

WINNEBAGO PRESBYTERY

SESSION RECORDS REVIEW CHECKLIST COMMENTARY

Preface

The Review Checklist is meant to serve as a condensed record of the review process for a particular set of Session Minutes. Because it is brief, it may not always be clear to the reviewer what is expected or meant within Presbytery's guidelines for an accurate and comprehensive set of Minutes. The checklist also does not contain enough information to educate the Clerk of Session or the reviewer of the checklist toward improving the Minutes as records of Session. The following commentary was constructed to serve both the reviewer and the Clerk.

This commentary needs to be read with several comments in mind. Some parts of the checklist are obvious and no explanation is necessary. Some parts will be explained sufficiently by this commentary. Other parts may generate further questions or may not be conducive to short, definitive answers. Such questions should be referred to the Session Records Review Committee of Presbytery or to the Stated Clerk. These questions will improve the checklist, the commentary, and the review process itself. It should be noted further that the review process is a reflection of the oversight and expectations of Presbytery for the records of its constituent churches; so, both these materials and the final interpretation is with Presbytery.

The references below are to the Form of Government in the *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church, USA, denoted as "G-0.0000."

Maintaining Session Records

Numbered Pages:

The pages of the minutes book are to be numbered sequentially in a time period, e.g., for a particular year, or across a volume of minutes across several years. Some clerks prefer to number pages by a machine or mechanism different from the reproduction process, in order to prevent the easy replacement or substitution of pages, but this is not required.

Corrections:

No erasures, footnotes, or insertion of loose papers are permitted. Corrections and changes can be made by a Session without formal action prior to the approval of the minutes. Once the minutes have been approved, if a correction or an insertion of material must be made, the Session must approve by majority vote and the new material is to be recorded in that meeting's minutes with reference to the earlier action or meeting.

If an entry was erroneous or an action was changed or corrected, the textual adjustment is to be made as follows:

- Strike out the erroneous material by drawing a line [permanent ink or printer line] through the incorrect material or, if page can be reprinted, by using strikeover.
- Write the correct text in the minutes of the meeting wherein the Session made the correction with reference to the date and minutes location of the earlier incorrect citation.
- At the place of the earlier action that has been corrected or changed, cite the location of the corrected text in the margin of that minute with the date and volume/page reference of the revised action.
- Sign and date the reference to the change in the margin of the page giving the earlier action.
- Change to minutes is by a two-thirds vote or by a simple majority of the Session if advance notice has been given.
- Because it is critical to preserve the integrity of the record of Session decisions, a motion to expunge does not permit removal of the earlier approved action in the minutes. The preferred alternative is simply to rescind the action. [See most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*]

If a page, pages, or a whole set of minutes were incorrectly written, leave them in place as part of the record, indicating that they are obsolete and give reference to the minutes of the meeting at which the errors were corrected. Always sign and date such corrections.

Actions Regularly Reported [items refer to Checklist enumeration]

3. Session Roster:

Use the full name of elders in order to avoid confusion when several generations of a wider family or unrelated persons with the same last name are involved in the life of the church. Attendance records can be decisive in several areas of parliamentary rule and in judicial inquiry; carefulness is, therefore, essential.

7-19. Session Actions:

Record all actions voted by Session, including those made by consensus [G-3.0107]. You may choose to record all motions, for the historical record, whether passed or defeated, but you are only required to record the motions that are affirmed. You may record the maker and seconder of motions, but this is not required. If a motion is recorded as affirmatively voted, it may be assumed that it was appropriately made and seconded.

Minutes are to provide a means to understand and retain the actions and issues before the Session. This requires not only the exact text of actions, carefully recorded, but it may also be helpful to include a brief recital of discussions, questions and issues raised without reference to persons and without recorder evaluation. A general guideline to keep in mind is what a historian or reader would need in the future in order to understand what was decided.

12. Session Action on Member Rolls [G-3.0201.c.]:

All changes in the member rolls are to be made by specific Session action.

14. Pastor's Report:

The report of the pastor(s) to the Session is neither a legal requirement nor necessarily a separate part of the agenda; there should, however, be some indication in the record that the pastor(s) is regularly reporting on professional responsibilities for the information and review of the Session.

19. Relations with Presbytery and the wider Church [G-3.0202]:

The Minutes should reflect how the Session and the church relate to the presbytery and other bodies in the wider church, e.g., election of presbytery commissioners, participation in the programs of Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly, observance of decisions or initiatives of the wider church, and the annual statistical report to presbytery (items 24 & 25).

