

THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER ONE

CONGREGATIONS AND THEIR MEMBERSHIP

G-1.01 THE CONGREGATION

1.0101 The Mission of the Congregation

The congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context. The triune God gives to the congregation all the gifts of the gospel necessary to being the Church. The congregation is the basic form of the church, but it is not of itself a sufficient form of the church. Thus congregations are bound together in communion with one another, united in covenant relationships of accountability and responsibility, contributing their strengths to the benefit of the whole, and are called, collectively, the church.

Through the congregation God's people carry out the ministries of proclamation, sharing the Sacraments, and living in covenant life with God and each other. In the life of the congregation, individual believers are equipped for the ministry of witness to the love and grace of God in and for the world. The congregation reaches out to people, communities, and the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to gather for worship, to offer care and nurture to God's children, to speak for social justice and righteousness, to bear witness to the truth and to the reign of God that is coming into the world.

1.0102 The Fellowship of the Congregation

The polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presupposes the fellowship of women and men with their children united in covenant relationship with one another and with God. The organization rests upon the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.

1.0103 Governed by the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

A "congregation" as used in this Form of Government refers to a formally organized community chartered and recognized by a presbytery as provided in this Constitution. Each congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be governed by this Constitution. The members of a congregation put themselves under the leadership of the session and the higher councils (presbytery, synod, and General Assembly). The government and guidance of the congregation are the responsibility of ruling elders, elected from among the members of the congregation, and teaching elders (ministers of the Word and Sacrament) who serve together as the session. The session leads the congregation in fulfilling its responsibilities for the service of all people, for the upbuilding of the whole church, and for the glory of God.

G-1.02 THE ORGANIZING OF A CONGREGATION

A congregation in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can be organized only by the authority of a presbytery and shall function under the provisions of this Constitution.

1.0201 Organizing Covenant

In organizing a congregation, presbytery shall receive applications for membership from persons wishing to unite in forming a new congregation. These persons shall covenant together as follows:

"We, the undersigned, in response to the grace of God, desire to be constituted and organized as a church to be known as _____. We promise and covenant to live together in unity and to work together in ministry as disciples of Jesus Christ, bound to him and to one another as a part of the body of Christ in this place according to the principles of faith, mission, and order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

"(Signatures)"

They shall be declared an organized congregation of the presbytery and shall proceed to the election of ruling elders and, if they so decide, deacons. The presbytery shall prepare, examine, ordain, and install these newly elected persons.

Presbytery shall continue to work closely with the congregation in securing pastoral leadership, in plans for the service and witness of the congregation, in coordinating its work with other churches, in counseling concerning bylaws for the congregation conforming to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and in giving other forms of support and encouragement that will strengthen the mission of the congregation in the larger life of the denomination.

G-1.03 THE MEMBERSHIP OF A CONGREGATION

1.0301 The Meaning of Membership and Baptism

In Jesus Christ, God calls women and men to faith and to membership in the church, the body of Christ. The triune God incarnate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ gives to the church not only its mission but also its understanding of membership. One becomes a member of the church through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and acceptance of Christ's Lordship in all of life. Baptism and a public profession of faith in Jesus as Lord are the visible signs of God's call and claim on a human life and of entrance into the membership of the church. The baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith. The baptism of those who enter the covenant of membership upon their own profession of faith witnesses to the truth that God's gift of grace calls for fulfillment in a response of faithfulness. (W-2.3008b, c.)

1.0302 Welcome and Openness

A congregation shall welcome all persons who trust in God's grace in Jesus Christ and desire to become part of the fellowship and ministry of his Church. No person shall be denied membership for any reason not related to profession of faith. The Gospel leads members to extend the fellowship of Christ to all persons. Failure to do so constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal to the gospel.

1.0303 Entry into Membership

Persons may enter into active church membership in the following ways:

- a. Public profession of faith, made after careful examination by the session in the meaning and responsibilities of membership; if not already baptized, the person making profession of faith shall be baptized;
- b. Certificate of transfer, when a person is a member of another Christian church at the time of transfer;
- c. Reaffirmation of faith, for other previously baptized persons.

1.0304 The Ministry of Members

a. Membership in the Church is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to Jesus Christ that binds the individual believer to fulfillment of the obligations of membership. A faithful member accepts Christ's call to bear witness to God's love and grace and to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church. Such involvement includes:

- proclaiming the good news in word and deed,
- taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation,
- lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support,
- studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life,
- supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,
- demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church,
- responding to God's activity in the world through service to others,
- living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,

working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment,
participating in the governing responsibilities of the church.

b. Members shall regularly review and evaluate the integrity with which they are involved in the ministry of the church and consider ways in which their participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful.

G-1.04 CATEGORIES OF MEMBERSHIP

The membership of a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) includes baptized members, active members, and affiliate members.

1.0401 Baptized Member

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. Such baptized members receive the pastoral care and instruction of the church, and may participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

1.0402 Active Member

An active member is a person who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into membership of the church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of this church, and participates in the church's work and worship. In addition, active members participate in the governance of the church and may be elected to ordered ministry (see G-2.0102). Active members shall regularly, after prayerful consideration, recommit themselves to the disciplines and responsibilities of membership outlined in G-1.0303. The session shall have responsibility for preparing those who would become active members of the congregation. The session shall review the roll of active members at least annually and shall counsel with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership.

1.0403 Affiliate Member

An affiliate member is a member of another congregation of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the congregation of membership is situated, has presented a certificate of good standing from the appropriate council or governing body of that congregation, and has been received by the session as an affiliate member. An affiliate member may participate in the life of the congregation in the same manner as an active member except that an affiliate member may not vote or be elected to ordered ministry.

1.0404 Other Participants

Persons who are not members of, or who may have ceased active participation in, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are welcome and may participate in the life and worship of this church and receive its pastoral care and instruction. The invitation to the Lord's Supper is extended to all who have been baptized, remembering that access to the table is not a right conferred upon the worthy, but a privilege given to the undeserving who come in faith, repentance, and love (W-2.4011). Confessing members of other Christian churches may present children for baptism, in conformity with W-2.3014.

G-1.05 MEETINGS OF THE CONGREGATION

1.0501 Annual and Special Meetings

The congregation shall hold an annual meeting and may hold special meetings as necessary. At least annually, the congregation shall review the adequacy of the compensation of the pastor or pastors, shall elect ruling elders, and may elect deacons and other persons to positions of elected service as determined by the congregation. Special meetings may be called for any or all of the purposes appropriate for congregational consideration. The business to be transacted at special meetings shall be limited to items specifically listed in the call for the meeting. Adequate public notice of all congregational meetings shall be given at a regular service of worship; congregations shall provide by their own rule for minimum notification requirements. Congregations shall also provide by rule the quorum necessary to conduct business. All active members of the congregation present at either annual or special meetings are entitled to vote.

1.0502 Calling a Congregational Meeting

Meetings of the congregation shall be called by the session, by the presbytery, or by the session when requested in writing by one fourth of the active members on the roll of the congregation.

1.0503 Business Proper to Congregational Meetings

Business to be transacted at meetings of the congregation shall be limited to matters related to the following:

- a. electing ruling elders, deacons, and trustees;
- b. calling of a pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor;
- c. changing existing pastoral relationships, by such means as approving or changing the terms of call, or requesting, consenting to, or declining to consent to dissolution;
- d. buying, mortgaging, or selling real property;
- e. requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption from one or more requirements because of limited size (G-2.0206).

Whenever permitted by civil law, both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting.

1.0504 Moderator

The installed pastor shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the congregation. If there is no installed pastor, the presbytery shall make provision for a moderator. If it is impractical for the pastor to preside, he or she shall invite another teaching elder (minister of the Word and Sacrament) who is a member of the presbytery or a person authorized by the presbytery to serve as moderator.

1.0505 Secretary and Minutes

The clerk of session shall serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If the clerk of session is unable to serve, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting. The secretary shall record the actions of the congregation in minutes of the meeting.

