

CHAPTER THREE
COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH

G-3.01 GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF COUNCILS

G-3.0101 Councils as an Expression of Unity of the Church

The mutual interconnection of the church through its councils is a sign of the unity of the church. Congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), while possessing all the gifts necessary to be the church, are nonetheless not sufficient in themselves to be the church. Rather, they are called to share with others both within and beyond the congregation the task of bearing witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the world. This call to bear witness is the work of all believers. The particular responsibility of the councils of the church is to nurture, guide, and govern those who witness as part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to the end that such witness strengthens the whole church and gives glory to God.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is governed by councils composed of presbyters elected by the people (F-3.0202). These councils are called the session, the presbytery, the synod, and the General Assembly. All councils of the church are united by the nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers as provided in this Constitution. The councils are distinct, but have such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church. The jurisdiction of each council is limited by the express provisions of the Constitution, with the acts of each subject to review by the next higher council. Powers not mentioned in this Constitution are reserved to the presbyteries.

Councils of the church exist to help congregations and the church as a whole to be more faithful participants in the mission of Christ. They do so as they

Provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard,
responding to the promise of God's new creation in Christ, and
inviting all people to participate in that new creation;

Provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received,
welcoming those who are being engrafted into Christ,
bearing witness to Christ's saving death and resurrection,
anticipating the heavenly banquet that is to come, and
committing itself in the present to solidarity with the marginalized and the
hungry; and

Nurture a covenant community of disciples of Christ,
living in the strength of God's promise, and
giving itself in service to God's mission.

G-3.0102 Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction

Councils of this church have only ecclesiastical jurisdiction for the purpose of serving Jesus Christ and declaring and obeying his will in relation to truth and service, order and discipline. They may frame statements of faith, bear testimony against error in doctrine and immorality in life, resolve questions of doctrine and discipline, give counsel in matters of conscience, and decide issues properly brought before them under the provisions of this *Book of Order*. They may authorize the administration of the sacraments in accordance with the Directory for Worship. They have power to establish plans and rules for the worship, mission, government, and discipline of the church and to do those things necessary to the peace, purity, unity, and progress of the church under the will of Christ. They have responsibility for the leadership, guidance, and government of that portion of the church that is under their jurisdiction.

G-3.0103 Participation and Representation

The councils of the church shall give full expression to the rich diversity of the church's membership and shall provide for full participation and access to representation in decision-making and employment practices (F-1.0403). In fulfilling this commitment, councils shall give due consideration to both the gifts and requirements for ministry (G-2.0104) and the right of people in congregations and councils to elect their officers (F-3.0106).

Each council shall develop procedures and mechanisms for promoting and reviewing that body's implementation of the church's commitment to inclusiveness and representation. Councils above the session shall establish by their own rule committees on representation to fulfill the following functions: to advise the council regarding the implementation of principles of unity and diversity, to advocate for diversity in leadership, and to consult with the council on the employment of personnel, in accordance with the principles of unity and diversity in F-1.0403. A committee on representation should not be merged with another committee or made a subcommittee of another committee.

G-3.0104 Officers

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.

The moderator possesses the authority necessary for preserving order and for conducting efficiently the business of the body. He or she shall convene and adjourn the body in accordance with its own action.

Each council higher than the session shall elect a moderator for such terms as the council determines. At the time of their election, moderators must be continuing members

of, or commissioners to, the council over which they are elected to preside. They shall preside at meetings of the council during their term of office; councils shall provide by rule who shall preside in the absence of the moderator.

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. The clerk of a presbytery, a synod, and the General Assembly shall be called stated clerk, shall be elected by the council for a definite term as it may determine, and must be a ruling elder or **minister of the Word and Sacrament**. A stated clerk may be removed from office prior to completion of his or her term of service through the use of the process outlined in G-3.0110.

Councils may elect such other officers as the council requires.

G-3.0105 Meetings

Meetings of councils shall be opened and closed with prayer.^a 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.

