



Regarding Ruling Elders 2014-2017

Relationships



Regarding Ruling Elders: A Monthly Series for Serving Faithfully

Ruling elders are called to ministry in partnership with teaching elders. Within this calling, ruling elders have responsibilities in several areas of the life of the church including exercise in leadership, governance, spiritual discernment, and discipline. This series seeks to lift up the specific responsibilities while also providing an opportunity to reflect upon how they are lived out.

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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: finding your voice as a ruling elder



Office of the General Assembly

VALERIE YOUNG

“The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles ... calls women and men to all ministries of the Church” (*The Book of Confessions, A Brief Statement of Faith*, 10.4, lines 58–59, 64).

I am a true “over-thinker.” That means I’ve thought so much about how I ended up a ruling elder in a teaching elder world that I doubted my qualifications due to a lack of earthly credentials. At times, I have lost sight of the fact that God called me! Others have affirmed it, regardless of how long my resume is or how many degrees I hold.

Soon after I began my new role with the synod, I was gathered with new colleagues, still overthinking and doubting my qualifications. A wise collaborator said, “Oh, stop it! You’re here now, so what are you going to do?” While I thought it incredibly rude at the time, I have since come to see it as a reminder of my call, and I am grateful.

At each council level above that of the session (presbytery, synod, and General Assembly), our constitution calls for numerical parity of ruling elders and teaching elders. That means that there are to be equal numbers of ruling elders and teaching elders at each level (*Book of Order*, G-3.0301; G-3.0401; G-3.0501). Ruling elders are equal partners in the work of the church.

Valerie recommends the following resources:

- Theocademy lessons on Ordered Ministry, especially the first video in the series, and suggests watching it with other ruling elders and teaching elders rather than watching alone
- *Presbyterian Polity for Church Leaders, 4th edition*, by Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker (Geneva Press: Louisville, 2012)

In addition to the moderator of the church session, a teaching elder, the session members are ruling elders. The session is responsible for, among other things, the administration of the church and its 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 ... [demonstrating] the unity and interdependence of the church, in that councils share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers” (*Book of Order*, G-3.0106). The session is charged with the management and direction of the church, we (ruling elders and teaching elders) are to enable

one another in our ministries. Ruling elders are called upon more and more to lead, educate, establish, and oversee administration as needed to support the mission of the church. We are partners in ministry and mission.

Remembering the gifts of the Spirit found in First Corinthians, we all have different gifts—and in the PC(USA), ruling elders are called to use them in a broad way—not everyone is called to attend seminary or to serve as a mission co-worker, but everyone—**EVERYONE**—is called to use their gifts, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ regardless of their standing in the world.

It is time that we all understand the role of ruling elders as partners in Christ's Church. You're here now, what are **YOU** going to do?

Valerie (Knox) Young, is a ruling elder who has been serving with the Synod of the Sun for almost ten years, currently as co-leader for administration and stated clerk. She also serves as a Steering Committee member of East Broad Outreach Community (a new church development of Grace Presbytery) in Mansfield, Texas.

**For more about the
information provided here:**

Browse the Ruling Elders Web site at
<http://www.pcusa.org/rulingelders>

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: ordered ministries



Office of the General Assembly

ALYSON JANKE

Conversation in a restaurant: “Kim and Joe, would you come to church with us on Sunday morning? Ted and I are both being ordained at the 10 o’clock service and we’d love to have you there for the service and fellowship afterwards.” Kim replied: “Ordained! Neither one of you are trained as

ministers. What’s this all about?”

It’s true, Presbyterians ordain to ministries besides that of minister of the Word and Sacrament. “The Church’s ordered ministries described in the New Testament and maintained by this church are deacons and presbyters (teaching elders and ruling elders)” (*Book of Order*, G-2.0102). Ordination is the rite by which persons are set aside with prayer and the laying on of hands to serve in these roles of ordered ministry (*Book of Order*, W-4.4001a). The session is responsible for preparation and examination of ruling elders and deacons before their ordination. All those in ordered ministries answer the same questions at ordination, except the final questions that address the specific role[s] unique to that order of ministry.

You may have thought you became a ruling elder or deacon because of a phone call from someone on a nominating committee, but in actuality, it was the Holy Spirit making a claim on your life.

Call to Ordered Ministry

The people who serve in these ordered ministries are elected by the congregation or council of the church that they will serve. “[T]he right of God’s people to elect presbyters and deacons is inalienable” (*Book of Order*, G-2.0102). This election by the people is one step in what we refer to as a “call to ordered ministry.” The call has three components: an individual’s sense that the Holy Spirit is moving him or her to such service, “the approval of a community of God’s people” (such as election by a congregation), “and the concurring judgment of a council of the Church” (*Book of Order*, G-2.0103). You may have thought that you became a ruling elder or deacon because of a phone call from someone on a nominating committee, but in actuality, it was the Holy Spirit making a claim on your life.

Roles of Deacons and Ruling Elders

“The ministry of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the

redeeming love of Jesus Christ ..." (*Book of Order*, G-2.0201). The session maintains oversight of the deacons who may be individuals commissioned to specific work, or may be organized as a board. Not all congregations choose to have the ordered ministry of deacon, but the function of this ministry is always preserved and falls to the ruling elders and the session (*Book of Order*, G-2.0202).

Ruling elders are not equipped with crowns and scepters, but with measuring tapes and Bibles.

Presbyters are teaching elders (also called ministers of the Word and Sacrament) and ruling elders (members of a congregation elected by and ordained in a congregation). Ruling elders are not called "ruling" because of their role in governance, but because they are "to discern and measure [a congregation's] fidelity to the

Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life" (*Book of Order*, F-3.0202). Ruling elders are not equipped with crowns and scepters, but with measuring tapes and Bibles.

