



Regarding Ruling Elders 2014-2017

# Structure and Polity



**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.

These articles were originally published online throughout 2014-2017.

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# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding ruling elders: congregational statistics



Office of the General Assembly

KRIS VALERIUS

It's that time of year when sessions groan a bit. It's statistics season.

One of the most frequently asked questions regarding the Session Annual Statistical Report (SASR) is "Why?" The short answer, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Order requires churches to submit statistics annually

to the presbytery (Book of Order, G-3.0302e) and the General Assembly mandates presbyteries to collect specific data about their churches.

But perhaps the longer response would be better than the "because I said so." After all, it is easier to do something if you know how it's going to be used and who needs the information. Compliance isn't the issue, understanding is.

### **Mandates**

First, everything asked on the SASR is mandated by the General Assembly. This includes both the question and definition. The original form was approved at the 1803 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The questions have changed over the years but there is some data that we are still collecting today: membership total, professions of faith, certificate gains and losses, deaths, and baptisms.

"So, the General Assembly is making me do this," big sigh. "We don't use the information and who cares how many kids we have in Sunday school."

Each question was introduced either through an overture from a presbytery or from a recommendation from a General Assembly committee or agency. A group felt the question was important enough to go through all the various steps to include that particular question on the official form. Without going into every question and explain the who and why's, here are a couple hidden gems on the form.

### **Baptized Members**

One of the most misunderstood rolls a church is required to maintain is the Baptized Member roll.

*G-1.0401—A baptized member is a person who has received the Sacrament of Baptism, whether in this congregation or elsewhere, and who has been enrolled as a baptized member by the session but who has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.*

In simpler terms, a baptized member is someone who has been baptized but not made a profession of faith. The majority are going to be children of active members, pre-confirmation age. It may be one of the most important rolls your church maintains. If you are looking for who the future of your church is, the baptized member roll is the place to look. These are future active members of the congregation. What church doesn't want to grow? Better yet, a list of potential members.

### **Age Breakdown**

Another interesting area is the age breakdown. On average, only about 84 percent of the churches report this data. In some recent research conducted for an MDiv student, I was surprised to find that over the last ten years most categories changed less than one percent from year to year. The most consistent at 14 percent each year was the "25 and Under" and the one that varied the most, "Over 65," ranged from 28–32 percent.

It brought to mind the frequently heard, "we are a dying church" or "everyone is leaving the church" or "we don't attract young people." Regardless of whether there were 2.2 million members or 1.8 million, the overall percentages didn't change. We aren't losing any one category of people. Other than the "Over 65" category, the other four areas are only a couple of percentages apart.

### **Keeping the Community in Mind**

Keeping these figures in mind, it might be beneficial to look at the community, instead of a church worrying about attracting a particular age group. According to the Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA), an independent research group that publishes a religious census report every five years, in my county there are a total of 704 different congregations of various denominations. Seeing the numerous options for people, I was surprised to read that 45 percent of the people of my county were considered "unclaimed." Wouldn't it be exciting if my church could make disciples out of just 2 percent of those people?

### **Using Your Own Statistics**

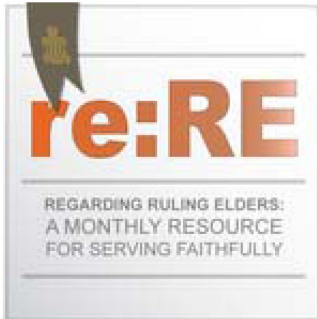
Being someone who works with figures daily, I can enter the data into an Excel spreadsheet and work with complicated formulas with the best of them. Now it's your turn. Through the online statistics entry program, churches have access to the last ten years of their own statistics year-round. Data can be exported into a variety of formats. There are a number of online tools to help navigate the data, such as the U.S. Census Bureau.

So, when your session approves the Annual Statistical Report, think about how it might work for you in the future. Be reminded that after 200 years, the PC(USA) still considers the statistical reports an important part of our history. Challenge your session to find ways to incorporate this useful information to help grow your church family.

*Kris Valerius serves as Assistant Stated Clerk in the Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as manager of OGA Records. She has worked for the church twenty-five years and is a member of Beechmont Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky.*

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding Ruling Elders: Financial Responsibilities



Office of the General Assembly

CONRAD ROCHA

The *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) provides that ruling elders serving in a church council have “responsibility for the leadership, guidance, and government of that portion of the church that is under their jurisdiction,” so that all things will result in “the peace, purity, unity, and

progress of the church under the will of Christ” (G-3.0102). In pursuit of this charge, ruling elders, among other matters, are to ensure that the administration of the church and its mission are enabled and strengthened such that the church can “give effective witness in the world to God’s new creation in Jesus Christ and ... the mission of the triune God” (G-3.0106).

In ensuring that mission is properly administered, each council must “prepare and adopt a budget” (G-3.0113) and, in the case of sessions, “determine the distribution of the congregation’s benevolences” (G-3.0205). The councils are further required to ensure that “[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” (G-3.0113).

### For more about the information provided here:

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

Although the *Book of Order* does not mandate periodic reports of all financial activities to a council other than annually, it seems inconsistent with good stewardship and oversight for the council itself not to require such reports each time it gathers for regular stated meetings. Further, the mandate that “[f]inancial books and records adequate to reflect all financial transactions shall be kept” cannot be fulfilled if the council is not reviewing those books and records on a schedule that is aligned, at minimum, with its regular stated meetings (G-3.0205b). Likewise, decisions of the mission work necessary to carry out effective witness necessitate regular review of those books and records such that the council is able to adequately and wisely fund that work.