When a council makes a decision, a member of the body who voted against the decision is entitled to file a dissent or a protest. Filing a dissent or protest neither initiates nor prevents judicial process.

a. A dissent is a declaration expressing disagreement with a decision of a council. It shall be made at the particular session during which the decision is made. The names of members dissenting shall be recorded.

b. A protest is a written declaration, supported by reasons, alleging that a decision of a council is or contains an irregularity or a delinquency. Written notice of the protest shall be given at the particular session of the council during which it arose and shall be filed with the clerk before adjournment. If the protest is expressed in decorous and respectful language, it shall be entered in the minutes of the meeting, and may be accompanied by an answer prepared by the council. No further action is required.

G-3.0106 Administration of Mission

Mission determines the forms and structures needed for the church to do its work. Administration is the process by which a council implements its decisions. Administration enables the church to give effective witness in the world to God's new creation in Jesus Christ and strengthens the church's witness to the mission of the triune God.

Councils higher than the session may provide examples of policies and procedures that may be gathered into advisory handbooks. These examples illumine practices required by

the Constitution but left to councils for specific implementation. Such handbooks may also offer information that enhances or secures the ministry of the particular council.

Each council shall develop a manual of administrative operations that will specify the form and guide the work of mission in that council.

All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy and a child **and youth** protection policy.

A council may delegate aspects of its tasks to such entities as it deems appropriate, provided that those entities remain accountable to the council.

The administration of mission demonstrates the unity and interdependence of the church, in that councils share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers (F-3.0203). Through their members and elected commissioners, lower councils participate in planning and administration of the work of higher councils, and in consultation between bodies concerning mission, budget, staffing and fair employment practices, and matters of equitable compensation.

The funding of mission similarly demonstrates the unity and interdependence of the church. The failure of any part of the church to participate in the stewardship of the mission of the whole church diminishes that unity and interdependence. All mission funding should enable the church to give effective witness in the world to God’s new creation in Jesus Christ, and should strengthen the church’s witness to the mission of God.

Each council above the session shall prepare and adopt a budget for its operating expenses, including administrative personnel, and may fund it with a per capita apportionment among the particular congregations within its bounds. Presbyteries are responsible for raising their own funds and for raising and timely transmission of per capita funds to their respective synods and the General Assembly. Presbyteries may direct per capita apportionments to sessions within their bounds, but in no case shall the authority of the session to direct its benevolences be compromised.

G-3.0107 Records

Each council shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings. Minutes and all other official records of councils are the property in perpetuity of said councils or their legal successors. When a council ceases to exist, its records shall become the property of the next higher council within whose bounds the lower council was prior to its cessation. The clerk of each council shall make recommendation to that body for the permanent safekeeping of the body’s records with the Presbyterian Historical Society or in a temperature and humidity controlled environment of a seminary of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

G-3.0108 Administrative Review

Higher councils shall review the work of lower councils in the following ways:

a. *General Administrative Review*

Each council shall review annually or biennially, based on the body’s meeting frequency, the proceedings and actions of all entities related to the body, all officers able to

act on behalf of the body, and lower councils within its jurisdiction. In reviewing the procedures of the lower council, the higher body shall determine whether the proceedings have been correctly recorded, have been in accordance with this Constitution^b, have been prudent and equitable, and have been faithful to the mission of the whole church. It shall also determine whether lawful injunctions of a higher body have been obeyed.

b. *Special Administrative Review*

If a higher council learns at any time of an alleged irregularity or delinquency of a lower council, it may require the lower body to produce any records and to take appropriate action.

c. *Directed Response*

The higher council may direct the lower council to reconsider and take corrective action if matters are determined to be out of compliance. In addition to administrative review, review and correction may be sought by initiating judicial process as described in the Rules of Discipline.

G-3.0109 *Committees and Commissions*

Councils 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, and may create such structures jointly with other councils, in consultation with the next higher council. In appointing such committees and commissions councils shall be mindful of the principles of unity in diversity consistent with the provisions of this Constitution (F-1.0403, G-3.0103).

A committee shall study and recommend action or carry out decisions already made by a council. It shall make a full report to the council that created it, and its recommendations shall require action by that body. Committees of councils higher than the session shall consist of both **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** and members of congregations, **in numbers as nearly equal as possible**.