Persons ordained as a deacon or ruling elder ordinarily are in that ordered ministry for life, but will serve specific terms on the deacon board or the session. Elected terms are usually three years, but a person may be reelected to serve a second full or partial term totaling no more than six years. During terms on the session, ruling elders participate in the governance of the congregation. Whether in active service or not, ruling elders may be elected to serve as commissioners to other councils and may be elected by the more inclusive councils to serve on committees, commissions, or as officers. When elected to active service on councils, "ruling elders participate and vote with the same authority as teaching elders, and they are eligible for any office" (*Book of Order*, G-2.0301). Both ruling elders and deacons may participate in worship leadership as detailed in the Directory for Worship (e.g., W-2.3011, W-3.3603, W-3.3616d and e).

For more about the information provided here:

Browse the Ruling Elders Web site at <http://www.pcusa.org/rulingelders>

Kim and Joe did attend that service of worship and were pleased to see their friends ordained, one as a deacon, the other as a ruling elder, and to witness this uniquely Presbyterian event.

Alyson Janke is a ruling elder, currently serving as the stated clerk of John Knox Presbytery. She teaches Presbyterian Polity at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, serves on the General Assembly Advisory Committee on the Constitution, and is commissioned to pastoral service in Wild Rose, Wisconsin. Alyson and her husband and son own and operate a dairy farm in central Wisconsin.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders building community



Office of the General Assembly

IRENE PAK

One of my favorite aspects about being Presbyterian is that no matter what we are called to do within the life of the church, we are called to do it in community. We know that being called to do things together sometimes makes things a lot easier and sometimes more difficult, depending on how we like to work, but in the life of the church, we are called to “do” and to “be” church together. Jesus set that example for us by calling twelve disciples to engage in ministry with him, and even when they were asked to set out for a specific task, they were sent out, at least, two by two.

Knowing this, ruling elders are called to engage in community within the church and outside of it – yes, even outside of Session and committee meetings, although those meetings, themselves, can be great places to begin building and fostering deeper relationships and community while attending to the needs and ministry of the church.

There are many ways to build community outside of the meeting space but here are some practical ways that could be considered to foster leadership and relationship in community.

“[Jesus] called the twelve and began to send them out two by two...” Mark 6:7

Serve home communion – Form pairs of ruling elders and deacons to serve home communion to shut-ins who would like to receive it on the day communion is served in the congregation. Those who have participated in our congregation, while beginning with hesitation, come back with a sense of spiritual renewal. Serving communion and praying with someone who cannot come to the church is always a powerful act and particularly when serving two by two. (*Book of Order*, W-3.3616e) Visit <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/worship/service-lords-day-extendedcommunion/> for more information.

Lead in worship – Consider the ways you might assist in worship leadership, whether as a liturgist or in some other way. The visual and audio connection that comes from the voices and people inviting the Spirit into that space for that time builds connections. Engaging in prayer for the community or for an individual in the context of worship and on a personal one-on-one basis enriches your own spiritual leadership while participating in the lives and ministry of others.

Create a Mission and Service Project Sunday – Communities of faith are increasingly taking opportunities during the Sunday worship time to periodically go out into the community and participate in an act of service as the act of worship for that day. Take the lead on one of the service project possibilities and take a group with you. The worship service does not need to be canceled in order for this to happen. In fact, the congregation I serve had 3-4 leaders taking groups out after being commissioned at the beginning of the worship service. They went to sites like Habitat for Humanity, local education programs, and members of the choir went out as a “Care Choir” to sing to our shut-ins. Following the service, those who were there had an opportunity to put together lunches for another local shelter, so that

all could participate even if they could not physically go off site.

Host a gathering with an interfaith partner – With a bit more planning involved, engaging in a program or retreat that is intentional about interfaith dialogue and learning is a great way to connect with the community beyond your church and even beyond your own comfort zone. Because of all of the headline news about extremist Islamic groups and feeling a call to action toward understanding, our congregation recently held a Women’s Retreat with a local organization of our Muslim sisters. We learned more about Islam and engaged in more intimate conversation within small groups. What was wonderful about this experience is the diversity that came from among them, and also that they saw in us! We were all surprised but grew in deeper understanding of one another.

The key in all of this is to remember to do the work of ministry together, and never take for granted the call placed on your life in this time to serve and the impact even simple gestures can have for your community of faith.

For more about the information provided here, browse the Ruling Elders Web site at <http://www.pcusa.org/rulingelders>.

The Rev. Irene Pak serves as the Associate Pastor at Stone Church of Willow Glen in San Jose, California. Prior to this, she served as an Associate Pastor for English Ministries at Daesung Korean Presbyterian Church in Sunnyvale, California. Irene also served in the PC(USA) office of Racial Justice and Advocacy for one year. She loves to read, play guitar and cello, and eat good food.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: managing conflict



Office of the General Assembly

MARK KOENIG

Conflict. None of us really like it. The word itself may make us nervous. But conflict is part of life. We experience conflict in communities, national debates, and personal relationships. We experience conflict in our congregations.

John Paul Lederach, a Mennonite layperson and a pioneer in the field of conflict transformation, suggests conflict is woven into the fabric of creation. God creates a vast diverse human family and gives the human creature freedom and the capacity to feel, think, act, and react. In his book, *The Journey Toward Reconciliation*, Lederach writes, “These elements make our lives rich, ever-renewing, and interesting. They also make conflict a natural part of our relationships” (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa., 1999, p. 130).

The question is not whether we can avoid conflict in our congregational life. The question is how we will handle the conflict that is a normal part of our life together as followers of Jesus. While congregations experiencing serious conflict are encouraged to contact their presbytery for assistance and guidance, some basic concepts and practices can increase the possibility that the experience of conflict will be enlightening, constructive, and creative: a time in which we discover God’s grace in surprising ways that strengthen Christ’s body.

Prayer. Pray for each other, for the community, for guidance and wisdom, and for ourselves.