In my experience, too often a council becomes complacent about exercising its responsibility of oversight of church finances and ends up with the difficult task of constructing and reconstructing financial books and records after fraud or theft have been

“Good business practices and the administration of mission are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are

detected. Such a failure on the part of a council can create great harm to the mission of the church, the credibility of the council, and the perpetrator of the fraud or theft. It is only through diligent oversight that all participants in the administration of, and accounting for, the churches financial resources remain accountable and, quite frankly, remain honest in their particular role in financial administration. With this in mind, it is important to note that the *Book of Order* also provides that “all offerings shall be counted and recorded by at least two duly appointed persons, or by one fidelity bonded person” (G-3.0205a).

complimentary and, I would say, necessary, provided they are always tempered by the exhibition of “the love and justice of Jesus Christ”

In short, a session, or for that matter any council of the church, that does not meticulously carry out its responsibilities of oversight of the financial resources with which it has been entrusted by its members is opening the door to fraud, mismanagement, and, ultimately, great harm to the spiritual well-being of those who have breached the responsibility for maintaining good financial practices and to the entire body of Christ for whom the council has responsibility. In the end, the effective witness of the church is compromised.

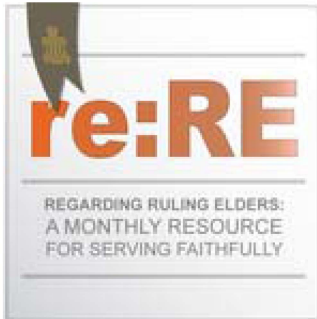
Finally, it should be noted that yes, we are the church, but we are also councils of the church that cannot leave good business practices at the door of the church upon entering into God’s work and mission. In fact, we can and should bring those good practices into our work so that we are able to effectively carry out that work and witness, remembering always that we can incorporate these practices into our communal life. Thus, good business practices and the administration of mission are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are complimentary and, I would say, necessary, provided they are always tempered by the exhibition of “the love and justice of Jesus Christ” (W-4.4003i).

As ruling elders, one of the vows we take when we are to be ordained into this service is that we “[w]ill be a faithful ruling elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service” (W-4.4003i). Exercising your fiduciary responsibilities of oversight in the administration of mission will better enable you, and the people in whose hands God has entrusted you, to be nurtured, to serve and to worship God in “obedience to Jesus Christ” (W-4.4003d).

Conrad M. Rocha is a ruling elder and currently serves as stated clerk and executive of the Synod of the Southwest. He is also a licensed New Mexico attorney and serves as executive director of a not-for-profit organization that provides free civil legal services to New Mexico’s poor. He has served at all council levels of the church as a volunteer, before joining the staff of the synod. He also spent 6 1/2 years as a tax accountant with what was then the largest accounting firm in the world.

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding ruling elders: 221st General Assembly (2014)



Office of the General Assembly

GRADYE PARSONS

*Stated Clerk of the General  
Assembly*

Teachers, lawyers, doctors, farmers, bookkeepers, and any other vocation one can think of.

That's the limitless pool of professions from which ruling elders are drawn from for service in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It also is from this diverse and life-giving body that the 221st General Assembly (2014) is pulling from in order to discern the mind of Christ for the church, June 14–21, in Detroit.

Half of General Assembly commissioners, elected by presbyteries, are ruling elders and half are teaching elders. This shared leadership structure, mirrored at the presbytery level, is part of our basic understanding of how we govern ourselves. It signifies the high value the denomination places on both ministerial and lay leadership, a core belief dating back to John Calvin.

Ordained and equally empowered alongside teaching elders, ruling elders maintain unique roles.

The *Book of Order* states,

As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God's Spirit and governance of God's people. Accordingly, congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit. Ruling elders are so named not because they "lord it over" the congregation (Matt. 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. ... (G-2.0301)

It's important for ruling elders to have this perspective in their personal witness and in the session as they uncover what God is calling the church to do. They vow to be part of the community that is the church.

Serving at General Assembly is a continuation of this perspective and calling, and must be seen as a wonderful opportunity to give richly to the full body. Each ruling elder coming to the 221st General Assembly (2014) should be ready to bring his or her gifts

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

and talents to the table, ultimately widening the foundation that supports and gives form to the discernment process.

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

Thorough preparation is essential. Review each overture, found on PC-Biz, and study the issues in order to have a basic understanding of the business coming before the assembly. Ruling elders also need to understand the mechanics of how a debate works, and really be prepared to listen to a range of voices from across the nation, and even the world.

When ruling elders leave the 221st General Assembly (2014) I hope they take with them a sense of what the wider work of the church is, and a sense of how their congregation plays a part in that.

**The Reverend Gradye Parsons** serves as the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He has served pastorates in Newport and Bristol, Tenn., served as executive presbyter and stated clerk for the Presbytery of Holston, and as director of operations for the Office of the General Assembly.

