.0402 and G- 1.0403. The session shall delete names from the roll of the congregation upon the member's death, admission to membership in another congregation, ordination as Minister of Word and Sacrament (then you include the presbytery of membership), or renunciation of jurisdiction. The session may delete names from the roll of the congregation when a member so requests or has moved or otherwise ceased to participate actively in the work and worship of the congregation for a period of two years. The session shall seek to restore members to active participation and shall provide written notice before deleting names due to member inactivity.

Active Members

An **Active Member** is one who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into membership of the church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of the particular church, and participates in the church's work and worship.

Record name, date received into membership, and method of reception. Record date of removal from the particular role and whether by death, transfer to another church, (placed on another participants roll or inactive roll, if one is maintained), or removed.

Baptized Members

A **Baptized Member** is one who has received the Sacrament of Baptism but has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This includes adults who were baptized in that particular church who have not made a profession of faith and baptized children of active members or pastors related to the particular church. The 217th General Assembly issued a "clarification of meaning" to this definition to include children of active members who have been baptized in a Christian church (Trinity baptism) but who have not yet been received as Active Members (confirmed). Record the name, date of baptism (if known), church where Sacrament of Baptism occurred. Names should be removed from this roll when a profession of faith is made, or when the person moves from the community. Note: This may be one of the most important rolls your church maintains. If you are looking for who the future of your church is, the baptized member roll is the place to look. These are future active members of the congregation. What church doesn't want to grow? We also recommend you keep a list of potential members/visitors – but that list is not an official roll of the church and may be kept more informally.

Affiliate Members

An **Affiliate Member** is one who is an active member of another church of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the church of active membership is located. An example of an affiliate member would be a college student living in your community while attending school. Record name, date of affiliation, name of home church, date of renewal, date of return to home church.

(Note from the Stated Clerk: You may notice that there is **no inactive roll**, as there was in Books of Order prior to 2011. The session may choose to maintain an “other participant’s roll” or an “inactive roll.” If the session does maintain an inactive roll, then the rules for keeping an individual on that roll or for deleting such an individual should be determined by the session, recorded in the minutes of the session, and kept in a Manual of Administrative Operations. The former definition is this: *An inactive member of a particular church is one who does not participate in the church’s work and worship. An inactive member is entitled to all the rights and privileges of an active member except the right to speak in the meetings of the congregation and to vote and hold office.*)

Registers

Registers are historical records and need to be carefully maintained. It is the responsibility of the clerk of session to maintain or oversee the maintenance of registers as required in G-3.014 which says it is the duty of the Clerk to “maintain and required registers” (which would include “baptisms authorized by the session, ruling elders and deacons, installed pastors with dates of service and such other registers as the session may deem necessary”) G-3.02040.

Most Sessions maintain the following registers:

Marriages

Register of Marriages shall include marriages of members of the church, all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the church, and all marriages performed on church property.

Baptisms

Register of Infant and Adult Baptisms shall include name, parents’ names, and date of birth of those being baptized.

Ruling Elders (See note following Pastors)

Register of Ruling Elders shall include each elder’s name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.

Deacons (See note following Pastors)

Register of Deacons shall include each deacon's name, the name of the church in which each was ordained, date of ordination, terms of active service, and record of removals.

Pastors (Teaching Elders)

Register of Pastors shall include the names of Pastors, Co-Pastors, Associate Pastors, and Temporary pastoral relationships serving the church, with dates of service.

Note: For both Ruling Elders and Deacons, the Book of Order in G-2.0404 governs the Term of Service.

Advisory on “Electronic Meetings” and “Electronic Decisions” from the Executive Presbyter and Stated Clerk Donegal Presbytery

Increasingly, people are relying on electronic forms of communication to connect, share information, and talk with one another, and make decisions. There are a wide variety of ways to connect electronically – including email, web-boards, file sharing resources like Google Drive and Dropbox, online planning platforms like Smartsheet, Google Docs, Google Sheets, online learning platforms like Moodle and Blackboard, and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. There are ways to communicate via conference telephone calls, Skype, Zoom, and other online video meeting capabilities. There are direct phone calls and there is texting. Many people are connected to these means of communication for much of their lives through smartphones and mobile tablets. This is also a rapidly changing context with multiple options and an array of possibilities.