Mutual Invitation. This process comes from the work of the Reverend Eric H.F. Law. Using Mutual Invitation, one person speaks and the others listen. The speaker then invites a group member to speak next. The process continues until everyone has had the opportunity to speak. Mutual Invitation helps ensure everyone in the group is included, respected, and heard. The use of Mutual Invitation over time helps group members listen and speak more effectively, even in situations where it is not used.

Ground Rules. Ground rules provide a framework within which a group might interact respectfully. Many congregations have used ground rules created by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—*Seeking to Be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement*. [1]

Identify the Congregation’s Unwritten Rules. All congregations have unwritten rules that identify what is and is not acceptable. Healthy congregations look at their unwritten rules. They consider how these rules enrich the life of the congregation as a whole. Rules that enhance the congregation’s life are affirmed. The congregation seeks to rewrite unhelpful rules and norms so they become helpful rather than hurtful in the congregation’s life.

Listen. Listen for understanding. Focus on what is being said rather than on how we might respond. Practice empathy, welcome, and compassion in an effort to hear the experiences, concerns, and commitments of the person to whom we are listening.

Speak. Speak clearly. Speak for ourselves. Speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). Focus on the issue at hand rather than on blaming others or justifying ourselves.

Look to Ourselves. In conflict, our first instinct is often to ask what is wrong with the other person. Instead consider why we responded to the issue or the statement as we did. What beliefs or values deep within us were touched? Awareness of why we respond allows us to shift our focus from personalities to the causes of disagreement.

State the Areas of Agreement. We seek common ground for our shared ministry as followers of Christ. A basic communication skill can help us in that effort: stating areas of agreement before identifying where we disagree. The search for common ground shows that, even as we disagree, we are at least as interested in what binds us together as we are in what separates us. Our ways of listening and speaking and working together change as we become as eager to explore our agreements as we are to express our differences.

Jesus teaches his followers how to address conflict in Matthew 18:15–17. Talk directly to one another in times of conflict. If that does not lead to resolution, we are to bring one or two others into the conversation. And if that fails, “tell it to the church” (Matthew 18:17). As John Paul Lederach reminds us, Jesus provides “a view of the church as a place to process and work with conflict, not a place that is free from conflict” (*The Journey Toward Reconciliation*, p. 130).

For more about the information provided here:

Browse the Ruling Elders website at <http://www.pcusa.org/rulingelders>

Conflict is a part of life; it is a part of the life of the church. By God’s grace and with hard and prayer-filled work, times of conflict can be times of growth and learning on our journey following Jesus. May it be so for you.

For further study, consider using the Peacemaking Program’s resource, *To Strengthen Christ’s Body: Tools for Talking about Tough Issues*. Order from Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Church Store; \$5; PDS #2435808001 [2]

The Reverend W. Mark Koenig serves as the director of the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations. Mark previously served with the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program; on the staff of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve; and as co-pastor of congregations in Iowa and Ohio. [3]

[1] <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/seeking-be-faithful-together/~>

[2] <http://store.pcusa.org/Communications?search=To+strengthen+christ%27s+body>

[3] <http://www.pcusa.org/un>

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: ministry in changing neighborhoods



Office of the General Assembly

THE REVEREND DR. FELIPE
N. MARTINEZ

A suburban Presbyterian church knew that its neighborhood had been changing, with an increasing number of immigrant Latino families now living in the area. A ruling elder from the church wanted to meet with me to ask how they should reach out to the growing Latino community. As a church, she thought, they should offer worship opportunities to their new neighbors, so she was wondering how to start a Spanish-

language service. In her mind, she could already see a banner hanging outside the church announcing their new worship in Spanish. Knowing that the church had very few racial ethnic minorities on their rolls, and that they had not done any outreach to the Latino community before, I asked her to take a step back before we went any further. I asked “What are you good at as a church? I would focus on that first as the way to connect with this new community.” For example, I said, if you were to tell me that your church has a very successful daycare, then I would wonder about the impact on your ministry if you hired a bilingual person to work part-time at the daycare. I could tell that my suggestion had gotten the wheels turning. The ruling elder said that in fact they had several active and retired teachers in the congregation, as well as a couple of bilingual people. With that she began to consider how those strengths could be used as key components of a new outreach.

The ruling elder got her session thinking about this idea, and in subsequent meetings a process began to take shape to create a bilingual tutoring ministry. One of the interesting aspects of their plan was that instead of having the children come to the church for tutoring, these Presbyterian volunteers would tutor in the community room at an apartment complex where many Latino families lived. It was the church going to the people, rather than expecting the people to come to the church. The program created a buzz in the community and was successful for many years: helping children improve in the school, nurturing a connection of the church and the community, and re-energizing a passion for mission within the church.

Ruling elders play a key role in any outreach to a church’s changing community:

Ruling elders who are curious and engaged are particularly well-suited for having their ear to the ground to notice trends, strengths, and needs in their community.

Ruling elders know how to build relationship bridges between the church and its neighborhood.

Ruling elders with a heart for mission understand the importance of fostering buy-in from the community they are supporting, inviting the community to partner in the development and launch of an outreach effort.

The more ruling elders are involved in the planning and implementation of outreach ideas, the better the congregation’s

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ownership of the project will be.

Many of our congregations are blessed with opportunities to reach out to their increasingly diverse neighborhoods. The stories of cross-cultural ministry with the deepest impact in the church and community have at least one thing in common: the energy and passion of the ruling elders in leadership.