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding ruling elders: moderating meetings

October 15, 2014



Office of the General Assembly

MILLIE SNYDER

As a ruling elder, you may have been asked, or will be asked, to moderate a committee or a meeting. For some of us who aren't accustomed to leading meetings, this call seems frightening or overwhelming. Others of us regularly lead meetings at work or for the PTA or the neighborhood association, and we wonder if church meetings should be any different than those.

Here are some practical guidelines for moderating church meetings:

Set a regular meeting day and time. Generally it works best if members of your committee or team can put the meeting schedule on their calendars at the beginning of the year. Sometimes it is tempting to move the meeting day/time in order to accommodate various members and their conflicts but that tends to create more issues than it solves.

Find a meeting location. At the church, in someone's home, or at a public location like a coffee shop? Each location has unique strengths and weaknesses. Think about what works best for your members and what location supports your ministry. An occasional meeting in someone's home can nurture the sense of community for your group. If you are moderating the worship committee, consider sitting in the sanctuary for one of your meetings. If you are moderating the evangelism committee, consider gathering at a popular coffee spot in order to open your eyes to those around you.

Remind your members about the meetings and their locations. This can be done by phone call, email, text message, or distributing a written calendar.

Create an agenda for the meeting. Consider who should have input about what goes on that agenda. Should you check with the pastor or church staff? Should you ask committee members to send you agenda items in advance? Ideally the agenda can be sent to everyone ahead of time so they know what to expect they will be discussing.

The agenda can be organized in various ways. You can cover "old business" that has been previously discussed and is ongoing and then "new business" items. Or you can have reports from the members about their work since the last meeting. Be sure to have a timeline in mind for the meeting and to have a targeted ending time. A church committee meeting should be one to two hours in length to accomplish your work and to honor the time of those who serve.

Begin the meeting with some community building time. This might involve introducing yourselves to one



another, or answering an easy “ice breaker” question, or checking in about how things are going in your lives. Questions like “when you were six, what did you want to be when you grew up?” or “what’s your favorite fall smell?” can be a way for members to get to know one another and create connections.

Have a devotion. The devotion establishes the tone for this meeting as ministry, and not just another business meeting. As moderator, you can lead the devotion or you can rotate this among your members. A simple devotion is to read a short scripture passage, ask “what strikes you in this for our work together?” and then pray. Ideally select a scripture passage that connects with your committee’s work.

You are the moderator. The word “moderate” means that you are the one responsible for facilitating the discussion, making sure that members have an opportunity to give input and to share insights. Each person on the committee is a member of the Body of Christ and brings unique gifts to your ministry together. As moderator, you are encouraging each person in his/her own ministry as part of the group.

Arrange for someone take minutes or notes of the meeting. This might be one person’s role for the entire year or you might rotate this among your members.

As the meeting draws to a close, review any decisions that have been made. What are the tasks to be done before the next meeting and who is doing them? Close the meeting in prayer, asking for God to guide you in your ministry together.

*The Reverend Dr. Millie Snyder earned degrees from Davidson College, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Columbia Theological Seminary. She has served congregations in Rochester Hills, Michigan, and in Matthews, North Carolina. Millie currently serves Myers Park Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, as executive pastor and is responsible for overall coordination and implementation of the church’s ministries. She is married and has two daughters, 17 and 14 years old.*

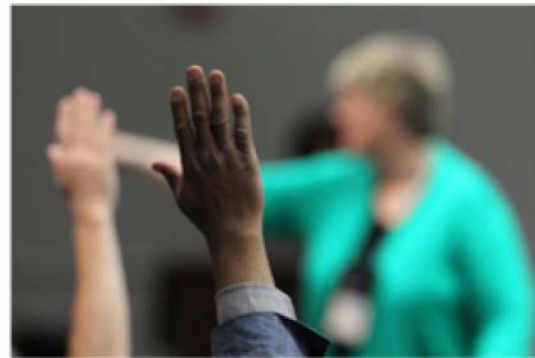


Photo by Michael Whitman

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

Browse the Ruling Elders Web site at [www.pcusa.org/rulingelders](http://www.pcusa.org/rulingelders).

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding ruling elders: Presbyterian councils

August 15, 2014



Office of the General Assembly

ALYSON JANKE

How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb? It takes a council, in stated meeting, to determine if a new light bulb is in the ministry plan of the council, if there is funding for a new light bulb, and if persons can be called who will faithfully carry out this mission.

One of the hallmarks of presbyterian belief and governance is that we don't place much decision-making authority with individuals, who are prone to "idolatry and tyranny." (F-2.05) Instead, decisions about the mission, ministry, and governance of the Presbyterian Church are made by ordered groups of people gathered in "councils." These councils, from most local (governs a congregation) to most inclusive (governs the whole denomination), are called session, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly. (F-3.0203)

The **session** is the most local council. Each congregation is led and governed by its session which is responsible for the congregation's worship, programs, property, finances, and membership. The session is composed of persons elected by the congregation - ruling elders and installed pastors. (G-3.0201)

The next larger council is the **presbytery**, composed of at least ten sessions and ten teaching elders within a certain district. The presbytery is charged with oversight and nurture of the congregations and ministers within its bounds. It may organize, dismiss, and dissolve congregations; oversee congregations without pastors; establish and dissolve pastoral relationships; receive, dismiss and discipline its members; oversee the process by which individuals become teaching elders; and maintain ecumenical relationships. (G-3.0301) The presbytery elects commissioners (voting representatives) to synod and to General Assembly. Powers not specifically delegated "are reserved to the presbyteries." (G-3.0101).