CHAPTER TWO

ORDERED MINISTRY, COMMISSIONING, AND CERTIFICATION

G-2.01 ORDERED MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH

2.0101 Christ's Ministry

The Church's ministry is a gift from Jesus Christ to the whole Church. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills, exercising his authority by the ministry of women and men for the establishment and extension of God's new reality. His ministry is the foundation and standard for all ministry, the pattern of the one who came "not to be served but to serve" (Matt. 20:28). The basic form of ministry is the ministry of the whole people of God, from whose midst some are called to ordered ministries. Members and those in ordered ministries serve together under the mandate of Christ who is the chief minister of all.

2.0102 Ordered Ministries

The Church's ordered ministries mentioned in the New Testament, which this church has maintained, include those of presbyters (teaching elders and ruling elders) and deacons. Ordered ministries are gifts to the church to order its life so that the ministry of the whole people of God may flourish.

The government of this church is representative, and the right of God's people to elect presbyters and deacons is inalienable. Therefore, no person can be placed in any ordered ministry in a congregation or council of the church except by election of that body. One responsibility of membership in the church is the election of those ordained to fulfill particular functions. The existence of these ordered ministries in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church.

2.0103 Gifts and Qualifications¹

a. To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament—God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God's people and the concurring judgment of a governing body of the church.

b. Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

2.0104 Freedom of Conscience

It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve it in ordered ministries shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in this Constitution. So far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained. It is to be recognized, however, that in entering the ordered ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek, or serve in, ordered ministry. The decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity is made initially by the individual concerned but ultimately becomes the responsibility of the council in which he or she is a member.

¹ The task force was directed by the 217th General Assembly (2006) not to alter the current wording in G-6.0106b. Elsewhere in this proposed Form of Government, we have used "ordered ministry" in place of "office."

G-2.02 RULING ELDERS AND DEACONS*2.0201 Ruling Elder Defined*

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 governing and ministry. 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. Ruling elders, together with teaching elders (ministers of the Word and Sacrament), exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationships. When elected by the congregation, they shall serve faithfully as members of the session. When elected as commissioners to higher councils, ruling elders participate and vote with the same authority as teaching elders, and they are eligible for any office.

2.0202 Deacon Defined

The ministry of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, witness, and service after the example of Jesus Christ. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, warm sympathies, and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry. It is the duty of deacons, first of all, to engage in ministries that show the love and justice of Jesus Christ to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith. Deacons, whether individually commissioned or organized as a board of deacons, are under the supervision and authority of the session.

2.0203 Election of Ruling Elders and Deacons

Ruling elders and deacons are men and women elected by the congregation from among its members. The nomination and election of elders and deacons shall express the rich diversity of the congregation’s membership and shall guarantee participation and inclusiveness (F-3.0303). Elders and deacons shall be nominated by a committee drawn from and representative of the congregation’s membership. A majority of the committee shall be members not currently in active service as elders or deacons. This committee shall include at least two elders, at least one of whom is currently serving on session, and the pastor shall serve *ex officio* without vote. When elections are held, full opportunity shall always be given to the congregation for nomination from the floor of the congregational meeting by any active member of the congregation. A majority of all the active members present and voting shall be required to elect

2.0204 Preparation for Ministry as a Ruling Elder or Deacon

When persons have been elected to the ordered ministry of ruling elder or deacon, the session shall provide a period of study and preparation, after which the session shall examine them as to their personal faith; knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church; and the duties of the ministry. The session shall also confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the ministry appropriate to the order. If the examination is approved, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation.

2.0205 Service of Ordination and Installation

The service of ordination and installation shall focus upon Christ and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church, and shall include a sermon appropriate to the occasion. The moderator of session or person authorized to preside shall state briefly the nature of the ministry of ruling elder and deacon. The act of ordination and installation takes place in the context of worship. The order for that service of worship in the Directory for Worship (W-4.4000) shall be followed.

2.0206 Terms of Service

Elders and deacons shall be elected to serve terms of no more than three years and shall be eligible for reelection. However, no elder or deacon shall be eligible to serve more than six consecutive years, and an elder or deacon who has served six consecutive years shall be ineligible for election to the same board for at least one year. Election shall be to classes as nearly equal in number as possible, with the term of only one class ending each year. The presbytery may, upon written request and by majority vote, grant a congregation a waiver of this limitation on terms.

2.0207 Perpetual Ministry and Unique Ordination

Ordination to the ministry of ruling elder and to the ministry of deacon is unique to that order of ministry. Once ordained and while they are active members of any congregation of this denomination, elders or deacons not in active service on a session or board of deacons continue to bear the responsibilities of the ministry to which they have been ordained except as provided in G-2.0209, G-2.0210, or in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

2.0208 Dissolution of Relationship

An elder or deacon may resign from the session or board of deacons for good cause, with the session's consent. On ceasing to be an active member of a congregation, an elder or deacon ceases to be a member of its session or board. When an elder or deacon, because of change of residence or disability, is unable to perform the duties of the ministry to which he or she was ordained for a period of one year, the active relationship shall be dissolved by the session unless there is good reason not to do so, which reason should be recorded.

2.0209 Release from Ministry as a Ruling Elder or Deacon

If an elder or deacon who is in good standing shall make application to the session of the congregation in which he or she holds membership to be released from the exercise of the ordered ministry, the session, upon granting the release, shall delete that person's name from the appropriate roll of ruling elder or deacon of the congregation. No judgment of failure on the part of the ruling elder or deacon is implied in this action. Release from the exercise of the ministry of ruling elder or deacon requires a discontinuation of all functions of that ministry. The status of one so released shall be the same as any church member. Should a person released under this section later desire to be restored to that ordered ministry, that person shall make application to the session that granted the release, and upon approval of the session, that person shall be restored to the exercise of the ministry from which he or she was released without re-ordination.

2.0210 Renunciation of Jurisdiction

When an elder or deacon submits to the clerk of session a written statement renouncing the jurisdiction of this church, the renunciation shall be effective upon receipt. When an elder or deacon persists in work disapproved by the session, the session shall consult with him or her and shall give notice of its disapproval. If, after having been provided opportunity for consultation and upon written notice of its disapproval, the elder or deacon persists in the work, the session may then conclude that the elder or deacon has renounced the jurisdiction of this church.

2.0211 Effect of Renunciation

Renunciation of jurisdiction shall remove the elder or deacon from membership and ordered ministry and shall terminate the exercise of the ministry. The renunciation shall be reported by the clerk of session at the next meeting of the session, which shall record the renunciation, delete the elder or deacon's name from the appropriate register and take such other administrative actions as may be required by this Constitution.

G-2.03 TEACHING ELDERS: MINISTERS OF THE WORD AND SACRAMENT*2.0301 Teaching Elder Defined*

As the Lord has set aside through calling certain members to be teaching elders to perform a particular ministry of the Word and Sacrament and has committed to them a variety of work, the church through the presbytery calls them to that service and responsibility. Teaching elders, also called ministers of the Word and Sacrament, shall be committed in all their work to equipping the people of God for their ministry and witness. They shall be members of the presbytery which shall designate them to such work as may be helpful to the church in mission, in the performance of which they shall be accountable to the presbytery. No pastoral relationship may be established, changed, or dissolved without the approval of the presbytery. They shall be responsible for participation in the larger ministry of the church in addition to the duties to which they are called and designated by the presbytery. Ministers of the Word and Sacrament have membership in the presbytery by action of the presbytery itself. The presbytery shall determine whether a particular work is a call to validated ministry requiring ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

2.0302 Categories of Membership

A minister of the Word and Sacrament shall be engaged in a ministry validated by the presbytery, be a member-at-large as determined by the presbytery, or be honorably retired.

a. *Validated Ministry*

A validated ministry shall:

- (1) demonstrate conformity with the mission of God's people in the world as set forth in Holy Scripture, *The Book of Confessions*, and the *Book of Order* of this church;
- (2) serve and aid others, and enable the ministry of others;
- (3) give evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God's Word;
- (4) be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery in addition to any organizations, agencies, and institutions served;
- (5) include responsible participation in the deliberations, worship, and work of the presbytery and in the life of a congregation of this church or a church in correspondence with the PC(USA) (G-5.0202);

When ministers of the Word and Sacrament are called to validated ministry beyond the jurisdiction of this church, they shall give evidence of a quality of life that helps to share the ministry of the good news. They shall participate in a congregation, in their presbytery, and in ecumenical relationships and shall be eligible for election to the higher councils of the church and to the boards and agencies of those councils.