A commission is empowered to consider and conclude matters referred to it by a council. The designating council shall state specifically the scope of the commission's powers and any restrictions on those powers.

A council may designate two types of commissions:

a. *Judicial Commissions*

Judicial commissions shall consider and decide cases of process for the council or councils according to the Rules of Discipline. Sessions shall perform the function of a judicial commission for the congregation; each council higher than the session shall elect a permanent judicial commission (see D-5.0000). Cooperating synods may elect a joint permanent judicial commission pursuant to G-3.0404 and D-5.0101.

b. *Administrative Commissions*

Administrative commissions are designated to consider and conclude matters not involving ecclesiastical judicial process, except that in the discharge of their assigned responsibilities they may discover and report to the designating council matters that may require judicial action by the council.

Functions that may be entrusted to administrative commissions include, but are not limited to:

(1) (by sessions) ordaining and installing ruling elders and deacons, receiving and dismissing members, and visiting organizations within the congregation to settle differences therein;

(2) (by presbyteries) ordaining and installing **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**;

(3) (by presbyteries) examining and receiving into membership **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** seeking admission to presbytery, including approval of terms of call and commissions for ordination and installation; and receiving candidates under care;

(4) (by presbyteries) developing immigrant fellowships, organizing new congregations, merging congregations, or forming union or federated congregations (G-5.05);

(5) (by presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly) visiting particular councils, congregations, or agencies over which they have immediate jurisdiction reported to be affected with disorder^c, and inquiring into and settling the difficulties therein, except that no commission of a presbytery shall be empowered to dissolve a pastoral relationship without the specific authorization by the designating body (G-2.0901);

(6) (by all councils) making pastoral inquiry into persons accused of sexual abuse of another person (D-10.0401c) when jurisdiction in a judicial proceeding against such persons has ended due to death or renunciation of the accused; such inquiries shall not be understood as judicial proceedings but shall seek to reach a determination of truth related to the accusation and to make appropriate recommendations to the designating council.

A commission of presbytery, synod, or General Assembly shall be composed of ruling elders and **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** in numbers as nearly equal as possible and sufficient to accomplish their work. A quorum of any commission shall be established by the designating council or councils but in no case shall be less than a majority of its members (except as limited by D-5.0204).

A commission of a session shall be composed of at least two ruling elders, and a **minister of the Word and Sacrament** in an installed or temporary relationship with the

congregation governed by that session or a **commissioned pastor (also known as commissioned ruling elder)**.

A commission shall keep a full record of its proceedings and shall submit that record to the council or councils for incorporation into its records. Actions of a commission shall be regarded as actions of the council or councils that created it. A commission may be assigned additional duties as a committee, which duties shall be reported and handled as the report of a committee.

The decisions of an administrative commission shall be reported to the clerk of the designating council, who shall report it to the council at its next stated meeting. A council may rescind or amend an action of its administrative commission in the same way actions of the council are modified.

When an administrative commission has been designated to settle differences within a particular organization or council, it shall, before making its decision final, afford to all persons affected by its decision fair notice and an opportunity to be heard on matters at issue.

G-3.0110 Administrative Staff

Councils higher than the session may employ such staff as is required by the mission of the body in accordance with the principles of unity in diversity (F-1.0403). Councils may, in consultation with the next higher council, share staff as required by the mission of the body. A council shall make provision in its manual of administrative operations (G-3.0106) for the process of electing executive staff and the hiring of other staff, the description of the responsibilities of the positions, the method of performance review, and the manner of termination of employment. (G-3.0104)

G-3.0111 Nominating Process

All councils higher than the session shall have a process for nominating persons to serve in positions requiring election by the council. The process shall ensure that nominations are made by an entity broadly representative of the constituency of the council, and in conformity with the church's commitment to unity in diversity (F-1.0403).

G-3.0112 Insurance

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

G-3.0113 Finances

Each council shall prepare and adopt a budget to support the church's mission within its area.