Ours is a representative form of government. The four councils compose a tiered system of government. Each council is responsible for its own program, staffing, worship life, budget, and administration of mission. Each council also has distinct responsibilities.

The **synod** is the next more inclusive council, with at least 3 presbyteries in its region. Synod is responsible for the life and mission of the church and for supporting the presbyteries throughout its region. (G-3.0401) There are currently 16 synods, each with a distinct ministry and mission.

The **General Assembly** is the council of the whole church. It meets biennially and deliberates on matters of governance, mission, social witness, and doctrine. (G-3.0501)

The councils are distinct and have assigned responsibilities, yet have “such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church.”(G-3.0101) For instance, only the session is empowered to ordain ruling elders and deacons. Only the presbytery is empowered to ordain teaching elders. Yet when a session or presbytery has acted and ordained someone, that ordination is recognized by the whole church. The minister’s credentials are valid across the denomination. The ruling elder may transfer membership to any other Presbyterian Church and, upon election by that congregation, serve on the session without being re-ordained; or may assume other duties of ruling elders.

Councils are “composed of presbyters elected by the people” (G-3.0101). 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.) When presbyters meet in councils, they are not bound by the will of the people who elected them, but “seek together to find and represent the will of Christ.” (F-3.0204) Discernment processes and *Roberts’ Rules of Order* are the tools by which they deliberate. Decisions are reached by majority vote. Councils above the session are composed of teaching and ruling elders in numbers as nearly equal as possible.

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

Browse the Ruling Elders Web site at [www.pcusa.org/rulingelders](http://www.pcusa.org/rulingelders).

And that light bulb? How many Presbyterians does it take in your council?

**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 and serves on the General Assembly Advisory Committee on the Constitution. She and her husband and son own and operate a dairy farm in central Wisconsin.

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding ruling elders: ministry without installed pastoral leadership



Office of the General Assembly

KERRY RICE

A few years ago, the session and members of the church I attend in Louisville, Kentucky, found itself without installed pastoral leadership. And the dissolution of the terms of call occurred under difficult circumstances.

The church continues to provide an important witness to the community, but not just because we were blessed by the presence of several teaching elders who worshiped and worked within the congregation on a regular basis. Were it not for the vital commitment of ruling elders—in the roles of Sunday school teachers, treasurer and financial assistant, committee chairs and members, clerk of session, worship leaders, and the myriad of other roles ruling elders can play—the ministry of the church would have been extremely curtailed if not lost indefinitely.

Our experience may or may not be unique, but my guess is that there are more churches that go through pastoral transitions without the pastoral resources available to them like we had. But even though we were greatly blessed, there may be some similar issues to think through:

### **What is it like to have the session moderated by someone who is not the installed pastor of the church?**

While there is very little technical difference between having an installed pastor moderate or having the presbytery appoint a moderator, there is a greater “cultural” difference:

The session is made up of installed

Under healthy circumstances, the session may take on additional responsibilities in the various ways in which the life of a congregation is expressed. But in particular, new or enhanced responsibilities may include:

Intentional communication with the congregation.

Regular communication with the presbytery, its staff, and its committees.

Discernment of the future of the congregation, in terms of mission and ministry, including the appropriate level of pastoral and professional and/or volunteer staff. This should include consultation with the congregation and presbytery.

Reexamination of the budget and projections of future expenses (including an honest assessment of the facilities

ruling elders and installed teaching elders of that congregation and all members have voice and vote. When a moderator is appointed who is not installed at that congregation, they are not a voting member of the session (*Book of Order*, G-3.0201).

and other liabilities) and checking those assumptions out with the congregation.

Providing additional pastoral care to one another, and/or making sure the pastoral care needs of other employees, volunteers, and members are being met.

Each moderator has their own style working with a session. No style is wrong—every style takes some time to which to adjust.

The clerk and moderator have to negotiate roles regarding agenda, reports, etc.

More time must be spent exploring history and context surrounding each item of business.

### **What are some of the implications of having a “vacant pulpit”?**

Many churches have a vacant pulpit for at least a short time during a pastoral transition. However, if the vacant pulpit is declared and there is no definite plan for filling the pulpit in the near future, it can lead to a time of uncertainty—questions about the ministry, the viability of the congregation, the mission and witness in the community, and many more. The psychological effects of being a vulnerable congregation—or even an at-risk congregation—can weigh heavy.

This may also be an opportunity for great gifts to emerge:

Support from presbytery leadership and the committee on ministry (or your presbytery’s similar ministry);

Opportunity to reexamine the congregational mission and witness;

Coming to understand congregational identity in a new way.

### **How might the role of session change?**

The role of the session will change during a pastoral transition. Exactly how much and in what ways depends on the way in which the session engaged the previous staff and how much of a partnership for congregational leadership existed with the previous pastor. Like many churches, we relied on the pastor for much of the work of the congregation and often allowed the pastor to fill the void of leadership when we neglected to fulfill our own responsibilities. So the work that we had to take on during the transition was much greater than it should have been.

The session has great responsibility for the ministry and witness of the congregation, including pastoral care, worship, outreach, stewardship, and personnel. Though a pastoral transition can be difficult, causing grief and questions, it does not have to bring the ministry of the congregation to a standstill.