The presbytery shall review annually the work of all ministers of the Word and Sacrament engaged in validated ministries outside the congregation.

b. *Member-at-large*

A member-at-large is a minister of the Word and Sacrament who has previously been admitted to the presbytery or another presbytery as an active member, and who now, without intentional abandonment of the exercise of ministry, is no longer engaged in a ministry that complies with all the criteria in G-2.0302a. A minister may be designated a member-at-large because he or she is limited in his or her ability to engage in a ministry fulfilling all of the criteria for a validated ministry because of family responsibilities or other individual circumstances recognized by the presbytery. A member-at-large shall comply with as many of the criteria in G-2.0302a as possible and shall actively participate in the life of a congregation. A member-at-large is entitled to take part in the meetings of the presbytery and to speak, vote, and hold office. The status of member-at-large shall be reviewed annually.

c. *Honorably Retired*

The status of honorable retirement may be granted by a presbytery because of age or because of physical or mental disability.

2.0303 *Pastoral Relationships*

When ministers of the Word and Sacrament are called as pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor of a congregation, they are to be responsible for a quality of life and relationships that commend the gospel to all persons and that communicate its joy and justice. They are responsible for studying, teaching, and preaching the Word, for celebrating Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and for praying with and for the congregation. With the ruling elders, they are to encourage people in the worship and service of God; to equip and enable them for their tasks within the church and their mission in the world; to exercise pastoral care, devoting special attention to the poor, the sick, the troubled, and the dying; to participate in governing responsibilities, including leadership of the congregation in implementing the principles of participation and inclusiveness in the decision-making life of the congregation, and its task of reaching out in concern and service to the life of the human community as a whole. With the deacons they are to share in the ministries of sympathy, witness, and service. In addition to these pastoral duties, they are responsible for sharing in the ministry of the church in councils higher than the session and in ecumenical relationships.

a. *Installed Pastoral Relationships*

The installed pastoral relationships are pastor, co-pastor, and associate pastor. A minister of the Word and Sacrament may be installed in a pastoral relationship for an indefinite period or for a designated term determined by the presbytery in consultation with the congregation. When a congregation determines that its strategy for mission under the Word so requires, the congregation may call additional pastors. Such additional pastors shall be called co-pastors or associate pastors, and the duties of each pastor and the relationship between the pastors of the congregation shall be

determined by the session with the approval of the presbytery. When a congregation has two pastors serving as co-pastors, and the relationship of one of them is dissolved, the other remains as pastor. The relationship of an associate pastor to a congregation is not dependent upon that of a pastor. An associate pastor is not eligible to be the next installed pastor of that congregation, except by three-fourths vote of those members of presbytery present and voting

b. *Temporary Pastoral Relationships*

Temporary pastoral relationships are approved by the presbytery and do not carry a formal call or installation. When a congregation does not have a pastor, or while the pastor is unable to perform her or his duties, the session, with the approval of presbytery, may obtain the services of a minister of the Word and Sacrament, candidate, or elder in a temporary pastoral relationship. No formal call shall be issued by the congregation and no formal installation shall take place.

Titles and terms of service for temporary relationships shall be determined by the presbytery. A minister of the Word and Sacrament serving in a temporary pastoral relationship is invited for a specified period not to exceed twelve months in length, which is renewable with the approval of the presbytery. A minister employed in a temporary pastoral relationship is not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor except by a three-fourths vote of the members of presbytery present and voting. A presbytery may determine that its mission strategy necessitates a further limit on eligibility of temporary pastors to serve as the next installed pastor of a congregation served in a temporary capacity.

2.0304 *Transfer of Ministers of Other Denominations*

a. When a minister of another Christian church is called to a work properly under the jurisdiction of a presbytery, the presbytery, after the constitutional conditions have been met, shall recognize the minister's previous ordination to ministry. Such ministers shall furnish credentials and evidence of good standing acceptable to the presbytery, and shall submit satisfactory evidence of possessing the qualifications of character and scholarship required of candidates of this church. (See G-2.0407 and G-2.0410.) In exceptional circumstances the following provisions will apply:

- (1) In the case of ministers for immigrant fellowships and congregations, a presbytery may, if it determines that its strategy for mission with that group requires it, recognize the ordination and enroll a new immigrant minister who furnishes evidence of good standing in a denomination in correspondence with the General Assembly as a member of the presbytery, even though at the time of enrollment that minister lacks the educational history required of candidates, and provide such educational opportunities as seem necessary and prudent for that minister's successful ministry in the presbytery.
- (2) A minister of another Reformed church who has been ordained for five or more years may be granted an exemption for some or all of the examinations required of candidates for ordination by a two-thirds vote of the presbytery.

b. Upon enrollment, the minister shall furnish the presbytery with evidence of having surrendered membership in any and all other Christian churches with which the minister has previously been associated.

2.0305 *Temporary Membership in Presbytery for a Period of Service*

A presbytery may enroll a minister of another Christian church who is serving temporarily in a validated ministry in this church, or in an installed relationship under the provisions of the Formula of Agreement, when the minister has satisfied the requirements of preparation for such service established by the presbytery's own rule.

2.0306 *Release from Ministry as a Teaching Elder*

When a teaching elder who is in good standing shall make application to be released from the exercise of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament, the presbytery shall delete that person's name from the roll and give that person a certificate of membership to a congregation. Release from the exercise of ordained ministry requires discontinuance of all functions of that ministry. The designations that refer to teaching elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament, shall not be used. The person so released shall engage in the ministry shared by all active members of congregations. Should a person released under this section later desire to be restored to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament, that person shall apply through the presbytery which granted the release, and upon approval of that presbytery, the

reaffirmation of the ordination vows, and the resumption of a ministry that qualifies that person for membership in the presbytery, shall be restored to the exercise of the ordained ministry as a teaching elder without re-ordination.

2.0307 Renunciation of Jurisdiction

When a minister of the Word and Sacrament submits to the stated clerk of the presbytery a written statement renouncing the jurisdiction of this church, the renunciation shall be effective upon receipt. When a minister of the Word and Sacrament persists in work disapproved by the presbytery having jurisdiction, the presbytery shall consult with the minister and shall give notice of its disapproval. If after having been provided opportunity for consultation and upon written notice of its disapproval, the minister of the Word and Sacrament persists in the work, the presbytery may then conclude that he or she has renounced the jurisdiction of this church.

2.0308 Effect of Renunciation

Renunciation of jurisdiction shall remove the minister from membership and ordered ministry and shall terminate the exercise of that ministry. The renunciation shall be reported by the stated clerk at the next meeting of the presbytery, which shall record the renunciation, delete her or his name from the appropriate roll, and take such other administrative actions as may be required by this Constitution, including public communication of such a renunciation.

G-2.04 PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY

2.0401 Nature and Purpose of Preparation

It is important that those who are to be ordained as minister of the Word and Sacrament receive full preparation for their task under the direction of the presbytery. For this purpose, a presbytery shall enter into covenant relationship with those preparing to become ministers of the Word and Sacrament and with their sessions and congregations. This relationship shall be divided into the two phases of inquiry and candidacy.

2.0402 Time Requirements

To be enrolled as an inquirer, the applicant shall be a member of the sponsoring congregation, shall have been active in the work and worship of that congregation for at least six months, and shall have received the endorsement of the session of the sponsoring congregation. The inquiry and candidacy phases shall continue for a period of no less than two years, including at least one year as a candidate.

2.0403 Purpose of Inquiry

The purpose of the inquiry phase is to provide an opportunity for the church and those who believe themselves called to ministry of the Word and Sacrament to explore that call together so that the presbytery can make an informed decision about the inquirer's suitability for ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

2.0404 Purpose of Candidacy

The purpose of the candidacy phase is to provide for the full preparation of persons to serve the church as ministers of the Word and Sacrament. This shall be accomplished through the presbytery's support, guidance, and evaluation of a candidate's fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination.

2.0405 Oversight

During the phases of inquiry and candidacy the individual continues to be an active member of his or her congregation and subject to the concern and discipline of the session. In matters relating to preparation for ministry, the individual is subject to the oversight of the presbytery within the context of their covenant relationship.