Record of Annual Reports

21. Examination of Elders & Deacons [G-3.0201 c.]:

The Minutes should reflect that the Session has provided for the instruction and examination as well as the ordination and installation of ruling elders and deacons.

23. Annual Review of Staff [G-3.0201 c.; G-3.0110]:

In addition to review of pastor compensation, the Minutes are to record that all staff/employees had performance and compensation evaluation annually.

28. Approval of Annual Budget [G-3.0113; G-3.0205]:

The Minutes are to include the detailed annual budget as approved by the Session, including both operating and mission expenditures in full, and the Session's action to communicate this information to the whole congregation. The Session Minutes are to include as well a full record of how the offerings of the members were distributed in mission, program, and operational endeavors of the Church.

29. Annual Financial Review [G-3.0205]:

The Minutes are to record both the Session's action to authorize a full financial review in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and the report of that annual review. This does not require a Certified Public Accountant but it does mean a review based on current accounting procedures. The reviewer should not be related to the treasurer, the financial secretary, or anyone else having responsibility for accepting, disbursing, or accounting for the funds of the church.

30. Review of Church Organizations

The Minutes are to record how the Session provides for the support, review, and oversight of all organizations in the congregation. The Session should review those organizations as well that are co-sponsored with the church, directly related to the Church, or that use the Church facilities.

31. & 34. Record of Property Management & Insurance coverage [G-3.0112]:

The Minutes should reflect Session review of changes in church property and oversight of church facilities. Minutes should also reflect Session's attention to the matter of insurance protection for Church property and personnel and that the Session has reported a summary of such coverage to the presbytery.

33. Session Leadership of Congregation [G-3.0201. a-c]:

The Minutes should reflect, although not necessarily in any single report, how the Session fulfills its responsibilities for oversight, nurture, education and fellowship as required and expected in the *Book of Order* [G-3.0201].

35. Record of Minutes Review [G-3.0108 a; b.]:

The annual review and evaluation by the Presbytery of ~~the previous year's~~ **years of** Session Minutes are to be reported to the Session and recorded in that meeting's minutes, including a listing of any exceptions which have been noted by Presbytery and, if necessary, any corrective action ordered by Presbytery.

Record of Congregational Meetings

37. Congregational Meetings and church organizational reports [G-3.0204]:

The minutes of a congregational meeting record only those actions which are authorized by the Form of Government in G-1.0503. All other matters and decisions within the life of the local church are reserved to the Session according to the polity and governance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The congregational meeting minutes are to record all actions of the congregation, within its defined authority (G-1.0503), including the full details of any property transaction or decision, with the full legal description of real property. Appropriate organizational reports are to be available to the members of the congregation, usually as part of an annual meeting, reflecting the general nature and substance of the church's life. Such reports may be included in the minutes.

41. Congregational Meeting Minutes [G-1.0505]:

The Session Minutes are to contain the minutes of congregational meetings, including reports from the organizations in the church, attested as accurate by the signature of both the Session moderator and the clerk acting as secretary and entered into the Session Minutes record either as an independent entry in the same year or appended to the minutes of the next meeting of the Session.

Rolls and Registers [G-3.0204]

44. - 46. The Session through its Clerk shall maintain a membership roll, which distinguishes three types of members: 1) active, 2) affiliated and 3) baptized. The third category refers to those members who have been baptized but not yet confirmed as active members, typically children prior to communicant training and acceptance. There may be one roll with distinctive notations or three separate rolls.

47. - 49. The Session shall maintain registers of all baptisms in the life of the church, of all ruling elders, deacons, and installed pastors with dates of service. Elders and Deacons may have multiple terms of active service, so the registers should reflect all terms of service.

50. The Session shall maintain a register of all marriages in the church with names of the parties and dates.

It may establish appropriate additional registers, e.g., employees of the church, commissioners to Presbytery, temporary pastors, supporting friends of the church, and other registers as appropriate for historical purposes.

n.b. The records of Session may be maintained electronically for ordinary operational use. The permanent archival records, however, must be retained in hard copy/paper form, according to professional archival standards and periodically submitted for permanent storage in the national archival facility of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Department of History in Philadelphia. Digitized, electronic copies may also be made for the local records of the church. The Stated Clerk of Presbytery can assist in accomplishing these matters upon request.