So my message to congregations in times of transition is this:

God will provide! And I don’t mean that in the passive sense—

that you just stand still, ignore movements of the Spirit, and God will provide you with a new pastor. I mean that God will provide, and has already provided, your congregation with all that it needs to do ministry. You just need to be God’s partner in the process and push yourself beyond your comfort zone and discover leadership skills that were unknown or untested. The church is stronger than any particular person or role—teaching elder or ruling elder!

### **Helpful resources include:**

On Calling A Pastor [1]

Models of Ministry [2]

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

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

*Kerry Rice lives in Louisville, Kentucky, and is a ruling elder, husband of a Presbyterian minister serving in a UCC church, and father of six teenagers. When not traveling to soccer training or games, he serves as director of Ordered Ministries and Certification in the Office of the General Assembly.*

[1] <http://www.pcusa.org/ocap>

[2] <http://www.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/ministers/models-ministry/>

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding ruling elders: parliamentary procedure



Office of the General Assembly

THERESE HOWELL

Henry Martin Robert (1837-1923) was an engineer who retired from the U.S. Army as a brigadier general. Gen. Robert was asked – unexpectedly – to preside over a meeting, and did not know how, but felt it would be worse to refuse. The meeting “... lasted for fourteen hours...” and Robert said, “My embarrassment was supreme. I plunged in, trusting to Providence that the assembly would behave itself. . . . [and] the determination that I would never attend another meeting until I knew something of . . . parliamentary law.” From the first edition of Robert’s Rules in 1876 to the current Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition (“RONR”), are procedures for efficient and fair meetings. Though Gen. Robert was in the Army, RONR is a tool, not a weapon!

These rules, called parliamentary procedure or parliamentary law, are the original model for conflict resolution, and a means of ensuring the rights of the body, the will of the majority, and the rights of the minority are protected. Many councils of the church, including sessions, use this form of parliamentary procedure for these very reasons. If you know seven basic motions, you will be able to move through any meeting decently and in order!

The motion to **Amend** is to delete, add, or strike out and insert. The words proposed for amendment must be consecutive words; if not, or the amendment is longer than a paragraph, the motion “to substitute” (a form of amendment) is used.

**Commit or Refer** sends an issue back to a committee for further study.

This motion should state what committee, what task(s), and when to report back.

To **Postpone** (to a definite time) allows additional time to a member or committee to do further study. This motion should always be used instead of the motion to “table.”

Members of the meeting have the right to **Limit Debate**. This motion is a compromise of the right of the individual and the right of the body, so requires 2/3 vote for approval.

The “**Call the Previous Question**” motion is a favorite at presbytery and General Assembly. RONR states it cannot be used in committee - “In order that there may be no interference with the assembly’s having the benefit of its committees’ matured judgment, motions to close or limit debate are not allowed in committees.” But we Presbyterians often allow this in committee meetings; otherwise meetings might never end!

The motion to **Lay on the Table** (or to Table) is rarely necessary. To postpone (to a definite time) is always preferable because it is debatable. To table is appropriate to interrupt the pending business in order to do something else

Interested in parliamentary procedure? Robert’s Rules In Brief is a more concise version of RONR with sample language for making motions, etc. For more information, go to [www.parliamentarians.org](http://www.parliamentarians.org), the website of the National Association of Parliamentarians, or [www.robertsrules.com](http://www.robertsrules.com), the official website of Robert’s Rules of Order.

immediately – for example, evacuate the building because of fire!

To **Consider by Paragraph or Seriatim** allows for the orderly consideration of a complex document. The document is taken paragraph by paragraph, or section by section, or chapter by chapter. Each paragraph, section, or chapter is amended before final action is taken on the entire document.

So how do you make a motion? You rise (or raise your hand) to get the moderator's attention. The moderator calls on you and you make your motion. Hopefully another person calls out "second!" A second means someone thinks this motion worthy of discussion; it doesn't mean agreement. The moderator states the motion and calls for debate. The maker of the motion gets to speak first. All persons speaking to the motion must address the moderator. After debate, the moderator asks "are you ready for the question?" The moderator takes the vote, and announces the results of the vote.

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*Therese Howell is a ruling elder currently serving as the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee. She is a member of the National Association of Parliamentarians and serves on the Advisory Committee on the Constitution. She and her husband live in Franklin, TN with their Labrador retriever, Bella.*

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: ruling elders and presbytery



Office of the General Assembly

SALLY HINCHMAN



Presbytery of Lake Huron Commissioners to the 221st General Assembly (2014)  
report to the presbytery

“The presbytery is the council serving as a corporate expression of the church within a certain district and is composed of all the congregations and teaching elders within that district. ... The presbytery is responsible for the government of the church throughout its district, and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness” (*Book of Order*, G-3.03). This mission is carried out through the ministry and witness of teaching elders and ruling elders within it.

My father was one of those ruling elders; one I look on as my role model of a ruling elder in the Presbyterian church. He served on the session of our church and as their clerk of session. He was often their commissioner to presbytery and was elected as a commissioner to two General Assemblies. He was a faithful member of numerous committees of the presbytery and later served as the moderator of the presbytery.