2.0406 Service in Covenant Relationship

Inquirers and candidates shall, with the permission of the presbytery of care, engage in some form of supervised service to the church. No inquirer or candidate who has not been previously ordained as a ruling elder may serve as moderator of a session, administer the Sacraments, or perform a marriage service. An inquirer or candidate previously ordained as a ruling elder may be authorized by the presbytery to preside at the Lord's Supper when invited by a session.

2.0407 Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service

A candidate may not, without approval of the presbytery, enter into negotiation for his or her service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. The presbytery shall record when it has certified a candidate ready for examination for ordination, pending a call. Evidence of readiness shall include:

- a. demonstration of readiness to begin ministry of the Word and Sacrament;
- b. presentation of a transcript showing satisfactory grades at a regionally accredited college or university, together with a diploma;
- c. presentation of a transcript of a course of study including Hebrew and Greek and exegesis of the Old and New Testaments, using Hebrew and Greek texts, from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the presbytery, with satisfactory grades, and with presentation of a plan to complete the theological degree;
- d. presentation of satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination prepared and authorized by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates.

2.0408 Transfer of Relationship

At the request of the inquirer or candidate and with the approval of the sessions and presbyteries involved, a presbytery may transfer the covenant relationship of an inquirer or candidate.

2.0409 Removal from Relationship

A presbytery may also, for sufficient reasons, remove an individual's name from the roll of inquirers and candidates, reporting this action and the reasons to the session, to the individual, and, if appropriate, to the educational institution in which the individual is enrolled. Prior to taking such action, the presbytery or its designated entity shall make a reasonable attempt to give the candidate or inquirer an opportunity to be heard concerning the proposed removal.

2.0410 Exceptions

By a three-fourths vote, a presbytery may waive any of the requirements for ordination in G-2.04, except for those of G-2.0407d. If a presbytery judges that there are good and sufficient reasons why a candidate should not be required to satisfy the requirements of G-2.0407d, it shall approve by three-quarters vote some alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard ordination examinations. A full account of the reasons for exception shall be included in the minutes of the presbytery and communicated to the presbytery to which an inquirer or candidate may be transferred.

2.05 ORDINATION*2.0501 Ordination*

Ordination to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament is an act of the whole church carried out by the presbytery, setting apart a person to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. Such a person shall have fulfilled the ordination requirements of the presbytery of care and received the call of God to service to a congregation or other work in the mission of the church that is acceptable to the candidate and to the presbytery of call.

2.0502 Place of Ordination

The presbytery placing the call to the candidate for ministry shall ordinarily examine, ordain, and install the candidate.

2.0503 Service of Ordination

The order for that service found in the Directory for Worship, W-4.4000, shall be followed.

2.0504 Record of Ordination

The presbytery of call shall record the ordination and installation and enroll the minister as a member of the presbytery. The stated clerk of the presbytery shall report these actions to the General Assembly and to the congregation of which the candidate was formerly a member.

2.06 CALL AND INSTALLATION*2.0601 Pastoral Vacancy*

When a congregation has a vacancy in a pastoral position, or after the presbytery approves the effective date of the dissolution of an existing pastoral relationship, the congregation shall, with the guidance and permission of the presbytery, proceed to fill the vacancy in the following manner.

2.0602 Election of a Pastor Nominating Committee

The session shall call a congregational meeting to elect a pastor nominating committee that shall be representative of the whole congregation. This committee's duty shall be to nominate a minister of the Word and Sacrament to the congregation.

2.0603 Call Process

The pastor nominating committee shall confer with the presbytery on the merits, suitability, and availability of those considered for the call according to the process of that presbytery. When the committee is ready to report to the congregation and the presbytery concurs, the committee shall notify the session, which shall call a congregational meeting.

2.0604 Dissent

On the election of a pastor, if it appears that a substantial minority of the voters are averse to the nominee who has received a majority of the votes and that they cannot be persuaded to concur in the call, the moderator shall recommend to the majority that they not prosecute the call. If the congregation is nearly unanimous, or if the majority insist upon their right to call a pastor, the moderator shall forward the call to the presbytery, certifying the results of the vote and any other facts of importance. The moderator shall also inform the person being called of the nature and circumstances of the decision.

2.0605 Terms of Call

The terms of call shall always meet or exceed any minimum requirement of the presbytery in effect when the call is made. The congregation shall review annually the adequacy of the minister's compensation and adjust the compensation to meet changes in the presbytery's requirements. The call shall include participation in the Benefits Plan of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including both pension and medical coverage, or any successor plan approved by the General Assembly.

2.0606 Installation Service

When the congregation, the presbytery, and the minister of the Word and Sacrament (or candidate) have all concurred in a call to a permanent or designated pastoral position, the presbytery shall complete the call process by organizing and conducting a service of installation. Installation is an act of the presbytery establishing the pastoral relationship. A service of installation occurs in the context of worship. The service outline found in the Directory for Worship, W-4.4000, shall be followed.

G-2.07 DISSOLUTION OF PASTORAL RELATIONSHIPS*2.0701 Congregational Meeting*

An installed pastoral relationship may be dissolved only by the presbytery. Whether the minister of the Word and Sacrament or the congregation or the presbytery initiates proceedings for dissolution of the relationship, there shall always be a meeting of the congregation to consider the matter and to consent, or decline to consent, to dissolution,

unless the presbytery expressly finds that the church's mission under the Word imperatively demands dissolution of the relationship without such a meeting.

2.0702 Pastor, Co-Pastor or Associate Pastor Requests

A pastor, co-pastor or associate pastor may request the presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship. The minister must also state her or his intention to the session. The session shall call a congregational meeting to act upon the request and to make recommendations to the presbytery. If the congregation does not concur, the presbytery shall hear from the congregation, through its elected commissioners, the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the pastoral relationship. If the congregation fails to appear, or if its reasons for retaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the request may be granted and the pastoral relationship dissolved.

2.0703 Congregation Requests

If any congregation desires the pastoral relationship to be dissolved, a similar procedure shall be followed. When a congregation requests the session to call a congregational meeting to dissolve its relationship with its pastor, the session shall call the meeting and request the presbytery to appoint a moderator for the meeting. If the pastor does not concur with the request to dissolve the relationship, the presbytery shall hear from him or her the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the relationship. If the pastor fails to appear, or if the reasons for maintaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the relationship may be dissolved.

2.0704 Presbytery Action

The presbytery may inquire into reported difficulties in a congregation and may dissolve the pastoral relationship if, after consultation with the minister, the session, and the congregation, it finds the church's mission under the Word imperatively demands it.

2.0705 Officiate by Invitation Only

Former pastors and associate pastors may officiate at services for members of a congregation, or at services within its property, only upon invitation from the moderator of the session or, in the case of the inability to contact the moderator, from the clerk of session. After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors may not offer themselves in any pastoral capacity without the invitation of the pastor.

G-2.08 COMMISSIONED PASTORS

2.0801 Functions

When the presbytery, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee, determines that its strategy for mission requires it, the presbytery may authorize a ruling elder to be commissioned to limited pastoral service as assigned by the presbytery. A ruling elder so designated may be commissioned to serve in a validated ministry of the presbytery. The commission for such service shall not exceed twelve months, but shall be renewable, and it shall specify the authority, responsibilities, and term of the service.

2.0802 Training, Examination and Commissioning

The ruling elder shall be instructed in Bible, Reformed Theology and Sacraments, Presbyterian Polity, preaching, leading worship, pastoral care, and teaching. The ruling elder shall be examined by the appropriate committee of the presbytery as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction mentioned previously. A ruling elder who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in the specified ministry may continue to be listed as available to serve, but is not authorized to perform the functions of a commissioned pastor again until commissioned to a congregation or ministry by the presbytery.

2.0803 Commissioning Service

When the presbytery is satisfied with the qualifications of an elder to serve a congregation providing the services described above, it shall commission the ruling elder to pastoral service as designated by the presbytery, employing the vows contained in W-4.4000.

2.0804 Supervision

The commissioned pastor shall work under the supervision of the presbytery. The presbytery may at any time withdraw the commission for reasons it deems good and sufficient. A minister of the Word and Sacrament shall be assigned as a mentor and supervisor.

G-2.09 CERTIFIED CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS*2.0901 Skills and Training*

Christian educators are persons called to service in the ministry of education in congregations or councils. They shall have skills and training in biblical interpretation, Reformed theology, human development, faith development, religious educational theory and practice, and the polity, programs, and mission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). They should be encouraged by their session and presbytery to meet, or be prepared to meet, the certification requirements defined in the manual approved by the General Assembly.