A full financial review of all financial books and records shall be conducted every year by a public accountant or committee of members versed in accounting procedures. Reviewers should not be related to the treasurer(s). Terminology in this section is meant to provide general guidance and is not intended to require or not require specific audit procedures or practices as understood within the professional accounting community.

G-3.02 THE SESSION

G-3.0201 *Composition and Responsibilities*

The session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service^d 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 shall have responsibility for governing the congregation^e and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the session shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have identified themselves throughout history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

In light of this charge, the session has responsibility and power to:

a. *provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.* This responsibility shall include providing a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, education, and spiritual nurture; providing for regular preaching of the Word by a **minister of the Word and Sacrament** or other person prepared and approved for the work; planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world with the message of salvation and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship; planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community in accordance with the prophetic witness of Jesus Christ; and initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to the love and grace of God.

b. *provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received.* This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate, in accordance with the principles of the Directory for Worship; and exercising pastoral care among the congregation in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the congregation may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.

c. *nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.* This responsibility shall include receiving and dismissing members; reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership; providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship; training, examining, ordaining, and installing those elected by the congregation as ruling elders and deacons; encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources; managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission; directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation; employing the administrative staff of the congregation; leading the congregation in

participating in the mission of the whole church; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline^f.

G-3.0202 Relations with Other Councils

Sessions have a particular responsibility to participate in the life of the whole church through participation in other councils. It is of particular importance that sessions:

- a. elect, as commissioners to presbytery, ruling elders from the congregation, preferably for at least a year, and receive their reports;
- b. nominate to presbytery ruling elders from the congregation who may be considered for election as commissioners to synod and General Assembly, and to serve on committees or commissions of the same, bearing in mind principles of inclusiveness and fair representation in the decision making of the church (F-1.0403);
- c. see that the guidance and communication of presbytery, synod, and General Assembly are considered, and that any binding actions are observed and carried out;
- d. welcome representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits;
- e. propose to the presbytery, or through it to the synod and General Assembly, such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church; and
- f. send to presbytery^g and General Assembly requested statistics and other information according to the requirements of those bodies, as well as voluntary financial contributions.

G-3.0203 Meetings

The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly. The moderator^h shall call a special meeting when he or she deems necessary or when requested in writing by any two members of the session. The business to be transacted at special meetings shall be limited to items specifically listed in the call for the meeting. There shall be reasonable notice given of all special meetings. The session shall also meet when directed by presbytery. Sessions shall provide by rule for a quorum for meetings; such quorum shall include the moderator and either a specific number of ruling elders or a specific percentage of those ruling elders in current service on the session.

G-3.0204 Minutes and Records

Minutes of the session shall be subject to the provisions of G-3.0107. They shall contain the minutes of all meetings of the congregation and all joint meetings with deacons and trustees.

Each session shall maintain the following roll and registers:

a. *Membership Roll*

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 or presbytery, 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.

b. *Registers*

There shall be registers of baptisms authorized by the session, of ruling elders and deacons, of installed pastors with dates of service, and such other registers as the session may deem necessary.

G-3.0205 Finances

In addition to those responsibilities described in G-3.0113, the session shall prepare and adopt a budget and determine the distribution of the congregation's benevolences. It shall authorize offerings for Christian purposes and shall account for the proceeds of such offerings and their disbursement. It shall provide full information to the congregation concerning its decisions in such matters.

The session shall elect a treasurer for such term as the session shall decide and shall supervise his or her work or delegate that supervision to a board of deacons or trustees. Those in charge of various congregational funds shall report at least annually to the session and more often as requested. Sessions may provide by rule for standard financial practices of the congregation, but shall in no case fail to observe the following procedures:

a. All offerings shall be counted and recorded by at least two duly appointed persons, or by one fidelity bonded person;

b. Financial books and records adequate to reflect all financial transactions shall be kept and shall be open to inspection by authorized church officers at reasonable times;

c. Periodic, and in no case less than annual, reports of all financial activities shall be made to the session or entity vested with financial oversight.