Felipe N. Martinez is the transitional general presbyter and stated clerk at the Presbytery of Great Rivers. The first ten years after graduating from McCormick Theological Seminary, Felipe served as pastor of a small rural congregation. He then supported Hispanic ministry and an international partnership with Mexico as associate executive presbyter in Whitewater Valley Presbytery for eleven years.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders and trustees



Office of the General Assembly

CHANDLER STOKES

Let's say that in the midst of a meeting of First Presbyterian Church's board of trustees, the conversation has become "energized" as the group comes to an agreement about investing church funds. As they prepare to move forward, a new trustee asks how the group can proceed and take action on the decision. Rusty McDonnell, president of the

board, assures the new member that the trustees do not need approval or counsel with the session and can make a plan for the investment of the monies as a part of this meeting. Interesting development!

As you consider the relationship between session and trustees, keep in mind that the session of the church, its active ruling elders, are responsible and hold jurisdiction over the entire ministry of the church, with the exception of those very few aspects reserved for teaching elders. So, the trustees of the church, whether they meet separately or are completely integrated into the session, make decisions only as the session delegates that responsibility to them.

The trustees of the church, whether they meet separately or are completely integrated into the session, make decisions only as the session delegates that responsibility to them.

The choice of how to employ the gifts of trustees for the ministry of the church is largely a matter of style (and sometimes of trust). In some churches, some of the active elders are designated as trustees, and they exercise their delegated responsibility as committee of session. The decision of the trustees, acting as a committee of session would in regular course be approved by the session, as any other committee's action would be. In other churches, the trustees meet as a separate body nearly always. The session might tacitly approve the trustees' actions by having delegated responsibility to them for a particular area of ministry.

A Congregation with a Board of Trustees

Most of the congregations I have served have had a "separate" board of trustees. I put "separate" in quotes, because, as mentioned previously, trustees only have authority that has been delegated to them by the session. In the congregation I currently serve, the session meets on the first Monday of the month, and the trustees meet on the third Monday of the month. And twice each year we have an evening when we meet together (along with the deacons). We also meet together occasionally for special meetings.

The trustees have a president, vice president, treasurer (who functions as the treasurer of the congregation, although they have significant staff support), and a secretary. These officers are chosen by the trustees themselves. The staff support (in a 1,400 member church) includes the "staff" treasurer, who does all the mechanics of the books and keeps the elected trustee treasurer informed, the church administrator, and the executive pastor. Other responsibilities of the trustees include serving as liaisons to some of our constituent ministries: the food pantry board, the child development

center board, the camp board, as well as the personnel and stewardship committees.

The session has delegated responsibility for the financial and legal affairs of the church to the trustees. The trustees do not set the budget (that is done by the session), but the trustees monitor it, along with the stewardship committee of session. The trustees claim the first line of responsibility for our facilities as well.

The trust between these boards is maintained through lots of communication. A trustee attends every session meeting. The minutes of each group are reviewed by the other. We recently entered into a capital campaign. When we were considering start dates for building and a new approach to pledging, session held a joint meeting with the trustees to glean from some of their experience.

For a constitutional reference to trustees and ruling elders, specifically related to incorporation, see G-4.01 in the PC(USA) Book of Order.

Either approach can lead to coherent and fruitful ministry as long as the relationship is maintained and the lines of communication are clear. In the case of our friend, Rusty McDonnell, the fictive president of the board of trustees of First Presbyterian Church, he was corrected by the vice president and reminded that while the enthusiasm for the project and its decision was exciting, the group would need to wait until the next session meeting to bring everyone on board.

The Reverend Chandler Stokes is senior pastor & head of staff at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He has been in ordained ministry for more than thirty years and has worked in rural, suburban, and urban churches from 25 to 1,400 members. And he loves his work.

For more about the information provided here, browse the Ruling Elders website at <http://www.pcusa.org/rulingelders>.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: calling young people to serve



Office of the General Assembly

GINA YEAGER-BUCKLEY

The Scriptures are full of the stories of young people, called by God, to be leaders. And not just class presidents or merit scholars—leaders of tribes, prophets of Israel, slayers of giants, judges, apostles, and even a mysterious twelve-year-old, teaching in the temple, Savior. We have the evidence of God’s hand upon young women and men as spiritual leaders. But we might need a few other things to nudge us, remind us, and inspire us.

First, we need a word from the Word—the divine testimony that all people, who are baptized, who believe in Jesus Christ, and who are open to serve as Jesus did, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can be tapped to lead God’s people. The requirement for leadership is call. Call by God and call of the community.

Next, as a nominating committee begins its work each year, how wonderful would it be if they began their discernment by reading together some of the call stories offered in Scripture. Interestingly, a good number of them are about young people; the call of shepherds, students, young wives, young girls, young adults. Beyond the reminder of the variety of personalities, responses, and situations, there is proof that God’s hand taps those of all ages and lifespan stages.

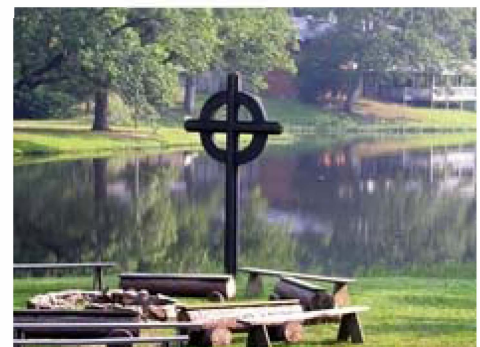
Thirdly, be inspired, rather than nervous, by what a young person brings. Young people are more idealistic and less worn-out by church politics, history, and tradition. Use this. Use their ideas and their idealism to push yourselves to try things, to be more inclusive, to be more plainspoken. Young people called to serve as ruling elders should not be novel, should not be a source of pride. Instead, their service should simply be a response to a very long and faithful legacy.

Here are a few things to bear in mind as you consider calling a young person to serve as a ruling elder:

Call a young person if they demonstrate the gifts evident of a faithful leader. Being called to serve is about God’s call—and the subsequent response of the community and the person called. It is not a “seat” or a “spot” to be filled.

