

THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER ONE

CONGREGATIONS AND THEIR MEMBERSHIP

G-1.01 THE CONGREGATION

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.

Through the congregation God’s people carry out the ministries of proclamation, sharing the Sacraments^a, and living in covenant life with God and each other. In the life of the congregation, individual believers are equipped for the ministry of witness to the love and grace of God in and for the world. The congregation reaches out to people, communities, and the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to gather for worship, to offer care and nurture to God’s children, to speak for social justice and righteousness, to bear witness to the truth and to the reign of God that is coming into the world.

G-1.0102 The Fellowship of the Congregation

The polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presupposes the fellowship of women, men, and children united in covenant relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests on the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.

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^{b,c}). 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 upbuilding of the whole church, and for the glory of God.

Other forms of corporate witness established by the presbytery shall also be governed by this Constitution and shall be subject to the authority of the presbytery.

G-1.02 THE ORGANIZING OF A CONGREGATION

A congregation in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can be organized only by the authority of a presbytery and shall function under the provisions of this Constitution.

G-1.0201 Organizing Covenant

In organizing a congregation, presbytery shall receive applications for membership from persons wishing to unite in forming a new congregation. These persons shall covenant together as follows:

“We, the undersigned, in response to the grace of God, desire to be constituted and organized as a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to be known as _____. We promise and covenant to live together in unity and to work together in ministry as disciples of Jesus Christ, bound to him and to one another as a part of the body of Christ in this place according to the principles of faith, mission, and order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

“(Signatures)”

At its sole discretion the presbytery may then declare them an organized congregation of the presbytery. The congregation shall then proceed to the election of ruling elders and, if they so decide, deacons. The presbytery shall prepare, examine, ordain, and install these newly elected persons. Presbytery shall continue to work closely with the congregation in securing pastoral leadership, in plans for the service and witness of the congregation, in coordinating its work with other congregations, in counseling concerning incorporation and bylaws for the congregation conforming to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and in giving other forms of support and encouragement that will strengthen the mission of the congregation in the larger life of the denomination.

G-1.03 THE MEMBERSHIP OF A CONGREGATION

G-1.0301 The Meaning of Membership and Baptism

In Jesus Christ, God calls people to faith and to membership in the Church, the body of Christ. Baptism is the visible sign of that call and claim on a human life and of entrance into the membership of the church. The baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God’s love claims people before they are able to respond in faith. The baptism of those who enter the covenant of membership upon their own profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior witnesses to the truth that God’s gift of grace calls forth a response of faithfulness. Thus, the triune God, incarnate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, gives to the Church not only its mission but also its understanding of membership.

G-1.0302 Welcome and Openness

A congregation shall welcome all persons who trust in God’s grace in Jesus Christ and desire to become part of the fellowship and ministry of his Church (F-1.0403). No

person shall be denied membership for any reason not related to profession of faith. The Gospel leads members to extend the fellowship of Christ to all persons. Failure to do so constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal to the Gospel.

G-1.0303 Entry into Membership

Persons may enter into active church membership in the following ways:

- a. Public profession of faith, made after careful examination by the session in the meaning and responsibilities of membership; if not already baptized, the person making profession of faith shall be baptized;
- b. Certificate of transfer, when a person is a member of another Christian church at the time of transfer;
- c. Reaffirmation of faith, for persons previously baptized in the name of the triune God and having publicly professed their faith.

G-1.0304 The Ministry of Members

Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ’s mission. A faithful member bears witness to God’s love and grace and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ’s Church. Such involvement includes:

- proclaiming the good news in word and deed,
- taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation,
- lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support,
- studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life,
- supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,
- 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 the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,
- working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment,
- caring for God’s creation,**
- participating in the governing responsibilities of the church, and
- reviewing and evaluating regularly the integrity of one’s membership, and considering ways in which one’s participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful.

G-1.04 CATEGORIES OF MEMBERSHIP

The membership of a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) includes baptized members, active members, and affiliate members.

G-1.0401 Baptized Member

A baptized member is a person who has received the Sacrament of Baptism, whether in this congregation or elsewhere, and who has been enrolled as a baptized member by the session but who has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Such baptized members receive the pastoral care and instruction of the church, and may participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

G-1.0402 Active Member

An active member is a person 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^d of this church, and participates in the church's work and worship. In addition, active members participate in the governance of the church and may be elected to ordered ministry (see G-2.0102). Active members shall regularly, after prayerful consideration, recommit themselves to the disciplines and responsibilities of membership outlined in G-1.0304. The session shall have responsibility for preparing those who would become active members of the congregation.

G-1.0403 Affiliate Member

An affiliate member is a member of another congregation of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the congregation of membership is situated, has presented a certificate of good standing from the appropriate council or governing body of that congregation, and has been received by the session as an affiliate member. An affiliate member may participate in the life of the congregation in the same manner as an active member except that an affiliate member may not vote in congregational meetings or be elected to ordered ministry or other office in the congregation.

G-1.0404 Other Participants

Persons who are not members of, or who may have ceased active participation in, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are welcome and may participate in the life and worship of this church and receive its pastoral care and instruction. The invitation to the Lord's Supper is extended to all who have been baptized, remembering that access to the table is not a right conferred upon the worthy, but a privilege given to the undeserving who come in faith, repentance, and love (W-3.0409). Confessing members of other Christian churches may present children for baptism, in conformity with W-3.0403.

G-1.05 MEETINGS OF THE CONGREGATION

G-1.0501 Annual and Special Meetings

The congregation shall hold an annual meeting and may hold special meetings as necessary, for any or all of the purposes appropriate for congregational consideration. The business to be transacted at special meetings shall be limited to items specifically listed in the call for the meeting.

All active members of the congregation present at either annual or special meetings are entitled to vote. Congregations shall provide by rule the quorum necessary to conduct business.

G-1.0502 Calling a Congregational Meeting

Meetings of the congregation shall be called by the session, by the presbytery, or by the session when requested in writing by one fourth of the active members on the roll of the congregation. Adequate public notice of all congregational meetings shall be given. Congregations shall provide by their own rule for minimum notification requirements and give notice at regular services of worship prior to the meeting.

G-1.0503 Business Proper to Congregational Meetings

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

- a. electing ruling elders, deacons, and trustees;
- b. calling a pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor;
- c. 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;
- d. buying, mortgaging, or selling real property;
- e. requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption as permitted in this Constitution (G-2.0404).
- f. approving a plan for the creation of a joint congregational witness, or amending or dissolving the joint congregational witness (G-5.05).

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

G-1.0504 Moderator

The installed pastor shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the congregation. If it is impractical for the pastor to preside, 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 the installed pastor is unable to moderate and/or to name another moderator, the presbytery shall make provision for a moderator.

G-1.0505 Secretary and Minutes

The clerk of session shall serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If the clerk of session is unable to serve, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting. The secretary shall record the actions of the congregation in minutes of the meeting.