G-3.03 THE PRESBYTERY

G-3.0301 Composition and Responsibilities

The presbytery is the council serving as a corporate expression of the church within a certain district and is composed of all the congregationsⁱ and **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** within that district. The presbytery shall adopt and communicate to the sessions a plan for determining how many ruling elders each session should elect as commissioners to presbytery, with a goal of numerical parity of ministers of the Word and Sacrament and ruling elders. This plan shall require each session to elect at least one commissioner^j and shall take into consideration the size of congregations as well as a method

to fulfill the principles of participation and representation found in F-1.0403 and G-3.0103. Ruling elders elected as officers of the presbytery shall be enrolled as members during the period of their service. A presbytery may enroll, or may provide by its own rule for the enrollment of, ruling elders during terms of elected service to the presbytery or its congregations.

The minimum composition of a presbytery is ten duly constituted sessions and ten **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**, unless an exception is approved by its synod and the General Assembly giving consideration to the responsibilities assigned to presbyteries in G-3.01 and G-3.03.

The presbytery is responsible for the government of the church throughout its district, and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations^k to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of its congregations, the presbytery shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

In light of this charge, the presbytery has responsibility and power to:

a. *provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.* This responsibility shall include organizing, receiving, merging, dismissing, and dissolving congregations in consultation with their members; overseeing congregations without pastors; establishing pastoral relationships and dissolving them; guiding the preparation of those preparing to become **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**; establishing and maintaining those ecumenical relationships that will enlarge the life and mission of the church in its district; providing encouragement, guidance, and resources to congregations in the areas of mission, prophetic witness, leadership development, worship, evangelism, and responsible administration to the end that the church's witness to the love and grace of God may be heard in the world.

b. *provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received.* This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at its meetings at least annually and for fellowship groups, new church developments, and other non-congregational entities meeting within its bounds; authorizing and training specific ruling elders to administer or preside at the Lord's Supper when it deems it necessary to meet the needs for the administration of the Sacrament; and exercising pastoral care for the congregations and members of presbytery in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the presbytery may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.

c. *nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.* This responsibility shall include ordaining, receiving, dismissing, installing, removing, and disciplining its members who are **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**^l; commissioning ruling elders to limited pastoral service; promoting the peace and harmony of congregations and inquiring into the sources of congregational discord; supporting congregations in develop-

ing the graces of generosity, stewardship, and service; assisting congregations in developing mission and participating in the mission of the whole church; taking jurisdiction over the members of dissolved congregations and granting transfers of their membership to other congregations; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within its bounds; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

G-3.0302 Relations with Synod and General Assembly

The presbytery has a responsibility to maintain regular and continuing relationship to synod and General Assembly by:

- a. electing commissioners to synod and General Assembly and receiving their reports;
- b. electing ruling elders and **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** to be readers of standard ordination examinations;
- c. seeing that the guidance and communication of synod and General Assembly are considered and that any binding actions are observed and carried out;
- d. proposing to synod such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church, and/or proposing to General Assembly overtures that have received a concurrence from at least one other presbytery, and
- e. sending annually to synod and General Assembly statistical and other information according to the requirements of those bodies.

G-3.0303 Relations with Sessions

Presbytery, being composed of the **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** and commissioners elected by the session of congregations within its district, has a particular responsibility to coordinate, guide, encourage, support, and resource the work of its congregations for the most effective witness to the broader community. In order to accomplish this responsibility, the presbytery has authority to:

- a. develop strategy for the mission of the church in its district;
- b. control the location of new congregations and of congregations desiring to move as well as to divide, dismiss, or dissolve congregations in consultation with their members;
- c. establish minimum compensation standards for pastoral calls and Certified Christian Educators and Certified Associate Christian Educators within the presbytery;
- d. counsel with a session concerning reported difficulties within a congregation, including:
 - (1) advising the session as to appropriate actions to be taken to resolve the reported difficulties,
 - (2) offering to help as a mediator, and

(3) acting to correct the difficulties if requested to do so by the session or if the session is unable or unwilling to do so, following the procedural safeguards of the Rules of Discipline;

e. assume original jurisdiction in any situation in which it determines that a session cannot exercise its authority. After a thorough investigation, and after full opportunity to be heard has been accorded to the session, the presbytery may conclude that the session of a congregation is unable or unwilling to manage wisely its affairs, and may appoint an administrative commission with the full power of session. This commission shall assume original jurisdiction of the existing session, if any, which shall cease to act until such time as the presbytery shall otherwise direct.

f. consider and act upon requests from congregations for permission to take the actions regarding real property as described in G-4.0206.