2.0902 Presbytery and Christian Education

The presbytery shall encourage Christian educators to seek certification, shall encourage sessions to make continuing education funds and time available to educators seeking certification, and shall provide a service of recognition at the time of certification. The presbytery may grant the privilege of the floor at all its meetings to all certified Christian educators, with voice and vote to certified Christian educators who are ruling elders.

G-2.10 OTHER CERTIFIED CHURCH WORKERS*2.1001 Other Certified Church Service*

Other persons may be certified and called to service within congregations, councils, and church-related entities. These individuals endeavor to reflect their faith through their work and to strengthen the church through their dedication. The presbytery may grant privilege of voice in its meetings to those who have been certified by any of the organizations acknowledged by the General Assembly. The presbytery shall affirm the skill and dedication of these certified persons by providing for recognition by the presbytery at the time of their certification.

CHAPTER THREE

COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH

G-3.01 GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF COUNCILS

3.0101 Councils as an Expression of Unity of the Church

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

3.0102 Definition

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

3.0103 Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction

Councils of this church have only ecclesiastical jurisdiction for the purpose of serving Jesus Christ and declaring and obeying his will in relation to truth and service, order and discipline. They may frame statements of faith, bear testimony against error in doctrine and immorality in life, resolve questions of doctrine and discipline, give counsel in matters of conscience, and decide issues properly brought before them under the provisions of this *Book of Order*. They may authorize the administration of the sacraments in accordance with the principles of the Directory for Worship (W-2.3011, W-2.4012, and W-3.6204). They have power to establish plans and rules for the worship, mission, government, and discipline of the church and to do those things necessary to the peace, purity, unity, and progress of the church under the will of Christ. They have responsibility for the leadership, guidance, and government of that portion of the church that is under their jurisdiction.

3.0104 Participation and Representation

The councils of the church shall give full expression to the rich diversity of the church's membership and shall guarantee full participation and access to representation in decision-making and employment practices (F-3.0303). In fulfilling this commitment, councils shall give due consideration to both the gifts and requirements for ministry (G-2.0103) and the right of people in congregations and councils to elect their officers (F-3.0106).

Each council shall develop procedures and mechanisms for promoting and reviewing that body's implementation of the church's commitment to inclusiveness and representation. Councils above the session may satisfy this requirement by establishing committees or other entities to advocate for diversity in leadership.

3.0105 Officers

Each council higher than the session shall elect a moderator. Each council shall elect a clerk and may elect such other officers as the council requires.

The pastor of a congregation shall be the moderator of the session of that congregation. In congregations where there are co-pastors, they shall both be considered moderators and have provisions for designating who presides at a particular meeting.

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

Moderators of councils higher than the session shall be elected for such terms as the council determines. At the time of their election, moderators must be continuing members of, or commissioners to, the council over which they are elected to preside. They shall preside at all meetings of the council during their term of office; councils shall provide by rule who shall preside in the absence of the moderator.

The clerk shall record the transactions of the council, keep its rolls of membership and attendance, preserve its records, and furnish extracts from them when required by another council of the church. Such extracts, verified by the clerk, shall be evidence in any council of the church. The clerk of the session shall be an elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine. The clerk of a presbytery, a synod, and the General Assembly shall be called stated clerk, shall be elected by the council for a definite term as it may determine, and must be eligible for membership in the council.

3.0106 Meetings

Meetings of councils shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*, except when it is in contradiction to this Constitution. Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body. Each meeting shall be opened and closed with prayer.

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

- a. A dissent is a declaration expressing disagreement with a decision of a council. It shall be made at the particular session during which the decision is made. The names of members dissenting shall be recorded.
- b. A protest is a written declaration, supported by reasons, alleging that a decision of a council is or contains an irregularity or a delinquency. Written notice of the protest shall be given at the particular session of the council during which it arose and shall be filed with the clerk before adjournment. It shall be entered in the minutes of the meeting, and may be accompanied by an answer prepared by the council.

3.0107 Administration of Mission

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

Councils higher than the session may provide examples of policies and procedures that may be gathered into advisory handbooks. These examples illumine practices required by the Constitution but left to councils for specific implementation. Such handbooks may also offer information that enhances or secures the ministry of the particular council.

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

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

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

The funding of mission similarly demonstrates the unity and interdependence of the church. The failure of any part of the church to participate in the stewardship of the mission of the whole church diminishes that unity and interdependence. All mission funding should enable the church to give effective witness in the world to the new reality of God in Jesus Christ, and should strengthen the church's witness to the mission of God. Each council above the session shall prepare an annual budget, which shall include a budget for its operating expenses, including administrative personnel, and may fund it with a per capita apportionment among the particular congregations within its bounds. Presbyteries are responsible for raising their own funds and for raising and timely transmission of funds to their respective synods and the General Assembly. Presbyteries may direct per capita apportionments to sessions within their bounds.

3.0108 *Records*

Each council shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings. Minutes and all other official records of councils are the property in perpetuity of said bodies or their legal successors. When congregations, presbyteries, or synods are dissolved, their records are held for the church by the next higher council within whose bounds they were before dissolution. The clerk of each council shall make recommendation to that body for the permanent safekeeping of the body's records with the Presbyterian Historical Society or in a temperature and humidity controlled environment of a seminary of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

3.0109 *Administrative Review*

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

a. *General Administrative Review*

Each council shall review annually or biennially, based on the body's meeting frequency, the proceedings and actions of all entities related to the body, all officers able to act on behalf of the body, and lower councils within its jurisdiction.

b. *Special Administrative Review*

If a higher council learns at any time of an alleged irregularity or delinquency of a lower council, it may require the lower body to produce any records and to take appropriate action. In reviewing the procedures of the lower council, the higher body shall determine whether the proceedings have been correctly recorded, have been in accordance with this Constitution, have been prudent and equitable, and have been faithful to the mission of the whole church. It shall also determine whether lawful injunctions of a higher body have been obeyed.

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

3.0110 *Committees and Commissions*

Councils may designate by their own rule such committees and commissions as they deem necessary and helpful for the accomplishment of the mission of the church, and may create such structures jointly with other comparable councils, in consultation with the next higher council. In appointing such committees and commissions councils shall be mindful of the principles of diversity and participation consistent with the provisions of this Constitution (F-3.0303, G-3.0104).

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

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

A council may designate two types of commissions:

a. *Judicial Commissions*

Judicial commissions shall consider and decide cases of process for the council according to the Rules of Discipline. Sessions shall perform the function of a judicial commission for the congregation; each council higher than the session shall elect a permanent judicial commission (see D-5.0000).

b. *Administrative Commissions*

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

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

- (1) (by sessions) ordaining and installing ruling elders and deacons, receiving and dismissing members, and visiting organizations within the congregation to settle differences therein;
- (2) (by presbyteries) ordaining and installing ministers of the Word and Sacrament;
- (3) (by presbyteries) examining and receiving into membership ministers seeking admission to presbytery, including approval of terms of call and commissions for ordination and installation; and receiving candidates under care;
- (4) (by presbyteries) developing immigrant fellowships, organizing new congregations, merging congregations, or forming union or federated congregations (G-5.05);
- (5) (by presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly) visiting particular councils, congregations, or agencies over which they have immediate jurisdiction reported to be affected with disorder, and inquiring into and settling the difficulties therein, except that no commission of a presbytery shall be empowered to dissolve a pastoral relationship without the specific authorization by the designating body (G-2.0701);
- (6) (by all councils) making pastoral inquiry into persons accused of sexual abuse of another person (D-10.0401c) when jurisdiction in a judicial proceeding against such persons has ended due to death of or renunciation by that person; such inquiries shall not be understood as judicial proceedings but shall seek to reach a determination of truth related to the accusation and to make appropriate recommendations to the designating council.

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

Commissions of a session shall be composed of at least two elders and a minister of the Word and Sacrament in an installed or temporary relationship with the congregation governed by that session or a commissioned pastor commissioned to that congregation.