Keep young people on your radar. Leadership looks radically different among adults than among young people. While many teenage leaders have been winners of awards, well-spoken, and fairly high profile, remember those who shine a little less brightly but who possess poise, wisdom, and faithful church engagement. The quiet one or the funny one

A young person might not have extensive budget experience, but they will certainly be recipients of the financial work and legacy the session is working through.



may be a dynamic elder. Get to know them.

Consider calling younger leaders in pairs. In the congregational legends of young elders there are tales and more tales of young people who felt uneasy, baffled, overlooked, and lonely. How would you feel, as an adult, if you were the only adult placed at a table entirely surrounded by all youth? It's challenging enough to be a ruling elder. The meetings, the focus, the decision-making, the backside view of the church. Add to that the oddity of being the only one. Lifting up more than one young person could be helpful.

Consider forming ruling elder partners. Partners serve as listening ears and a prayerful presence for each other. It's helpful, especially for a younger leader, to have a trusted partner/accompanier on the session. And, removing age from the equation, it is helpful for all leaders to have a partner. Encourage session partners to debrief questions, information, decisions with each other, avoiding the parking lot conversations.

While it is a reality that most young people don't have extensive knowledge of *Roberts Rules of Order*, church finance, property maintenance, or theological debates, they do have ideas, viewpoints, and intimate knowledge of the lives of younger church members and participants. Young people are valuable to the life of the church and have much to offer.

Gina Yeager-Buckley is a ruling elder who serves as the associate for Ministries with Youth for the Presbyterian Mission Agency. Gina lives and works in Louisville, Kentucky.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders and treasurers



Office of the General Assembly

TED MCCULLOCH

Back in the days when circuses traveled the land, there was a strongman as one of the sideshow acts that would demonstrate his power before a large audience. Toward the end, he squeezed the juice from a lemon between his hands. He then said to the audience, “I will offer \$200 to anyone in the audience who can squeeze another drop

from this lemon.”

A thin, scholarly looking elderly woman with glasses on a chain around her neck, came forward, picked up the lemon, squeezed it hard, and managed to get a drop of juice out of the lemon. The strongman was amazed. As he paid the woman the \$200, he said, “I’ve got to ask, ‘What is the secret of your strength?’”

“Practice,” the woman answered. “I was the treasurer of First Presbyterian Church for thirty-two years and have always had to squeeze something out of nothing!”

Often the task of our church treasurers seems to always be to try to make something out of nothing. The task of the church treasurer is not easy. Sessions, not to mention pastors or even congregations, often ask treasurers to find ways to pay for the things they want or believe the church needs to fund. Almost inevitably, this can lead to tensions between the session and the treasurer. Sessions can be perceived by treasurers as spending without regard for the church finances and treasurers can be perceived as unreasonably standing in the way of the session’s funding of church ministry.

So how should ruling elders and church treasurers relate?

The *Book of Order* only provides one reference to treasurers. The Form of Government, G-3.0205, says “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.” But from that one sentence, we see a couple of important things about how ruling elders on a session and treasurers are to relate.

This declaration is a reminder that it is the session that elects the treasurer. The treasurer is not chosen by the pastor or even by the congregation as a whole. The session elects the treasurer. That’s also why the session shall decide and shall supervise the treasurer’s work. To put it another way, the treasurer’s ultimate responsibility is to the session. This is the reason that the full text of G-3.0205 includes that sessions shall make sure certain procedures are followed regarding the counting and recording of offerings; the keeping of financial books and records that are also open to inspection by church officers (which is what session members are); and at least annual reports of all financial activities.

One other important note is that G-3.0205 says that the session shall elect the treasurer to “such term as the session shall decide. ...” Treasurers are not elected for life though sometimes it probably feels that way. Instead, they are elected for a term—that term can be one year or ten years or any length set by the session—as long as there is a specific term length.

That term length can actually be a great opportunity for the ruling elders and treasurer to relate. When the end of a treasurer's term is approaching, a session can be helpful to treasurers, especially treasurers that the session wants to have to continue, to not only ask if the treasurer wants to continue but to really listen to the treasurer's answer. Many times, out of love for their congregation, a treasurer will say something similar to, "Well, if no one else will do it, I guess I can do it again." And a session will leap on that as all the answer they need. But what if ruling elders really listened to that answer as an opportunity to have a meaningful conversation with the treasurer about whether she or he wants to continue and what, if any, adjustments can be made. The work is difficult and stressful enough without feeling like you can never step away from it.

Treasurers are a valued and necessary person in every congregation. The task may often seem like squeezing out one more drop of juice from a dried up lemon but the vast majority of treasurers never quit trying to do so. In that way, ruling elders and treasurers are exactly alike—they both love their congregations with all their hearts and all their souls. That may be the most important thing of all to know.

The Reverend Ted McCulloch has been the stated clerk for the Presbytery of Lake Huron since April 2010. He has served congregations in Birch Run and Saginaw, Michigan. Ted's favorite saying is that the church should be a hospital for sinners and not a museum for saints and hopes as both pastor and stated clerk, he serves in that spirit.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders and Clerks of Session



Office of the General Assembly

TED MCCULLOCH

Growing up just outside of Chicago, I was, and remain today, an avid Chicago Cubs fan. I learned early on that living around me there were two types of baseball fans—Chicago Cubs fans and Chicago White Sox fans. It was one team or the other even though both teams were from the same city.

Believe it or not, that old childhood realization comes to my mind when it comes to clerks of session. As I've met with clerks of session over the years, I realize there are two types of clerks—those who are also serving on the session as an active elder and those who are not currently serving as session members. That's because G-3.0104 of the *Book of Order* says only that “the clerk of the session shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine.” It doesn't say that the ruling elder must be an active ruling elder on the session. Nor does it say that the ruling elder must not be an active ruling elder on the session. It is open to either. It seems that the difference can show up in how sessions and clerks relate.