G-3.0304 Meetings and Quorum

The presbytery shall hold stated meetings at least twice each year, shall meet at the direction of synod, and may call special meetings in accordance with its own rules.

A presbytery may set its own quorum^m, but it shall be not fewer than three **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** who are members of the presbytery and three ruling elder commissioners from three different congregations.

G-3.0305 Minutes and Records

Minutes and other official records of the presbytery are the property of the presbytery, and are subject to the review specified in G-3.0108. The stated clerk is responsible for the preservation of the presbytery’s minutes and records. These records shall include the rolls of the presbytery’s membership and registers of all Certified Christian Educators, Certified Associate Christian Educators, and ruling elders commissioned to particular pastoral service.

G-3.0306 Membership of Presbytery

Each presbytery determines the **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** who are its members and validates the ministries in which they are to be engaged. It shall be guided in this determination by written criteria developed by the presbytery for validating ministries within its bounds (G-2.0503a).

The presbytery shall examine each **minister of the Word and Sacrament** or candidate who seeks membership in it on his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church.

The presbytery may designate **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** to work as teachers, evangelists, administrators, chaplains, and in other forms of ministry recognized as appropriate by the presbytery. Those so designated may administer the Sacraments at times and places authorized by the presbytery.

Every **minister of the Word and Sacrament** shall ordinarily be a member of the presbytery where his or her work is situated or of the presbytery where she or he resides.

A **minister of the Word and Sacrament** who is serving in a church outside the United States may, with the approval of the presbytery, accept membership in that church for the period of such service without affecting his or her membership in a presbytery of this church.

*G-3.0307 Pastor, Counselor, and Advisor to **Its Pastors and Congregations***

Presbyteries shall be open at all times to communication regarding the life and ministry of their congregations.

Each presbytery shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to serve as pastor and counselor to **its pastors, both ministers of the Word and Sacrament and, ruling elders commissioned to pastoral service (also called commissioned pastors [also known as commissioned ruling elders]), as well as the certified Christian educators of the presbytery; to facilitate the relations between the presbytery and its congregations, pastors, and certified Christian educators; and to settle difficulties on behalf of the presbytery where possible and expedient.**

Each presbytery shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to guide, nurture and oversee the process of preparing to become a **minister of the Word and Sacrament.**

To facilitate the presbytery's oversight of inquirers and candidates, reception and oversight of **minister of the Word and Sacrament** members, approval of calls for pastoral services and invitations for temporary pastoral services, oversight of congregations without pastors, dissolution of relationships, dismissal of members, and its close relationship with both member congregations and **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**, it may delegate its authority to designated entities within the presbytery. Such entities shall be composed of ruling elders and **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** in approximately equal numbers, bearing in mind the principles of unity in diversity in F-1.0403. All actions carried out as a result of delegated authority must be reported to the presbytery at its next regular meeting.

G-3.04 THE SYNODⁿ

G-3.0401 Composition and Responsibilities

The synod is the intermediate council serving as a corporate expression of the church throughout its region. It shall consist of not fewer than three presbyteries within a specific geographic region.

When a synod meets, it shall be composed of commissioners elected by the presbyteries. Each presbytery shall elect at least one ruling elder and one **minister of the Word and Sacrament** to serve as commissioners to synod. A synod shall determine a plan for the election of commissioners to the synod, as well as the method to fulfill the principles

of participation and representation found in F-1.0403 and G-3.0103; both plans shall be subject to approval by a majority of the presbyteries in the synod. The commissioners from each presbytery shall be divided equally between ruling elders and **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**. Each person elected moderator or other officer shall be enrolled as a member of the synod until a successor is elected and installed.