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

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

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

3.0111 Administrative Staff

Councils higher than the session may employ such staff as is required by the mission of the body in accordance with the principles of diversity and inclusiveness (F-3.0303). Councils may, in consultation with the next higher council, share staff as required by the mission of the body. A council shall make provision in its manual of administrative operations (G-3.0107) for the process of election of executive staff and the hiring of other staff, description of the responsibilities of the position, method of performance review, and the manner of termination of employment.

3.0112 Nominating Process

All councils higher than the session shall have a process for nominating persons to serve in positions requiring election by the council. The process shall ensure that nominations are made by an entity broadly representative of the constituency of the council, and in conformity with the church's commitment to inclusiveness (F-3.0303).

3.0113 Insurance

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

G-3.02 THE SESSION*3.0201 Composition and Responsibilities*

The session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service as elders, together with all installed pastors and associate pastors. All members of the session are entitled to vote. The pastor shall be the moderator of the session, and the session shall not meet without the pastor or designated moderator. Presbyteries shall provide by rule for moderators when the session is without a moderator for reasons of vacancy or inconvenience.

The session shall have responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the session shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have identified themselves throughout history (F-1.0303) and the six great ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

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

- a. *provide that the Word is truly proclaimed and heard as the vision of God's new reality in Christ, and the invitation to all people to participate in that reality.* This responsibility shall include providing a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, education, and spiritual nurture; providing for regular preaching of the Word by a minister of the Word and Sacrament or other person prepared and approved for the work; planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world with the message of salvation and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship; planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community; and initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to the love and grace of God.
- b. *provide that the Sacraments are rightly administered as visions of the blessed community and the heavenly banquet, and commitments of solidarity with the marginalized and the hungry.* This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate, in accordance with the principles of the Directory for Worship; and exercising pastoral care among the congregation in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the congregation may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.
- c. *nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ who live in the strength of God's promise and give themselves in service to God's mission.* This responsibility shall include receiving and dismissing members; providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship; training, examining, ordaining, installing those elected by the congregation as elders and deacons; encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources; managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission; directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation; employing the administrative staff of the congregation; leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

3.0202 Relations with Other Councils

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

- a. elect, as commissioners to presbytery, elders from the congregation, preferably for at least a year, and receive their reports;
- b. nominate to presbytery elders from the congregation who may be considered for election as commissioners to synod and General Assembly, and to serve on committees or commissions of the same, bearing in mind principles of inclusiveness and fair representation in the decision making of the church; (F-3.0303)
- c. observe and carry out the instructions of presbytery, synod, and General Assembly consistent with this Constitution;
- d. welcome representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits;
- e. propose to the presbytery, or through it to the synod and General Assembly, such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church; and

f. send to presbytery and General Assembly requested financial contributions, statistics, and other information according to the requirements of those bodies.

3.0203 Meetings

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

3.0204 Minutes and Records

Minutes of the session shall be subject to the provisions of G-3.0108. They shall contain the minutes of all meetings of the congregation and all joint meetings with deacons and trustees.

Each session shall maintain the following roll and registers:

a. Membership Roll

There shall be a membership roll in accordance with G-1.0402. The session may delete names from the roll of the congregation when requested to issue a certificate of transfer of membership to another congregation; when a member requests that his or her membership be terminated; when a member joins another congregation or otherwise renounces the jurisdiction of the session; when a member has moved or otherwise ceased to participate in the ministry of Christ's Church as defined in G-1.0303 for a period of not less than two years and after efforts on the part of the session to encourage the member to return to meaningful participation have failed, and after provision of written notice; or when a member dies.

b. Registers

There shall be registers of baptisms authorized by the session, of ruling elders and deacons elected by the congregation, of marriages and deaths, and such other registers as the session may deem necessary.

3.0205 Finances

The session shall prepare and approve an annual budget and determine the distribution of the congregation's benevolences. It shall authorize offerings for Christian purposes and shall account for the proceeds of such offerings and their disbursement. It shall provide full information to the congregation concerning its decisions in such matters.

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

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

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

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

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

G-3.03 THE PRESBYTERY*3.0301 Composition and Responsibilities*

The presbytery is the council serving as a corporate expression of the church within a certain district and is composed of all the congregations and ministers of the Word and Sacrament within that district. When a presbytery meets, each member congregation shall be represented by at least one elder. Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and elders should be present in numbers as equal as possible. The presbytery shall adopt and communicate to the sessions a plan for determining how many elders each session should commission to represent it at presbytery meetings. This plan shall take into consideration the size of congregations as well as a method to fulfill the principles of participation and representation found in F-3.0303 and G-3.0104. Elders elected as officers of the presbytery shall be enrolled as members during the period of their service.

The minimum composition of a presbytery is ten duly constituted sessions and ten ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

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. As it leads and guides the witness of its congregations, the presbytery shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six great ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

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

- a. *provide that the Word is truly proclaimed and heard as the vision of God's new reality in Christ, and the invitation to all people to participate in that reality.* This responsibility shall include organizing, receiving, and merging congregations in consultation with their members; overseeing congregations without pastors; establishing pastoral relationships and dissolving them; guiding the preparation of those preparing to become ministers of the Word and Sacrament; establishing and maintaining those ecumenical relationships that will enlarge the life and mission of the church in its district; providing encouragement, guidance, and resources to congregations in the areas of mission action, leadership development, worship, evangelism, and responsible administration to the end that the church's witness to the love and grace of God may be heard in the world.
- b. *provide that the Sacraments are rightly administered as visions of the blessed community and the heavenly banquet, and commitments of solidarity with the marginalized and the hungry.* This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at its meetings at least annually and for fellowship groups, new church developments, and other non-congregational entities meeting within its bounds; authorizing and training specific ruling elders to administer or preside at the Lord's Supper when it deems it necessary to meet the needs for the administration of the Sacrament; and exercising pastoral care for the congregations and members of presbytery, visiting sessions and ministers of the Word and Sacrament on a regular basis in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the presbytery may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.
- c. *nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ who live in the strength of God's promise and give themselves in service to God's mission.* This responsibility shall include ordaining, receiving, dismissing, installing, removing, and disciplining minister members; commissioning ruling elders as commissioned pastors; promoting the peace and harmony of congregations and inquiring into the sources of congregational discord; supporting congregations in developing the graces of generosity, stewardship, and service; assisting congregations in developing mission and participating in the mission of the whole church; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

3.0302 Relations with Synod and General Assembly

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

- a. electing commissioners to synod and General Assembly and receiving their reports;
- b. electing elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament to be readers of standard ordination examinations;
- c. seeing that the orders of synod and General Assembly are observed and carried out;

- d. proposing to synod or General Assembly such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church;
- e. sending annually to synod and General Assembly statistical and other information according to the requirements of those bodies.

3.0303 Relations with Sessions

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

- a. develop strategy for the mission of the church in its district;
- b. control the location of new congregations and of congregations desiring to move as well as to divide, dismiss, or dissolve congregations in consultation with their members;
- c. establish minimum compensation standards for pastoral calls and Certified Christian Educators within the presbytery;
- d. assume original jurisdiction in any situation in which it determines that a session cannot exercise its authority. After a thorough investigation, and after full opportunity to be heard has been accorded to the session, the presbytery may conclude that the session of a congregation is unable or unwilling to manage wisely its affairs, and may appoint an administrative commission with the full power of session. This commission shall assume original jurisdiction of the existing session, if any, which shall cease to act until such time as the presbytery shall otherwise direct.
- e. consider and act upon requests from congregations for permission to take the actions regarding real property as described in G-4.0206.

3.0304 Meetings and Quorum

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

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

3.0305 Minutes and Records

Minutes and other official records of the presbytery are the property of the presbytery, and are subject to the review specified in G-3.0109. The stated clerk is responsible for the preservation of the presbytery's minutes and records.

3.0306 Finances

The presbytery shall prepare and approve an annual general mission budget to support the church's mission within its area.

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

3.0307 Membership of Presbytery

Each presbytery determines the ministers of the Word and Sacrament who are its members. It shall be guided in this determination by written criteria developed by the presbytery for validating ministries within its bounds.

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

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

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

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

3.0308 Pastor, Counselor, and Advisor to Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Congregations

Each presbytery shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to serve as pastor and counselor to ministers of the Word and Sacrament, commissioned pastors, and certified Christian educators of the presbytery; to facilitate the relations between the presbytery and its congregations, ministers of the Word and Sacrament, commissioned pastors, and certified Christian educators; and to settle difficulties on behalf of the presbytery where possible and expedient.