When the clerk is not a member of the session, it is often necessary to remind sessions that the clerk has been where they are. Every clerk, at one time or another, has sat in session meetings and wrestled with the same things that all ruling elders wrestle with. Whether it's the budget or Sunday school or praying for guidance on a new mission outreach, ruling elders have had to pray and work together. As ruling elders themselves, at some point, the clerk has shared those experiences. Clerks understand what ruling elders go through on session because they have been there too.

When the clerk is a member of the session, the difficulty can often be just the opposite. It can be easy for the clerk to function more as a member of the session and not in their role as clerk. In those situations, the other ruling elders on the session may have to support the clerk in the clerk role.

Responsibilities of the Clerk of Session

Regardless of which type of clerk one has, the responsibilities of the clerk remain the same. The same section mentioned earlier, G-3.0104, details the responsibilities of the 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.”

One responsibility that's not listed in G-3.0104 but in G-1.0505 is that “the clerk of session shall serve as secretary for all the meetings of the congregation. If the clerk of session is unable to serve, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting.” Please note that the congregation elects the secretary for that congregational meeting. The clerk does not appoint someone nor does the session or the moderator. The congregation has to elect the secretary when the clerk is not able to be present.

Terms of Service

Finally, it's important to remember that clerks are "elected by the session for such term as it may determine" (that familiar G-3.0104 again). The length of that elected term is not specified and can be one year or three years or any agreed upon length. But whatever the term, if the clerk is going to be asked to serve another term, truly listening to how the clerk feels about serving again can be one of the greatest gifts ruling elders can give.

Most clerks really enjoy being able to serve their congregations in this capacity and appreciate the opportunity to work with ruling elders for the betterment of the congregations they all love. As a ruling elder themselves, they want your church—their church—to flourish and grow in service for Christ.

The Reverend Ted McCulloch has been the stated clerk for the Presbytery of Lake Huron since April 2010. He has served congregations in Birch Run and Saginaw, Michigan. As an ever-hopeful Cubs fan, Ted was very hopeful as his Cubs came up just short of the World Series this year.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders and deacons



Office of the General Assembly

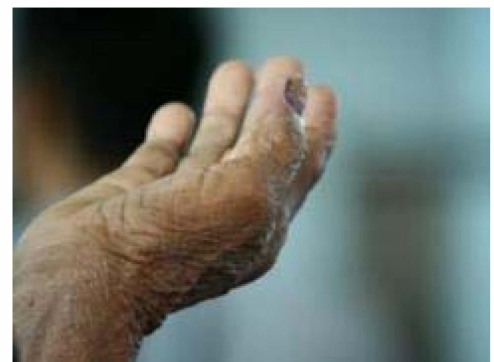
RALPH HAWKINS

The *Book of Order* calls ordained deacons to a ministry of “compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress” (G-2.0201). A tall order! In addition, the previous Form of

Government, when describing the responsibilities of a session, included the charge to ruling elders to “lead the congregation in ministries of personal and social healing and reconciliation in the communities in which the church lives and bears its witness” (*Book of Order*, 2009–11 version, G-10.0102g). That, too, was and remains a tall order, asking ruling elders to think and pray beyond the walls of the congregation’s bricks and mortar to consider the well-being of the world immediately around the congregation. It follows that given these current and historical mandates, a primary responsibility of active ruling elders is to provide for the mission and ministry of the deacons as they lead the congregation, including the session, in blessing the communities in which the church lives.

Unfortunately, the ministry of deacons in our congregations is often limited to those mundane tasks in the internal life of the church that no one else wants to do, the Cinderella tasks—“do the mending and the sewing and the mopping. ...” To be sure, a part of the deacon witness is humble service, and in the spirit of Philippians 2:1–13 there are no tasks so menial that they cannot become an act of ministry and a moment of witness for the common good of God’s people. But ruling elders would do well to ensure that deacons are not so burdened or burned out by the maintenance tasks of ministry within the congregation (setting up tables for every church meal) that they have no energy or imagination left over for the mission tasks of ministry beyond the congregation (breaking bread with neighbors and strangers). A wise session will counsel with the deacons, offering to redistribute or retire some or all previous tasks in order to make room for person-to-person ministry with those who most need to see the “redeeming love of Jesus Christ” (Ibid) within but also beyond the congregation.

Another way ruling elders can support the ministry of the deacon is by interpreting said ministry to the wider congregation. Often in Presbyterian churches, the office of deacon is perceived as a secondary or peripheral ministry; perhaps even understood as a kind of proving ground for possible “promotion” to ordination as a ruling elder. But if there is



—flickr user jimpg2_2015 CCA2.0

Ruling elders would do well to ensure that deacons are not so burdened or burned out by the maintenance tasks of ministry within the congregation that

wider agreement than ever before that the church does not just have a mission, but is a mission, and that if our summons as followers of Jesus is not only to go to church but to be the church, then it follows that the ministry of the deacon—“compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ” (Ibid)—is the leading edge of our

they have no energy or imagination left over for the mission tasks of ministry beyond the congregation.

common life in and for the world. Sessions would do well to train nominating committees to seek out those saints with spiritual gifts that align with the sacred work of compassion, witness, and service to serve as deacons. Furthermore, ruling elders should use their influence to highlight and encourage the work of the deacon, regularly reminding the congregation that the church is always and everywhere called to participate “in God’s mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering, and oppression; and to establish Christ’s just, loving, and peaceable rule in the world” (*Book of Order*, F-1.0302d).

Let ruling elders lead the church precisely by providing for deacons who lead God’s people outward and upward, always pointing to Jesus—the chief minister among us all.

Ralph W. Hawkins serves as executive presbyter and stated clerk of the Presbytery of Shenango, which has forty-nine congregations in western Pennsylvania. He is married to Elizabeth, an ordained deacon.