Synod is responsible for the life and mission of the church throughout its region and for supporting the ministry and mission of its presbyteries as they seek to support the witness of congregations, to the end that the church throughout its region becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the church throughout its region, it shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

In light of this charge, the synod has responsibility and power to:

a. *provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.* This responsibility may include developing, in conjunction with its presbyteries, a broad strategy for the mission of the church within its bounds and in accord with the larger strategy of the General Assembly; assisting its member presbyteries when requested in matters related to the calling, ordaining, and placement of **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**; establishing and maintaining, in conjunction with its presbyteries, those ecumenical relationships that will enlarge the life and mission of the church in its region; facilitating joint action in mission with other denominations and agencies in its region; facilitating communication among its presbyteries and between its presbyteries and the General Assembly; providing services for presbyteries within its area that can be performed more effectively from a broad regional base.

b. *provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received.* This responsibility may include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at its meetings and at other events and gatherings under its jurisdiction; and exercising pastoral care among its presbyteries in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the synod may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.

c. *nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.* This responsibility shall include providing such services of education and nurture as its presbyteries may require; providing encouragement, guidance, and resources to presbyteries in the areas of mission, prophetic witness, leadership development, worship, evangelism, and responsible administration; reviewing the work of its presbyteries; warning or bearing witness against error in doctrine or immorality in practice within its bounds; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

G-3.0402 Relations with General Assembly

The synod has responsibility to maintain regular and continuing relationship with the General Assembly by seeing that the guidance and communication of the General Assembly are considered and that any binding actions are observed and carried out, and by proposing to the General Assembly such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the whole church.

G-3.0403 Relations with Presbyteries

Each presbytery shall participate in the synod's responsibility and service through its elected commissioners to the synod. The synod has responsibility for supporting the work of the presbyteries within its bounds and as such is charged with:

a. developing, in conjunction with its presbyteries, joint plans and objectives for the fulfillment of mission, providing encouragement and guidance to its presbyteries and overseeing their work;

b. developing and providing, when requested, resources as needed to facilitate the mission of its presbyteries;

c. organizing new presbyteries, dividing, uniting, or otherwise combining presbyteries or portions of presbyteries previously existing, and, with the concurrence of existing presbyteries, creating non-geographic presbyteries, subject to the approval of the General Assembly, or taking other such actions as may be deemed necessary in order to meet the mission needs of racial ethnic or immigrant congregations. Such presbyteries shall be formed in compliance with the requirements of G-3.0301 and be accountable to the synod within which they were created.

G-3.0404 Reduced Function

A synod may decide, with the approval of a two-thirds majority of its presbyteries, to reduce its function. In no case shall synod function be less than the provision of judicial process and administrative review of the work of the presbyteries (G-3.0401c). Such a synod shall meet at least every two years for the purposes of setting budget, electing members to its permanent judicial commission, and admitting to record the actions of its permanent judicial and administrative commissions. Presbyteries of such a synod shall assume for themselves, by mutual agreement, such other synod functions as may be deemed necessary by the presbyteries and the synod.

Two or more synods sharing common boundaries, with the approval of a two-thirds majority of the presbyteries in each of the synods, may share administrative services and form a shared permanent judicial commission, with the membership of the commission being proportional, insofar as possible, to the number of presbyteries within each participating synod. Each synod shall pay the costs for processing a judicial case arising within its bounds.

G-3.0405 Meetings and Quorum

The synod shall hold stated meetings at least biennially, shall meet at the direction of the General Assembly, and may call special meetings in accordance with its own rules.

A synod may set its own quorum, but it shall include an equal number of ruling elders and **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** representing at least three presbyteries or one-third of its presbyteries, whichever is larger.

G-3.0406 Minutes and Records

The synod shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings that shall be submitted to the next succeeding meeting of the General Assembly for its general review and control. It shall report to the General Assembly the number of its presbyteries and, in general, all important changes that have occurred within its bounds.