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

To facilitate the presbytery's oversight of inquirers and candidates, reception and oversight of minister members, approval of calls for pastoral services and invitations for temporary pastoral services, oversight of congregations without pastors, dissolution of relationships, dismissal of members, and its close relationship with both member congregations and member ministers, it may delegate its authority to designated entities within the presbytery. Such entities shall be composed of elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament in approximately equal numbers, bearing in mind the principles of diversity and participation in F-3.0303. All actions carried out as a result of delegated authority must be reported to the presbytery at its next regular meeting.

G-3.04 THE SYNOD

3.0401 Composition and Responsibilities

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

When a synod meets, it shall be composed of commissioners elected by the presbyteries. Each presbytery shall elect at least one elder and one minister of the Word and Sacrament to serve as commissioners to synod. A synod shall determine a plan for the election of commissioners to the synod, as well as the method to fulfill the principles of participation and representation found in F-3.0303 and G-3.0104; both plans shall be subject to approval by a majority of the presbyteries in the synod. The commissioners from each presbytery shall be divided equally between elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. Each person elected moderator shall be enrolled as a member of the synod until a successor is elected and installed.

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

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

a. *provide that the Word is truly proclaimed and heard as the vision of God's new reality in Christ, and the invitation to all people to participate in that reality.* This responsibility may include developing, in conjunction with its presbyteries, a broad strategy for the mission of the church (The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, Chapter One: The Mission of the Church) within its bounds and in accord with the larger strategy of the General Assembly; assisting its member presbyteries when requested in matters related to the calling, ordaining, and placement of ministers of the Word and

Sacrament; establishing and maintaining, in conjunction with its presbyteries, those ecumenical relationships that will enlarge the life and mission of the church in its region; facilitating joint action in mission with other denominations and agencies in its region; facilitating communication among its presbyteries and between its presbyteries and the General Assembly; providing services for presbyteries within its area that can be performed more effectively from a broad regional base.

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

c. *nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ who live in the strength of God's promise and give themselves in service to God's mission.* This responsibility shall include providing such services of education and nurture as its presbyteries may require; reviewing the work of its presbyteries; warning or bearing witness against error in doctrine or immorality in practice within its bounds; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

3.0402 *Relations with General Assembly*

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

3.0403 *Relations with Presbyteries*

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

- a. developing, in conjunction with its presbyteries, joint plans and objectives for the fulfillment of mission, providing encouragement and guidance to its presbyteries and overseeing their work;
- b. developing and providing, when requested, resources as needed to facilitate the mission of its presbyteries;
- c. organizing new presbyteries, dividing, uniting, or otherwise combining presbyteries or portions of presbyteries previously existing, and, with the concurrence of existing presbyteries, creating non-geographic presbyteries, subject to the approval of the General Assembly, or taking other such actions as may be deemed necessary in order to meet the mission needs of racial ethnic or immigrant congregations. Such presbyteries shall be formed in compliance with the requirements of G-3.0301 and be accountable to the synod within which they were created.

3.0404 *Reduced Function*

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

3.0405 *Meetings and Quorum*

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

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

3.0406 *Minutes and Records*

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

3.0407 Finances

The synod shall prepare and approve a synod general mission budget to support the church's mission within its region.

The synod shall have a full financial review of all books and records relating to finances once a year by a public accountant or public accounting firm. Such auditors should not be related to the treasurer(s). Terminology in this section is meant to provide general guidance and is not intended to require or not require specific audit procedures or practices as understood within the professional accounting community.

G-3.05 THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY*3.0501 Composition and Responsibilities*

The General Assembly is the council of the whole church and it is representative of the unity of the synods, presbyteries, sessions, and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It shall consist of equal numbers of ruling and teaching elders elected by the presbyteries and reflective of the diversity within their bounds (F-3.0303 and G-3.0104), to serve as commissioners according to the following proportions:

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

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

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

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

- a. *provide that the Word is truly proclaimed and heard as the vision of God's new reality in Christ, and the invitation to all people to participate in that reality.* This responsibility shall include establishing a comprehensive mission strategy and priorities for the church; establishing and maintaining ecumenical relationships and correspondence with other ecclesiastical bodies; uniting with or receiving under its jurisdiction other ecclesiastical bodies consistent with the faith and order of this church, subject to the provision of G-5.02 and G-5.03; and commissioning, sending, and support of such mission personnel as will spread the good news of the grace of Jesus Christ to the world and foster the growth and development of God's people.
- b. *provide that the Sacraments are rightly administered as visions of the blessed community and the heavenly banquet, and commitments of solidarity with the marginalized and the hungry.* This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at meetings of the General Assembly; authorizing the participation in the celebration of the Lord's Supper in ecumenical gatherings attended by authorized representatives of the General Assembly; and exercising pastoral care throughout the whole church in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the church may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.

c. *nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ who live in the strength of God's promise and give themselves in service to God's mission.* This responsibility shall include providing those services, resources, and programs performed most effectively at a national level; adopting a budget for the work of the General Assembly and its entities; communicating with the whole church on matters of common concern; warning and bearing witness against errors in doctrine or immorality in the church and in the world; serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline; deciding controversies brought before it and advising and instructing in cases submitted to it, in conformity with this Constitution; authoritatively interpreting the most recent edition of the *Book of Order* in a manner binding on the whole church, in accordance with the provisions of G-6.02 or through a decision of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission in a remedial or disciplinary case, with the most recent interpretation of the *Book of Order* being binding; and establishing and maintaining an office of the Stated Clerk.

3.0502 *Relations with Other Councils*

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

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

3.0503 *Meetings and Quorum*

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

A quorum of the General Assembly shall be one hundred commissioners, with elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament in equal numbers, representing presbyteries of at least one fourth of its synods.

3.0504 *Finances*

The General Assembly shall prepare and approve a budget to support its work.

The General Assembly shall have a full financial review of all books and records relating to finances once a year by a public accountant or public accounting firm. Such auditors should not be related to the treasurer (or treasurers). Terminology in this section is meant to provide general guidance and is not intended to require or not require specific audit procedures or practices as understood within the professional accounting community.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CHURCH AND CIVIL AUTHORITY

G-4.01 CONGREGATIONAL INCORPORATION AND TRUSTEES

4.0101 Incorporation and Power

Where permitted by civil law, each congregation shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained. If incorporation is not permitted, individual trustees shall be elected by the congregation. Where permitted by civil law, each presbytery, synod, and the General Assembly shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained and shall determine a method to constitute the board of trustees.

The corporation so formed, or the individual trustees, shall have the following powers: to receive, hold, encumber, manage, and transfer property, real or personal, for the church, provided that in buying, selling, and mortgaging real property, the trustees shall act only after the approval of the congregation granted in a duly constituted meeting; to accept and execute deeds of title to such property; to hold and defend title to such property; to manage any permanent special funds for the furtherance of the purposes of the church, all subject to the authority of the session and under the provisions of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The powers and duties of the trustees shall not infringe upon the powers and duties of the session or the board of deacons.

4.0102 Members of the Corporation

Only members of the congregation or council shall be eligible to be members of the corporation and to be elected as trustees. The ruling elders on the session of a congregation, who are eligible under the civil law, shall be the trustees of such corporation, unless the corporation shall determine another method for electing its trustees.

G-4.02 CHURCH PROPERTY

4.0201 Property as a Tool for Mission

The property of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), of its councils and entities, and of its congregations, is a tool for the accomplishment of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.

4.0202 Decisions Concerning Property

The provisions of this Constitution prescribing the manner in which decisions are made, reviewed, and corrected within this church are applicable to all matters pertaining to property.

4.0203 Church Property Held in Trust

All property held by or for a congregation, a presbytery, a synod, the General Assembly, or the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), whether legal title is lodged in a corporation, a trustee or trustees, or an unincorporated association, and whether the property is used in programs of a congregation or of a higher council or retained for the production of income, is held in trust nevertheless for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

4.0204 Property Used Contrary to the Constitution

Whenever property of, or held for, a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) ceases to be used by that congregation as a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in accordance with this Constitution, such property shall be held, used, applied, transferred, or sold as provided by the presbytery.