Naturally, this means that groups have a wide variety of choices when it comes to using technology for decision making. Often these options are new and unfamiliar. Sometimes there are some members of a group that have access to these options and other members of the group that do not. When boards of a congregation such as the Session, Diaconate, and Trustees, committees of the congregation, and the commissions and committees of the presbytery prepare to make decisions, there are a number of factors to consider when using technology in the decision-making process.

1. In all of this we recognize that the Church is a community. We value relationships and strive to care for one another.

In our Foundations for Presbyterian Polity, we state that

The Church is the body of Christ. Christ gives to the Church all the gifts necessary to be his body. The Church strives to demonstrate these gifts in its life as a community in the world (1 Cor. 12:27–28):

The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.

The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation.

The Church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.

The Church is to be a community of witness, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God’s transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord.

(F-1.0301)

In the midst of the meetings that occur, we value the people who are involved and the different perspectives that people bring. We want to create systems that connect people and unleash creativity. We want to have decision making processes that connect us to the Holy Spirit's purposes, and we want to utilize technology in faithful and life-giving ways when it comes to technology.

2. We are under the authority of the Book of Order when it comes to running meetings. The Book of Order states that

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. (G-3.0105)

The provision of Robert's Rules (when it comes to electronic meetings) is that there must be 'simultaneous aural communication.' (see below for the entire text from Robert's Rules). The goal is for the meeting to have the nature of a "deliberative body" so that the body can genuinely consider the decisions before it.

The Office of the General Assembly has released advice on this in the form of a "Constitutional Musing." It describes an action of the General Assembly where it is possible to take a vote on a matter electronically if there has been discussion beforehand.

Based on this information, we can provide the following advice.

1. It is important for the Session talk about its plans for decision making processes before a group is in the middle of making decisions. The Session should provide guidance for its own work and for groups within the congregation on how to utilize technology in their decision making.
2. You cannot conduct a **meeting** through email.
3. You cannot take an official vote via email unless there has been provision for deliberation prior to the email vote. You also must make provision for this in your governing documents (by-laws or Manual of Administrative Operations).
4. If you make a decision via email, it is then noted in the next minutes. It is NOT ratified, as this would mean that the decision is not final until the session meeting, and this creates confusion about when the decision is actually made. Below are the Presbytery's rules in regards to these matters.
5. We advise against making anything but the most routine decisions via email. (And even this can be very tricky because what is "routine" to one person is not routine to another.)

6. In general, the more complex an issue, the more important it is to be face-to-face. (And what seems simple and obvious to one person can seem complex to another, which makes it very important to discuss communication and process before making decisions.)
7. File sharing and online platforms can be a great way to share resources and make sure that an entire group has access to the most up to date information. These can be an excellent place to gather suggestions and to track updates to a project.
8. It is possible for someone to participate in a meeting via phone, Skype, or other electronic means. Permission for electronic participation in meetings is required to be included in your by-laws or your Manual of Administrative Operations.
9. Conference call meetings are challenging and require a high level of skill from the moderator and participants.
10. The Presbytery of Donegal has a subscription conference call service. For brief session meetings (10 minutes or less), this can be used. For meetings longer than 10 minutes, the Presbytery will bill the session for the service.

Donegal Presbytery Rules regarding Electronic Meetings and Digital Decisions

The following rules regarding electronic meetings and digital communications are adopted for all presbytery committees, commissions, task groups and teams.