It is important for ruling elders to participate in the higher councils of the church. Each of us has our unique perspective on the issues that come before the councils. Some of these viewpoints may be different from the teaching elders. Ruling elder commissioners who attend presbytery meetings include those elected by their sessions (*Book of Order*, G-3.0202a) and ruling elders who have been elected as officers of the presbytery and others by rule of the presbytery during their terms of elected service to the presbytery (*Book of Order*, G-3.0301).

The *Book of Order* says that church power “is a shared power, to be exercised jointly by presbyters gathered in councils” (F-3.0208). In our Presbyterian polity, the power to make decisions is given to the councils of elected leaders. Ruling elders and teaching elders have no individual power of governance in Presbyterian polity. Their authority is only exercised in gatherings of presbyters when constituted as councils. All commissioners are independent decision makers and these decisions are made following prayer and discussion.

But even if not elected or able to serve as a commissioner to presbytery, ruling elders can be involved and engaged in the

ministry and governance of the body by participating on standing committees/commissions of the presbytery, using their specific gifts and skills in many areas to build up the body of Christ. Some presbyteries also offer educational opportunities related to issues, decisions, and ministries of the larger church, as well as mission and outreach opportunities. Such involvement emphasizes the connectional nature of our church.

When my father was active within the presbytery, I often attended installation and ordination services during the time he served on the commission. As a young person I attended presbytery meetings as the moderator of the junior and senior high youth councils to make reports. Much of this experience carried over as I eventually served as a certified Christian educator for seventeen years in local Presbyterian congregations. While in that role, I attended session meetings and presbytery meetings, represented with voice only. While serving as an associate presbyter later on, I was elected a ruling elder and enrolled as a member of the presbytery.

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

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

Consider finding out more about the presbytery. Think about how you might be more involved and aware of the ministry of your presbytery and who might serve as your role model as a ruling elder within it.

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For an additional article on ruling elders and mid councils, use the Regarding Ruling Elders archives at [pcusa.org/rulingelders](http://pcusa.org/rulingelders).

*Sally Hinchman is the stated clerk for the Presbytery of Heartland. She served 17 years as a church educator, 10 years as an associate presbyter, 11 years as a general presbyter for 3 presbyteries, and then served as an interim presbyter for 3 years. She decided to retire in the Kansas City area where she grew up.*

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders and per capita



Office of the General Assembly

**GRADYE PARSONS**

*Stated Clerk*

One of the most well-known notions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is our connectionalism. In addition to our connection through our polity and through our commitment to the gospel and relationship with the Trinity, one of the other things that binds Presbyterians is per capita, that universal funding source drawn from the whole church in order to support the whole church.

It is the glue that unites us, allowing Presbyterians to connect with one another and govern ourselves for the good of the body. And in this current season there is perhaps no better example of per capita at work than the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), took place June 18–25 in Portland, Oregon.

Per capita—presently \$7.12 per individual church member—literally pays for the biennial gathering. Travel, lodging, and meals for advisory delegates and assembly commissioners, half of whom are ruling elders, are covered by per capita dollars. That’s no small price tag.

Why place such importance on per capita and the way it is used? Because Presbyterians believe we discern best what God is calling us to do when we gather as mid councils, “seek[ing] together to find and represent the will of Christ” (*Book of Order*, F-3.0204). Per capita allows us to do that, to make the table more accessible so that all can join.

In fact, nearly everything the Office of the General Assembly does, from identifying and developing leadership for the PC(USA) to maintaining judicial and legislative services for the denomination, comes from per capita. Let us also not forget the critical work of partnering with presbyteries and synods in the work of the church.

Per capita makes the table more accessible so all have a seat.

In case you were wondering, per capita is not a new concept. In fact, apportionments like per capita date as far back in the denomination as the early 1800s, when it was collected so Presbyterians from the fringes of the emerging United States could easily attend corporate gatherings in the epicenter of the Presbyterian world at the time—Philadelphia. Did I also mention that per capita dollars now help fund the work of the Presbyterian Historical Society in “The City of Brotherly Love”?

The annual per capita amount is a combined request from a congregation’s presbytery, synod, and the General Assembly—based on their respective budgets for the coming year. A presbytery’s per capita rate depends on its geographical location and size, its mission needs, and the needs of the respective synod.

How can ruling elders take a more personal and intentional part in per capita? They can help communicate its

importance at the congregational level, ultimately strengthening the whole system. Ruling elders, who often know first-hand the impact per capita can have, can and should be champions of this adhesive that so tightly binds us. I invite you to actively champion per capita today.

More information on per capita is available online by visiting <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/ecclesial-and-ecumenical-ministries/per-capita/>

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*The Reverend Gradye Parsons serves as the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He has served pastorates in Newport and Bristol, Tenn., served as executive presbyter and stated clerk for the Presbytery of Holston, and as director of operations for the Office of the General Assembly.*

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding ruling elders: faith and work



Office of the General Assembly

THERESE HOWELL

*At the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), ruling elders gathered for a luncheon and panel discussion. As a part of that time, panelists were asked how, as a ruling elder, their faith is impacted by their work and ministry. One of the panelists, Therese Howell, participated in the discussion on that day and*

*writes her response here.*

Calling to service as a ruling elder is both an honor and a responsibility. An honor that an officer nominating committee sees gifts and skills in a person, and those skills and gifts reflect and support the responsibility of service to ordered ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). While it may seem obvious, faith is a necessary gift and skill for service in ordered ministry!

