

Frequently Asked Questions about the New Form of Government Office of the General Assembly

Updated August 2011 to reflect the most frequently asked questions of all six agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

When did the new Form of Government take effect?

The new Form of Government took effect on July 10, 2011, which is one year after the adjournment of the 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is included in the newest edition of the *Book of Order* (2011-2013).

Changes

What has changed with the new Form of Government?

The same basic polity that has defined the core work of councils (governing bodies) continues with the new Form of Government. This revision is not so much about “what” councils do – our essential polity – as it is about “who” and “how.” Increased flexibility in structures and procedures in a less regulatory environment is the major change. The new Form of Government allows councils to increase their focus on God’s work and how the church can most effectively participate in that work in each situation, rather than being focused on an increasingly lengthy and burdensome list of requirements.

What are the changes to terminology in the new Form of Government?

Former term	New term
office	ordered ministry
minister of the Word and Sacrament	teaching elder
elder	ruling elder
Commissioned lay pastor	Commissioned ruling elder
governing body	council

Will the change in terminology affect any of the six agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?

Under the new Form of Government, the GAMC will no longer be a council, but an agency of a council (the General Assembly). Therefore, the GAMC will have a new name in the coming weeks. The names of the other five agencies will remain the same (Board of Pensions, Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Foundation, Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, and Presbyterian Publishing Corporation).

What does the new Form of Government say about congregations?

In the old Form of Government, the congregation served as an essential mission arm of the presbytery and the larger church. In the new Form of Government, the congregation is the basic form of the church, but is not of itself a sufficient form of the church.

What is the role of councils (formerly governing bodies)?

The purpose of councils is to help congregations, and the church as a whole, be more

faithful participants in the mission of Christ.

What impact did the adoption of the new Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and Form of Government have on the texts of the Directory for Worship and the Rules of Discipline?

The revision of the Form of Government did not change the Directory for Worship or the Rules of Discipline. These documents remain part of the *Book of Order* and continue to have constitutional force and effect for the church. Editorial corrections were made in both documents to 1) include the specific constitutional amendments approved by a majority of the presbyteries, 2) align references to the new Form of Government, and 3) reflect the new terminology in the Foundations and Form of Government (see previous question).

Manuals

Will a council need to immediately revise its manual of operations?

Existing manuals – already required of presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly, and in use by many sessions – remain in force until changed by a council. Revisions do not have to be made immediately, affording a council time to determine what structures and procedures will work best to carry out its identified mission for Jesus Christ. [The Advisory Handbook for Councils for the Development of Policies and Procedures \[hyperlink\]](#) identifies policies and procedures required by the new Form of Government for each council, most of which should already be in place and would be revised only if and when a council deems it necessary.

What about sessions that have no manual?

Sessions will need to create a manual of their policies and procedures that will, at the least, need to define certain discretionary powers now given to them. These are described in the [Advisory Handbook for Councils for the Development of Policies and Procedures \[hyperlink\]](#) and include such things as quorums, adequate notice for special meetings, any changes to the nominations process, and so forth. Many of these might already exist as standing policies (prior actions) of the session. The size of the manual will depend on how detailed the structure is that the session has in place.

Ordination

What impact did the adoption of Amendment 10-A have on the text of the new Form of Government?

The passage of Amendment 10-A that changed the text of the former G-6.0106b also changed the text in the new Form of Government and is found at G-2.0104b.

Authoritative Interpretations

What happens to existing Authoritative Interpretations under the new Form of Government?

Authoritative Interpretations (AIs) of the Constitution can only be made or rescinded

through the constitutional process. All current AIs remain in effect until changed by a future General Assembly, which is the situation that has always existed with any amendment to the Form of Government that has been previously interpreted. A task force is currently working to make recommendations to the 220th General Assembly (2012) on the continuing status of all AIs, based on guidelines provided by the Advisory Committee on the Constitution to the 219th General Assembly (2010).

How will accountability be enforced in the new Form of Government?

The new Form of Government continues the longstanding Presbyterian principle of right-of-review of one council by the next higher council (F-3.0206, G-3.0108). Emphasis is placed on the need for consultation between councils on mission strategy, structures, and procedures. Enforcement of administrative and judicial directives relies even now on trust and mutual accountability, undergirded by our belief that all church power is ministerial and declarative (F-3.0107). Our work together as Presbyterians gathered in congregations and councils of the church will continue to be guided by this important declaration: “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-1.0102). No Form of Government can legislate this trust and love, but by answering the new Form of Government’s call to work cooperatively and collegially to identify and implement the mission of each council of the church, we may find a deepened sense of commitment and connection to Jesus Christ and each other as the journey progresses.

Pension and benefits

Does the New Form of Government change anything about mandated participation in the Benefits Plan of the Board of Pensions for installed pastors and associate pastors?

No, nothing has changed. Here is the old and new language:

(old language) G-14.0534: The terms of call shall always provide for compensation that meets or exceeds any minimum requirements of the presbytery in effect when the call is made, and the congregation’s obligation to review the adequacy of the minister’s compensation and adjust the compensation to meet changes in the presbytery’s requirements as amended from time to time. The call shall include participation in the Benefits Plan of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), including both pension and medical coverage, or any successor plan approved by the General Assembly.

(new language) G-2.0804: The terms of call shall always meet or exceed any minimum requirement of the presbytery in effect when the call is made. The session shall review annually the minister’s terms of call and shall propose for congregational action (G-1.0501) such changes as the session deems appropriate, provided that they meet the presbytery’s minimum requirements. The call shall include participation in the benefits plan of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),

including both pension and medical coverage, or any successor plan approved by the General Assembly.

Property

Did passage of the new Form of Government alter the church property trust clause language in any way?

The language of the church property trust clause was not changed in any way. It can be found in the new *Book of Order* at G-4.0203.

Does the presbytery still have to approve encumbering of property?

If, prior to the new Form of Government, a congregation was required to seek presbytery's approval to encumber the property, then the requirement to have presbytery's approval continues. The Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program still requires the presbytery to guarantee the loan even if the congregation does not have to seek permission from the presbytery.

If a church's loan is guaranteed by the presbytery and the church moves to another presbytery, what happens to the guarantee?

The guarantee will be the responsibility of the original presbytery that signed the guarantee agreement unless a new guarantee agreement is signed by the new presbytery. The Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program (PILP) will not automatically move the guarantee. PILP will evaluate the credit strength of the succeeding presbytery and decide on a loan-by-loan basis whether the guarantee can be transferred or if there will be two guarantee agreements.

Publications

What about publications that include references to the previous Form of Government?

Every agency is at work updating resources to reflect the language and spirit of the new Form of Government.

Where can I find the *Book of Order* (2011-2013)?

Available for purchase from the PC(USA) Church Store (pcusastore.com):

- Print version of the *Book of Order* (2011-2013) – also available in Korean, Spanish, and Braille
- CD-ROM of the PC(USA) Constitution (*The Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*)

Available for purchase from Amazon (amazon.com): <http://amzn.to/ooRJ2J>

- Kindle version of the *Book of Order* (2011-2013)

Available free of charge (<http://oga.pcusa.org/constitution.htm>)

- Downloadable PDF of the *Book of Order* (2011-2013)

Additional resources, including an errata sheet for the print and Kindle versions of the new *Book of Order*, are available at <http://oga.pcusa.org/constitution.htm>.