1. Every Presbytery Committee, Commission, Team and Task Group should decide on the methods by which they will conduct electronic meetings and digital communications.
2. Except where specifically prohibited, meetings of commissions, committees, teams, and task forces may be conducted as an electronic meeting, in whole or in part, without the participants being physically present in the same place.
3. Electronic meetings may be conducted via a phone conference call platform for voice communication or through Zoom, Skype or other video conference platform for voice and visual communication.
4. The presbytery maintains subscriptions to both aural conference call and video platform conference systems for the use of presbytery groups. These services are also available to congregations by prior arrangement with the presbytery office. The key factor that defines an electronic meeting is that all participants must have the opportunity for simultaneous communication.
5. Commissions, committees and teams, and task forces of the Presbytery of Donegal may take action required or permitted to be taken at a meeting with like effect between meetings of the entity, provided that every member is contacted either in person or via email and no member objects. If contacted via email, verification must consist of an email reply stating “no objection,” or words to that effect. If any member objects or wishes to have discussion on the motion, then a special face-to-face or electronic meeting is required to take the action. Discussion via email in lieu of a meeting is not sufficient. Action via email, if taken, shall be recorded in the minutes of the next meeting of the entity as an action taken by unanimous consent between meetings in accordance with the rules. Electronic meetings should be

conducted, rather than email, in order for a group to approve any actions that will be reported to the presbytery.

6. Training shall be provided for any digital tools in use by a committee (such as Smartsheet) or electronic meeting platforms. Electronic meetings are challenging and require a high level of skill from the moderator and participants. The presbytery staff are available to train groups and individuals.

Electronic Meetings from Robert's Rules

EXTENSION OF PARLIAMENTARY LAW TO ELECTRONIC MEETINGS. Except as authorized in the bylaws, the business of an organization or board can be validly transacted only at a regular or properly called meeting—that is, as defined on pages 81–82, a single official gathering in one room or area—of the assembly of its members at which a quorum is present.

Among some organizations, there is an increasing preference, especially in the case of a relatively small board or other assembly, to transact business at electronic meetings—that is, at meetings at which, rather than all participating members being physically present in one room or area as in traditional (or "face-to-face") meetings, some or all of them communicate with the others through electronic means such as the Internet or by telephone. A group that holds such alternative meetings does not lose its character as a deliberative assembly (see pp. 1–2) so long as the meetings provide, at a minimum, conditions of opportunity for simultaneous aural communication among all participating members equivalent to those of meetings held in one room or area. Under such conditions, an electronic meeting that is properly authorized in the bylaws is treated as though it were a meeting at which all the members who are participating are actually present.

If electronic meetings are to be authorized, it is advisable to adopt additional rules pertaining to their conduct (see Additional Rules for the Conduct of Electronic Meetings, below).

[page 98] **TYPES OF ELECTRONIC MEETINGS.** Various provisions for electronic meetings are possible, so that more than the minimum standard of an audioconference may be required. Thus, if the bylaws provide for meeting by videoconference (but not merely by "teleconference" or "audioconference"), the meeting must be conducted by a technology that allows all participating members to see each other, as well as to hear each other, at the same time. Provision may also be made for the use of additional collaborative technology to aid in the conduct of a meeting.

It is important to understand that, regardless of the technology used, the opportunity for simultaneous aural communication is essential to the deliberative character of the meeting. Therefore, a group that attempts to conduct the deliberative process in writing (such as by postal mail, e-mail, "chat rooms," or fax)—which is not recommended—does not constitute a deliberative assembly. Any such effort may achieve a consultative character, but it is foreign to the deliberative process as understood under parliamentary law.

ELECTRONIC MEETINGS IN COMMITTEES. As in the case of a board or any assembly, committees that are expressly established by the bylaws can hold a valid electronic meeting only if authorized in the

bylaws to do so. A committee that is not expressly established by the bylaws, however, may instead be authorized by a standing rule of the parent body or organization, or by the motion establishing the committee, to hold electronic meetings.