As a ruling elder, I have served as clerk of session, assistant stated clerk, and am now privileged to serve as stated clerk for the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee. I have moderated session meetings, taught officer training, participated in the ordinations and installations of both teaching and ruling elders, participated in commissioning services, taught meeting management and parliamentary procedure, as well as read hundreds of session minutes! I train administrative commissions and investigating committees, and have worked as a volunteer at all levels of the church. Through this service, I have met ruling elders, teaching elders, and church members—people who have strengthened my faith, tested my faith, and many who I am blessed to count as friends and colleagues in my journey of faith.

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11.1 NRSV)

As stated clerk for the Presbyterians in Middle Tennessee, my faith goes to work with me every day. On any given day, I talk to people who are looking for resources, people who are concerned or anxious about an issue, or people who are angry about something. Sometimes these discussions are about the church or the Church—something that did or didn't happen at session or presbytery or General Assembly. Sometimes the discussion concerns process or parliamentary procedure. But, regardless of the specifics, all of the discussions require a grounding in faith (and sometimes patience!). All of us have one thing in common—Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior.

There are times when it is difficult to remember our common calling, to remember that we are sisters and brothers in Christ. During the more difficult times I remind myself that God is in charge, and we are not, and I give thanks for that. I believe my work helps my faith grow stronger, sometimes during the more difficult times. I am privileged to serve with colleagues and friends here in the presbytery and across the country who challenge and support me as I seek to serve God. I give thanks to God for the opportunity to live out my faith every day, and am honored to work and serve with my sisters and brothers in Christ, as we journey together to live into our calling to love and serve God.

**How is your faith impacted by your work and ministry?**

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*Therese Howell is a ruling elder currently serving as the stated clerk of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee. She is a member of the Tennessee and National Associations of Parliamentarians, and a member of First Presbyterian Church, Franklin. She and her husband live in Franklin, Tennessee, with their Labrador Retriever, Bella.*

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding ruling elders: ruling elder preparation



Office of the General Assembly

RHONDA MYERS

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) holds fast to a representative form of government where ruling elders and teaching elders are elected to ordered ministry and share in ecclesial authority as, together, we seek to discern and represent the will of Christ in and through faithful service. To this end, “congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit” (*Book of Order*, G-2.0301).

Once a new class of ruling elders is elected by a congregation, the session is called upon to prepare these new leaders for service in the church. The responsibility for this time of study and preparation is sometimes delegated to a staff member, such as the pastor. But it is a responsibility of the session, acting as a whole, to prepare newly elected ruling elders for active participation in the leadership of the church. This training may include a review of:

- Biblical highlights of strong, courageous leaders (consider: Moses, David, Esther, Paul, Peter, etc.);
- Presbyterian polity and doctrine, including “The Marks of the Church” (F-1.0302), the “Notes of the Reformed Church” (F-1.0303), The Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304), and the constitutional questions asked of ruling elders at their Installation (W-4.4003);
- An inventory of spiritual gifts and talents;
- The duties and procedures of ministry, both in general and within a given context;
- The intersection of life and faith, as it pertains to church leadership.

After a time of study is completed, it is expected that the session will examine new leaders as to their readiness for service (G-2.0402). This *examination* is not intended to be harsh or punitive, but to serve instead as a mutual discussion about the church, its mission, and leadership. All this is done in a spirit of peace and for the sake of a nurtured and healthy community of faith. “Teaching elders shall be committed in all their work to equipping the people of God for their ministry and witness” (F-3.0202). This examination might include questions about the candidate’s:

- Personal faith and spiritual maturity;
- Commitment to Christ and the Church;
- Willingness to serve;
- Openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in becoming “a community of faith, hope, love, and witness” (G-3.0201);
- Desire to work for peace in the face of change, and to seek unity in the midst of diversity;
- Knowledge of the Constitution of the church (doctrine, government, and discipline); and
- Understanding of the duties incumbent upon a ruling elder.

Along with teaching elders, ruling elders are called to be stewards of the faith and champions of the gospel. Those who are called will lead by example. So it best be a good example!

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*The Reverend Dr. Rhonda Myers is pastor of the Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church in Midland, Michigan, serves as chair of her presbytery's CPM, and is married to an intentional interim pastor, the Reverend David Myers, who is currently serving in Linden, Michigan.*



# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders and new members



Office of the General Assembly

RHONDA MYERS

The Church is the body of Christ acting in the world as a witness to the gospel of grace. If the Church is to serve as Christ's faithful evangelist in active community, it must work at engaging and examining new members.

*An active member is one who makes a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, and is received into the body by an act of session. As a community of faith, the Church entrusts its life to God and works at becoming a community of hope, "rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation." The Church is "a community of witness, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God's transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord."* (Book of Order, F-1.0301)

"Membership ... is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ's mission" (*Book of Order*, G-1.0304). Therefore, it is appropriate that new members be prepared and examined for membership by the session overseeing their care and nurture. While "[n]o person shall be denied membership for any reason not related to profession of faith" (*Book of Order*, G-1.0302), even if a new member is joining by letter of transfer or reaffirmation of faith, thus renewing a faith commitment made at an earlier date, they are still dedicating themselves to a new congregation and should know how the mission and ministry of Christ are lived out in that particular assembly. While the pastor can be helpful in sharing this information, and is often the one to lead a "new member class," the session is best-positioned to tell the church's story and invite discussion over areas of mutual interest and dedication. Such a discussion can help the ruling elders discern an individual readiness to grow in covenant faithfulness.