G-3.05 THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

G-3.0501 Composition and Responsibilities

The General Assembly^p is the council of the whole church and it is representative of the unity of the synods, presbyteries, sessions, and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It shall consist of equal numbers of ruling elders and **ministers of the Word and Sacrament** elected by the presbyteries and reflective of the diversity within their bounds (F-1.0403 and G-3.0103), to serve as commissioners according to the following proportions:

- 8,000 members or less: 1 ruling elder and 1 **minister of the Word and Sacrament**
- 8,001–16,000: 2 ruling elders and 2 **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**
- 16,001–24,000: 3 ruling elders and 3 **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**
- 24,001–32,000: 4 ruling elders and 4 **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**
- 32,001–40,000: 5 ruling elders and 5 **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**
- 40,001–48,000: 6 ruling elders and 6 **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**
- 48,001 or more: 7 ruling elders and 7 **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**

Each person elected Moderator shall be enrolled as a member of the General Assembly until a successor is elected and installed.

The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the whole church, it shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

In light of this charge, the General Assembly has responsibility and power to:

- a. *provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.* This responsibility shall include establishing a comprehensive mission strategy and priorities for the church; establishing and maintaining ecumenical relationships and correspondence with other ecclesiastical bodies; uniting with or receiving under its jurisdiction other ecclesiastical bodies consistent with the faith and order of this church, subject to the provisions of G-5.02 and G-5.03; and commissioning, sending, and support of such mission personnel as will spread the good news of the grace of Jesus Christ to the world and foster the growth and development of God’s people.

b. *provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received.* This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord’s Supper at meetings of the General Assembly and other events and gatherings under its jurisdiction; authorizing the participation in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in ecumenical gatherings attended by authorized representatives of the General Assembly; and exercising pastoral care throughout the whole church in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the church may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.

c. *nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.* This responsibility shall include providing those services, resources, and programs performed most effectively at a national level; communicating with the whole church on matters of common concern; warning and bearing witness against errors in doctrine or immorality in the church and in the world; providing such services of education and nurture as its presbyteries may require; providing encouragement, guidance, and resources to presbyteries in the areas of mission, prophetic witness, leadership development, worship, evangelism, and responsible administration; discerning and presenting with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, matters of truth and vision that may inspire, challenge, and educate both church and world; serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline; deciding controversies brought before it and advising and instructing in cases submitted to it, in conformity with this Constitution; authoritatively interpreting the most recent edition of the *Book of Order* in a manner binding on the whole church, in accordance with the provisions of G-6.02 or through a decision of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission in a remedial or disciplinary case, with the most recent interpretation of the *Book of Order* being binding; and establishing and maintaining an office of the Stated Clerk.

G-3.0502 *Relations with Other Councils*

The General Assembly has responsibility to maintain relationships with presbyteries and synods by:

- a. consulting with and providing resources for presbyteries and synods as they execute their constitutional responsibilities;
- b. overseeing the work of synods;
- c. reviewing the records of synods, taking care to ensure that they conform to this Constitution;
- d. organizing new synods, or dividing, uniting, or otherwise combining previously existing synods or portions of synods; and
- e. approving the acts of synods to organize, divide, unite, or combine presbyteries or portions of presbyteries.

G-3.0503 Meetings and Quorum

The General Assembly shall hold a stated meeting at least biennially. The Moderator, or in the event of the incapacity of the Moderator, the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, shall call a special meeting at the request or with the concurrence of at least one fourth of the ruling elder commissioners and one fourth of the **minister of the Word and Sacrament** commissioners to the last preceding stated meeting of the General Assembly representing at least fifteen presbyteries, under the jurisdiction of at least five synods. Commissioners to the special meeting shall be the commissioners elected to the last preceding stated meeting of the General Assembly or their alternates. Notice of special meetings shall be sent no fewer than sixty days prior to convening and shall set out the purpose of the meeting. No other business than that listed in the notice shall be transacted.

A quorum of the General Assembly shall be one hundred commissioners, fifty of whom shall be ruling elders and fifty **ministers of the Word and Sacrament**, representing presbyteries of at least one fourth of its synods.