ADDITIONAL RULES FOR THE CONDUCT OF ELECTRONIC MEETINGS. If an organization authorizes its assembly, boards, or committees to hold electronic meetings, such a provision should indicate whether members who are not present in person have the right to participate by electronic means, or whether the body may choose to allow [page 99] or disallow such participation; and, conversely, whether there is required to be a central location for members who wish to attend meetings in person. The notice of an electronic meeting must include an adequate description of how to participate in it (for example, the telephone number to call for a teleconference must be provided). Various additional rules (in the bylaws, special rules of order, standing rules, or instructions to a committee, as appropriate) may also be necessary or advisable regarding the conduct of electronic meetings, such as rules relating to:

- the type of equipment or computer software required for participation in meetings, whether the organization must provide such equipment or software, and contingencies for technical difficulties or malfunctions;
 - methods for determining the presence of a quorum;
 - the conditions under which a member may raise a point of order doubting the presence of a quorum, and the conditions under which the continued presence of a quorum is presumed if no such point of order is raised;
 - methods for seeking recognition and obtaining the floor;
 - means by which motions may be submitted in writing during a meeting; and
 - methods for taking and verifying votes.
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- In addition, depending on the character of the organization, it may be advisable to adopt provisions for ensuring that nonmembers cannot participate in meetings (unless properly invited to do so), especially during any meeting or portion of a meeting held in executive session.

Advisory on “Executive Session” from the Executive Presbyter and Stated Clerk Donegal Presbytery

Meeting in “executive session” is sometimes necessary in order to preserve confidentiality and to give members appropriate privacy for discussion and deliberations. Sometimes the term “executive session” is used in order to meet without the pastor/moderator present. This is not a correct usage of the term. Meeting without the moderator present is not permitted under the polity of the PC(USA). In G-3.1014, our Book of Order states:

The pastor of a congregation shall be the moderator of the session of that congregation. In congregations where there are co-pastors, they shall both be considered moderators and have provisions for designating who presides at a particular meeting. If it is impractical for the pastor to moderate, he or she shall invite another minister of the Word and Sacrament who is a member of the presbytery or a person authorized by the presbytery to serve as moderator. If there is no installed pastor, or if the installed pastor is unable to invite another moderator, the presbytery shall make provision for a moderator.

If there are matters to discuss related to the moderator, it is appropriate for the moderator to invite another member of the presbytery to moderate a portion of the meeting. Often either the Executive Presbyter or the Stated Clerk are invited into such situations. These same provisions are also in effect for meetings of the congregation (G-1.0504). In these situations, it is appropriate to excuse the pastor. When the pastor returns, that person is given a synopsis of the content discussed, in front of the session, in order that everyone agrees that the appropriate information has been shared. Often these are sensitive matters. It is important, in the life of a congregation, to maintain appropriate confidentiality and also not to become a body that keeps secrets.

Executive Session is appropriately used to discuss personnel and legal matters where the minutes will not be made public but must be kept for documentary purposes. What follows is the text of Robert’s Rules of Order about Executive Session and advice from the Executive Presbyter and Stated Clerk.

Executive Session from Robert’s Rules, 11th edition, pg. 95.

An executive session in general parliamentary usage has come to mean any meeting of a deliberative assembly, or a portion of a meeting, at which the proceedings are secret. This term originally referred to the consideration of executive business—that is, presidential nominations to appointive offices, and treaties—behind closed doors in the United States Senate. The practice of organizations operating under the lodge system is equivalent to holding all regular meetings in executive session. In any society, certain matters relating to discipline (61, 63), such as trials, must be handled only in executive session. A meeting enters into executive session only when required by rule or established custom, or

upon the adoption of a motion to do so. A motion to go into executive session is a question of privilege (19), and therefore is adopted by a majority vote.

Whenever a meeting is being held in executive session, only members of the body that is meeting, special invitees, and such employees or staff members as the body or its rules may determine to be necessary are allowed to remain in the hall. Thus, in the case of a board or committee meeting being [page 96] held in executive session, all persons—whether or not they are members of the organization—who are not members of the board or committee (and who are not otherwise specifically invited or entitled to attend) are excluded from the meeting.