For additional reading, *The Presbyterian Deacon: An Essential Guide* is available for purchase at <http://www.wjkbooks.com/Products/066450325X/the-presbyterian-deacon.aspx>.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders and stewardship



Office of the General Assembly

LOYDA AJA

While growing up in the early sixties, I vividly remember the annual visit made by an elder, a deacon, and sometimes even the pastor. They came waving the pledge card and made a pretty convincing biblical case for my parents not only to make the annual pledge, but to pledge the tithe of 10 percent of their income! The visit was followed by

the Annual Stewardship Banquet, or as it was called one year, *The Banquet of Generosity*. It ended on Stewardship Sunday when church members came to the communion table bringing their pledge cards and placing them on the designated baskets.

This may have worked then, but it is no longer as viable a strategy given the changing conditions in our congregations. As Presbyterians, we have been taught that everything we are, have, and use comes from God (Jas. 1:17). As ruling elders, we have the responsibility and the opportunity to be the voice that teaches in some creative ways regarding mission and finances (*Book of Order*, G-3.0201c). We should not be afraid to look for alternative ways to fulfill the financial needs of the church. For example:

Shift from the annual three-week fall approach of asking for money to pay bills to a constant approach; giving people opportunities to examine and reflect on their own reasons for giving to God's mission and ministry on a regular basis. Involve the congregation. Ruling elders can identify the strong pillars of the church. Ask these people to share their stories as to why they give and how it makes a difference in their lives.

Hold an intergenerational Bible study series on simple living, biblical money principles, greed, and/or consumerism before talking about budget needs.

Give a generous portion of the church budget of at least 10 percent to missions and ministry beyond the local congregation.

Invite other elders and deacons to share how dollars are used for mission inside and outside the church, rather than showing reports simply illustrating dollars and deficits.

Serve others. Connect to the community around the congregation and find a way to address the needs. Find a community project or mission where members can use their gifts (local shelter; a local public school program that serves low-income or homeless children, youth and new immigrants; a women's shelter). Help the younger generations understand how their time and financial contributions can show the love and justice of Jesus Christ in our church and our communities.

Be sure that the church's mission is clear and known to all members. Is there a call to action, a call to participate? Making a financial commitment should always be a call to further the vision and mission of the church as well as a call to commit time, energy, and financial resources.

In the end, the goal should always be participating in God's mission inside and outside the church walls rather than just maintaining the building!

Loyda P. Aja is a ruling elder and a former Associate Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) General Assembly. A graduate of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, she currently lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where her lifetime partner, the Reverend Dr. Tony Aja, is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church. She serves on her presbytery's PJC, and plays in the hand-bell choir. Loyda loves visiting her grandchildren and walking her dogs, Lucero (Lucy) and Patrick.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders and pastoral care



Office of the General Assembly

ZEENA REGIS

In my work as hospice chaplain, I often ask my patients and their caregivers to tell me about their circle of support; those people who are helping them get through this extremely difficult and profound time in their lives. They often talk about their faith in God, family members, and close friends, but rarely the members of their church.

Sometimes I'll specifically ask them to tell me how their faith community is supporting them.

I tend to get similar responses each time I ask this question. They talk about how they have been committed to their church in the past, but lately their illness or the demands of caregiving have kept them from being active in the life of the congregation. They look at me earnestly and say, "I haven't seen them much, but I know they are praying for me."

As a chaplain, I see the problem. As a ruling elder in a PC(USA) congregation, I have been a part of the problem. When I heard that a Sunday school teacher was facing a difficult diagnosis, I worried that I would say the wrong things. When I suspected that a choir member was experiencing stress or burnout due to caregiving responsibilities for an ill spouse, I wondered if my offer of support would be perceived as intrusive or offensive. I worried if it was my place to reach out to someone who had not attended church in a while. All too often, my worrying and wondering would turn into inaction.

"... Pastoral care is not simply the domain of the pastor; it is our congregational commitment to one another."

I consoled myself with the thought that the pastor was handling it. I let myself off the hook and allowed the term "pastoral care" lull me into thinking that it is solely the job of the pastor. But encounters with my patients taught me that pastoral care is not simply the domain of the pastor; it is our congregational commitment to one another.

One of the most powerful parts of the worship service for me is the congregational vows during the baptismal liturgy. In those vows, the congregation promises "to guide and nurture ... by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging them to know and follow Christ and to be faithful members of his church" (*Book of Common Worship*, Louisville:Westminster John Knox Press, 1993, p. 406). The only way to live out this promise is to show up when others need us. When we practice pastoral care, we get better at it. We also learn that our relationship with Christ is nurtured and deepened in the process.



While there is certainly etiquette of illness and crisis, I've observed that people in the midst of difficult situations can overlook a well-meaning, but

clumsy comment. But it is more difficult to forgive not showing up at all. The more we show up the more we learn that we do not have to say the right things; we just have to be there to listen.

One of the things I always ask God when I pray for families in crisis is that God will give insight and grace to those who surround them. I pray that the family will receive the support they need from their family, friends, and faith community. This support can take many forms: a phone call, a card, a meal, a kind word, and, perhaps most of all, a listening ear.

Recently, I witnessed a church member answer an unspoken prayer by visiting with a cooler full of water and healthy snacks for a family who was living on hospital vending machine food. May we all avail ourselves to the stirring of the Spirit and let God use us to answer someone's prayer.

Zeena Regis is a ruling elder and member of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Decatur, Georgia. She is a graduate of Columbia Theological Seminary and currently serves as a chaplain with Hospice Atlanta/Visiting Nurse Health System. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her spouse, Rahjahn, and two pups, Bella and Chip.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders and prayer



Office of the General Assembly

ZEENA REGIS

A common religious conceit is that people only turn to prayer in times of difficulty and despair. In my time as a hospice chaplain, I have found that idea to be untrue. Often pain and grief seem to stifle one's ability to connect with God in prayer. Prayer can seem both insufficient and overwhelming when trauma has pierced the soul. I am often

called in to assist people in these times of spiritual disconnect.