The term of a new member class is largely dependent upon the spiritual maturity and level of discipleship already achieved by individuals seeking membership in the body. In general, though, such classes could lift up:

Being a Presbyterian—the church's history, polity, and doctrine.

Being a Presbyterian in this Place—the congregation's history, mission, and service, as well as the expectations of membership.

The intersection of life and faith, including an inventory of gifts and talents.

And, especially for those making a profession of faith, developing a statement of faith that speaks to their trust in God, their reliance upon grace, and evidence of the Spirit moving within them, prompting them to confess Christ as Lord and accept the responsibilities of membership. In the church I serve, that statement takes many forms. Recently, one confirmand composed a musical piece in three-parts to profess her faith. Another created a liturgical dance, which she performed and described in beautiful detail.

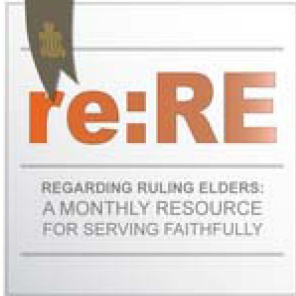
New members bring energy, joy, and hope to a congregation. They also encourage us to welcome the “new creation” in Christ. Preparing, examining, and celebrating these new members in a time of fresh commitment to the ministry of the Church can prompt an experience of the Spirit that leads to congregational renewal.

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*The Reverend Dr. Rhonda Myers is pastor of the Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church in Midland, Michigan, serves as chair of her presbytery’s CPM, and is married to an intentional interim pastor, the Reverend David Myers, who is currently serving in Linden, Michigan.*

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders and Baptism



Office of the General Assembly

RODGER NISHIOKA

Clive Gregory Guerra was clearly not having a good time. He was struggling in the arms of his mother. Perhaps he sensed her anxiety as they all stood in front of the congregation. When she passed him to his father, it did not help. He struggled in his dad's arms and let out a loud cry. He did not want to be passed from his father to Pastor Tom. He struggled and squirmed and then when Pastor Tom put water on his

head and said some important words, he let out a loud cry right into Pastor's Tom's microphone. His parents were cringing. So was the congregation. Then Ruling Elder Joni put out her arms and Pastor Tom gladly transferred Clive to her. Joni looked down at him and said, "That's all right, Clive Gregory. God has given you a great voice. You use it to God's glory!" That's when Clive's parents and the congregation broke out into smiles and for the first time in his baptism, so did Clive. Ruling Elder Joni then went on to look out at the congregation and ask if all were willing to care for Clive and to teach him about Jesus and to learn from him as well. Everyone said, "Yes!" Joni spoke to Clive who was now looking directly into her eyes and smiling, and said, "Pastor Tom better watch out. From now on, you belong to God and God has given you the gift of volume. I see a preacher in you one day!"

The Directory for Worship in the *Book of Order* tells us that Baptism is "the sign and seal of incorporation into Christ" (W-2.3001). While the pastor invites the individuals being baptized or the parents of the child being baptized to respond to a series of professions, the Directory for Worship says that a ruling elder may lead the whole congregation in a similar profession of faith and an affirmation of those being baptized and a promise to care for and nurture them (W-3.3603). Many liturgical theologians believe this is right and good since it is the responsibility of the session to authorize the Sacrament on behalf of the congregation.

Further, it is the ruling elders' responsibility to invite parents to have their child baptized and to invite individuals to seek the Sacrament of Baptism. When I arrived as the guest preacher in one of our congregations in Michigan, I was told that three generations of one family—a grandfather, a daughter, and a grandson—were being baptized that day. I was delighted to hear this and when I asked how this came about, the pastor told me that the daughter, a frequent visitor, had approached one of the ruling elders after a worship service that included a baptism asking about her young son being baptized. When the elder asked about the mother's own baptism experience, she replied that she had never been baptized. The elder then suggested that they both be baptized. Then when the young woman's father heard about it, he revealed that he had never been baptized and would be honored to be baptized on the same day in the same service as his daughter and grandson. What a celebration that day as the three held hands and walked around the congregation to applause and laughter as the whole congregation welcomed them into the family of Jesus Christ!



The Holy Sacrament —Bill McChesney - Flickr, CC 2.0

The *Book of Order* also stipulates that ruling elders must ensure that those being baptized go through a process of preparation and following the baptism, continue to be nurtured in the faith (W-2.3012b, c, e). This helps Clive Gregory and his folks understand that baptism is not the end of the journey but rather one step on the lifelong adventure of following the Lord. The Sacrament of Baptism is an act of the whole congregation. This means that both ruling and teaching elders should participate in all aspects of the sacrament from the invitation to the preparation to the baptism to the nurture that follows. In this way, we demonstrate to the whole world our life together as the Body of Christ.

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*Dr. Rodger Nishioka is the director of adult educational ministries at the Village Church in Prairie Village, Kansas. Prior to his call to Village Church, he served for fifteen years on the faculty of Columbia Theological Seminary teaching in Christian education.*