A member of a society can be punished under disciplinary procedure if he violates the secrecy of an executive session. Anyone else permitted to be present is honor-bound not to divulge anything that occurred. The minutes, or record of proceedings, of an executive session must be read and acted upon only in executive session, unless that which would be reported in the minutes—that is, the action taken, as distinct from that which was said in debate—was not secret, or secrecy has been lifted by the assembly. When the minutes of an executive session must be considered for approval at an executive session held solely for that purpose, the brief minutes of the latter meeting are, or are assumed to be, approved by that meeting.

Notes and advice:

1. When in executive session, everything that is said is confidential. If any person who is present shares any part of what is said, that person can face an allegation and charges based on the Rules of Discipline of the PC(USA) Book of Order. The only exception to confidentiality is if the Session decides to make something public.
2. At the conclusion of the executive session, the Session should read and should approve the minutes. They should also decide what (if anything) is shared from the matters discussed and acted upon during the executive session. Any action that is public is normally disclosed.
3. Minutes must be kept and kept separately. Written executive session minutes are confidential but are necessary for any legal matters. Any motions, personnel decisions, severance agreements, or other confidential but written matters must be recorded in minutes.

2019 Annual Review of Session Records (G-3.0108a)

Church _____

Period of Review _____ to _____

Clerk of Session: Please indicate in the third column the page number in Session Minutes where record of action can be found, (maximum of 3 references). **This completed form is to be in your books when they are presented for review.**

SESSION AND CONGREGATIONAL MINUTES

Item	Requirement	Page No.	Req. Met		Exceptions (for Reviewer)
			Y	N	
SESSION MEETINGS					
Every Meeting					
1	Date, time & place of each meeting; regular or special (w/purpose)				
2	Full names of elders, moderator, others invited by session, recorded as present, excused, or absent. Quorum attested (G-3.0203)				
3	Meeting opened/closed with prayer (G-3.0105)				
4	Approval of minutes of previous meeting, corrected if necessary, signed by clerk				
5	List of reports received by session from Trustees, Deacons, other committees				
6	All actions whether passed or failed; copies of any reports adopted by session				
7	Report of celebration of Lord’s Supper since last meeting, with number served, including homebound				
8	Authorization of all baptisms (W-3.0403); record of instruction and counseling with parents (W-3.0403)				
9	Actions to receive new members and how received (G-3.0201c)				
10	Actions to dismiss members (G-3.0201c) (also in Rolls & Registers)				
11	Marriages since last meeting (also in Rolls & Registers)				
12	Deaths since last meeting (also in Rolls & Registers)				
13	Election of Commissioners to presbytery and receipt of commissioners’ report (G-3.0201)				
14	Receipt of report(s) from Treasurer (G-3.0205)				
Annual or Occasional Actions					
15	Authorization for celebration of the Lord’s Supper (W-3.0410)				
16	Approval of any special offerings (G-3.0205)				
17	The examination of new elders & deacons after training (G-3.0201)				
18	The ordination and installation of elders & deacons (also in Rolls & Registers)				
19	Ongoing training of Ruling Elders and other Officers (G-3.0201c)				
20	Approve Staff Job Descriptions – initially and any subsequent changes (G-3.0201c)				
21	Election of a Clerk of Session for a specific term (G-3.0104)				
22	Election of a Treasurer for a term determined by Session (G-3,0205)				
23	Establishing a budget (annually) (G-3.0201)				
24	Annual review of compensation of staff (G-3.0201) & personnel documentation such as all actions taken to hire, compensate, evaluate, discipline, or terminate non-ordained staff.				
25	Review of Rolls & Registers (annually) (G-3.0201c, G-3.0204)				
26	Direct the work of the Board of Deacons (G-2.0202, G-3.0201c)				
27	Direct the work of the Board of Trustees (if separate from the Session) (G-4.0101, G-3.0201c)				
28	Direct the work of all Congregational Organizations (G3.0201c)				
29	Annual Audit or Review of Financial Records (G-3.0205)				