As a new chaplain, I was daunted by the request to pray at the hospice bedside. I was afraid that my feeble attempts at prayer would not rise to the occasion and properly honor the life-changing circumstances. While I grew up in a nondenominational tradition that valued spontaneous and fervent prayer, my PC(USA) seminary experiences privileged a more scripted and measured approach to prayer. Most of the prayers I saw delivered in chapel services and convocations were beautifully prepared; carefully written out prior to the occasion. My prayers at the bedside did not sound like the well-crafted ones of my professors and colleagues. I couldn't recall the structure and poetic movements of the prayers and liturgies I learned in my courses. I only knew how to request God's wisdom and grace in these heartbreaking situations. As I continued in my chaplain role, I began to understand that my prayers did not need to be beautiful. In fact, I realized that it was dangerous and hypocritical to think in those terms. Those prayers were not about me at all. Our prayers are about God and God's work in the world; work that often happens through our connection with one another.

As we pray with another, remember that our prayer is not performance, but it is connection.

But it was not until I had my own health crisis that I understood the true power of these bedside, unscripted prayers. As I lay in my own hospital bed, I couldn't gather my own thoughts enough to pray for myself. My own fears and anxieties rendered me unable to articulate my prayers to God. My soul thirsted for God, but I had lost trust in my own ability to cry out. And then one of the members from my congregation came to visit. Armed with anointing oil, she held her steady hand on my head, anointed my head, and then prayed for me. I don't remember the words she prayed, but I remember her words opened up sacred space for me. Her prayer helped give me the language to reconnect to God in an intimate way. The silent prayers of those in my faith community were essential to my physical recovery, yet it was her spoken prayer, while holding my hand, that sparked a spiritual recovery.



Prayer —Via Tsunji, Flickr, Creative Commons

As a ruling elder, our ordination vows commit us to prayer for one another. The relatively recent change in the ordination vows explicitly asks, “Will you **pray for** and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?” [PC(USA) *Book of Order*, W-4.4003h] This is a call to prayer and also an invitation to move from a sincere, but vague “You are in our prayers” to a more active posture of “Would you like for me to pray with you right now?” This can cause a powerful denominational culture shift. We can move our collective prayers from worship services and church meetings into our intimate spaces. Our homes, hospital rooms, and telephone lines become holy spaces when we come together and pray. As we pray with another, remember that our prayer is not performance, but it is connection. It is a humbling, but ultimately freeing opportunity to connect with God and one another with our hearts and deeds.

Zeena Regis is a ruling elder and member of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Decatur, Georgia. She is a graduate of Columbia Theological Seminary and currently serves as a chaplain with Hospice Atlanta/Visiting Nurse Health System. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her spouse, Rahjahn, and two pups, Bella and Chip.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding ruling elders: the ministry of the Lord's Supper



Office of the General Assembly

JANE ROGERS VANN

Margaret's sitting room is bright and cheerful, and there is the fragrance of fresh muffins in the air. Julia (Margaret's daughter, a deacon not presently serving) and I have just come from church where we have celebrated the Lord's Supper. In a small basket I am carrying broken bread and a small bottle of wine (or juice) that have been taken from the Lord's Table during worship. Soon we will extend the Lord's Table with Margaret.

People who are unable to attend worship always enjoy visits from church leaders, especially those visits when the ongoing life of the congregation is shared. "Extending the Table," celebrating the Lord's Supper with those unable to come to church can be one of highest ministries to which ruling elders are called. The Directory for Worship, in the section describing the Lord's Supper, says this: "The serving of the elements may be extended by two or more persons in the ordered ministry of the church, to those isolated from the community's worship. ... [T]he elements are to be served following worship on the same calendar day, or as soon thereafter as practically feasible, as a direct extension of the serving of the gathered congregation ..." (*Book of Order*, W-3.3616e).

Visits to homebound members are occasions for meaningful pastoral care, honest talk about life's joys and difficulties. When extending the Table, the unity of Word and Sacrament is a central focus and so I also carry a Bible, an order for worship from the day's service, and some notes I've made on the details of the service and on the sermon. This ensures that the Lord's Supper does not become some sort of "magical" ritual or a purely personal "moment with Jesus." In the Lord's Supper we "join our voices with prophets and martyrs and with all the faithful of every time and place." The presence of two members of ordered ministry—deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders, both active and inactive—gives embodied emphasis to the communal emphasis of the sacrament. If there has been a baptism during worship, it is fitting to remind those at home of their own baptism, as was done with the gathered congregation. Water and the sign of the cross on the forehead may be used, with the words, "Margaret, remember your baptism and be thankful."

Additional information about the extended serving of communion is available here.

The words we share are familiar: "The Lord be with you." "And also with you." "The Word of the Lord." "Thanks be to God." "The bread of life." "Amen." "The cup of Salvation." "Amen." For Margaret, and many like her, these are signs of her inclusion in the ongoing life of the congregation. No special serving pieces are needed for this service. An ordinary plate and cup from the kitchen bring the sacrament even closer to home.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) provides an Order for the Extended Serving of the Communion of the Church at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/extendedservingorderworship.pdf>.

The two-page order can be printed into a small booklet. These are “rubrics,” suggestions for how the service should be conducted. This resource is invaluable to elders and deacons who are ministering by extending the Table.

As we prepare to leave Margaret, our farewells are laced with the assurance of Christ’s presence among us in the sharing of bread and wine. All of us have been blessed by the ministry of extending the Table.

Jane Rogers Vann, Rowe Professor of Christian Education, Emerita, at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, now lives in Asheville, North Carolina. She continues to teach courses in the areas of worship and education.