4.0205 Property of a Dissolved or Extinct Congregation

Whenever a congregation is formally dissolved by the presbytery, or has become extinct by reason of the dispersal of its members, the abandonment of its work, or other cause, such property as it may have shall be held, used, and applied for such uses, purposes, and trusts as the presbytery may direct, limit, and appoint, or such property may be sold or disposed of as the presbytery may direct, in conformity with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

4.0206 *Selling, Encumbering, or Leasing Church Property*

a. *Selling or Encumbering Congregational Property*

A congregation shall not sell, mortgage, or otherwise encumber any of its real property and it shall not acquire real property subject to an encumbrance or condition without the written permission of the presbytery transmitted through the session of the congregation.

b. *Leasing Congregational Property*

A congregation shall not lease its real property used for purposes of worship, or lease for more than five years any of its other real property, without the written permission of the presbytery transmitted through the session of the congregation.

4.0207 *Property of Congregation in Schism*

The relationship to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) of a congregation can be severed only by constitutional action on the part of the presbytery (G-3.0303b). If there is a schism within the membership of a congregation and the presbytery is unable to effect a reconciliation or a division into separate congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the presbytery shall determine if one of the factions is entitled to the property because it is identified by the presbytery as the true church within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This determination does not depend upon which faction received the majority vote within the congregation at the time of the schism.

4.0208 *Exceptions*

The provisions of this chapter shall apply to all congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) except that any congregation which was not subject to a similar provision of the constitution of the church of which it was a part, prior to the reunion of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to form the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has been excused from that provision of this chapter if the congregation, within a period of eight years following the establishment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), voted to be exempt from such provision in a regularly called meeting and thereafter notified the presbytery of which it was a constituent congregation of such vote. The congregation voting to be so exempt shall hold title to its property and exercise its privileges of incorporation and property ownership under the provisions of the Constitution to which it was subject immediately prior to the establishment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This paragraph may not be amended (G-6.05).

G-4.03 CONFIDENCE AND PRIVILEGE

4.0301 *Trust and Confidentiality*

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, and commissioned pastors who have been authorized by the presbytery to serve as pastor in a congregation, shall maintain a relationship of trust and confidentiality, and shall hold in confidence all information revealed to them in the course of providing care and all information relating to the exercise of such care. When the person whose confidences are at issue gives express consent to reveal confidential information, then a minister of the Word and Sacrament or commissioned pastor may, but cannot be compelled to, reveal confidential information.

A minister of the Word and Sacrament or commissioned pastor may reveal confidential information when she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of imminent bodily harm to any person.

4.0302 *Mandatory Reporting*

Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian educator employed by this church or its congregations, shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication as defined in G-4.0301, (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

CHAPTER FIVE ECUMENICITY AND UNION

G-5.01 MISSIONAL COMMITMENT

5.0101 Ecumenicity

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels seeks to manifest more visibly the unity of the body of Christ and will be open to opportunities for conversation, cooperation, and action with other ecclesiastical groups. It will seek to initiate, maintain, and strengthen relations with other Reformed and Christian entities.

5.0102 Interfaith Relations

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels seeks new opportunities for conversation and understanding with non-Christian religious entities.

5.0103 Secular Organizations

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all level seeks to initiate and respond to approaches for conversation and common action with secular organizations and agencies where such approaches show promise of serving the mission of the Church in the world.

G-5.02 RELATIONS WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS

5.0201 Full Communion

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in full communion with those churches so recognized by ecumenical agreements approved by the General Assembly. Full communion shall include the mutual recognition of baptism and the orderly exchange of ministers, as defined by ecumenical agreement. Councils of this church are encouraged to engage in opportunities to minister together in mutual affirmation and admonition with churches with which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in full communion.

5.0202 Correspondence

The General Assembly is in correspondence with the highest council or governing body:

- a. of those churches with which it has had historical relations outside the United States, as recognized by the General Assembly,
- b. of those churches that are members of the ecumenical bodies in which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) holds membership,
- c. of those churches with which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has formal ecumenical dialogue approved by the General Assembly.

5.0203 Ecumenical Statements

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may from time to time receive for guidance statements of ecumenical consensus that regularly chosen representatives of this church have helped to formulate. Such statements shall serve to guide congregations and councils of this church as they share in joint action with other ecclesiastical bodies seeking ways to express the unity of the Church and to discover its future form. Such statements shall be approved by the General Assembly as a guide for shared action and submitted to the presbyteries for affirmative or negative vote. When the next General Assembly shall have received written advice that an ecumenical statement has received the affirmative vote of a majority of presbyteries, that statement shall serve as a guide for participation in ecumenical activities. Such statements shall be published as “Received Ecumenical Statements of Guidance”; they shall not be part of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) unless adopted as amendments according to the manner described in Chapter Six, “Amendments.”

G-5.03 FULL ORGANIC UNION

Full organic union of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) with any other ecclesiastical body shall be effected subject to the following approvals:

- a. the approval of the proposed plan of union by the General Assembly and its recommendation to the presbyteries;
- b. the approval in writing of two-thirds of the presbyteries;
- c. the approval and consummation by the next General Assembly, or other General Assembly specified in the proposed plan of union.

G-5.04 UNION PRESBYTERIES

A presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may unite to form a union presbytery with one or more comparable councils or governing bodies, each of which is a member of another Reformed body, with the approval of the synod or comparable council or governing body of which each is a part.

5.0401 Constitutional Authority

The union presbytery shall be subject to the constitution of each denomination represented in the union. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, any mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases where the others are permissive. Where there are conflicting mandatory provisions, the union presbytery shall overture the highest council or governing body of the denominations involved to resolve the conflict either by authoritative interpretation or by constitutional amendment.

5.0402 Plan of Union

A union presbytery shall be created by the adoption of a plan of union by two-thirds vote of each presbytery or governing body that is party to the union. The synod and/or governing body having jurisdiction over each of the uniting bodies shall approve the plan of union.

G-5.05 JOINT CONGREGATIONAL WITNESS

When its strategy for mission requires it, a presbytery may approve the creation of a joint witness between congregations of this denomination and congregations of other Christian churches that recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and savior, accept the authority of Scripture, and observe the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

- a. Such joint witnesses shall be subject to the constitution of each denomination involved. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, the mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive. Wherever there are conflicting mandatory provisions, the congregational council shall petition the next higher councils or governing bodies to resolve the conflict.
- b. Such joint witnesses shall be formed according to a plan approved by a two-thirds majority of the members of each of the congregations at duly called meetings of the congregation, and by the presbytery or comparable council or governing body of each church. No provision of a plan for joint witness shall be construed as modifying or amending the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- c. After consultation with the congregation involved in joint witness and the next higher council or governing body of the other denomination involved, a presbytery may receive a congregation from or transfer a congregation to a denomination with which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in full communion or correspondence when it determines that the strategy for mission of that congregation is better served by such a transfer (G-3.0303b).

CHAPTER SIX

INTERPRETING AND AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION

G-6.01 REFORM

In the faith that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seeks to be “the church reformed, always to be reformed, according to the Word of God and in the power of the Spirit” (F-2.02), this Constitution may be amended in the manner specified in these provisions.

G-6.02 INTERPRETING THE CONSTITUTION: THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION

The General Assembly may provide authoritative interpretation of the *Book of Order*, which shall be binding on the councils of the church when rendered in the manner described in this section or through a decision of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission in a remedial or disciplinary case.

The General Assembly shall establish an Advisory Committee on the Constitution composed of nine persons, ministers of the Word and Sacrament and ruling elders in numbers as nearly equal as possible. The Stated Clerk of the General Assembly shall be a member *ex officio* without vote. No person who has served on the Advisory Committee on the Constitution for a full term of six years shall be eligible for reelection until four years have elapsed after the expired six-year term. The General Assembly shall provide by its own rule for the qualifications of members of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution.

All questions requiring an interpretation by the General Assembly of the *Book of Order* arising from councils of the church shall be communicated in writing to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly no later than 120 days prior to the convening of the next session of the General Assembly. The Stated Clerk shall refer all such questions of interpretation to the Advisory Committee on the Constitution, except those pertaining to matters pending before a judicial commission.

G-6.03 AMENDING *THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS*

Amendments to the confessional documents of this church may be made only if all the following steps are completed:

- a. The proposal to amend *The Book of Confessions* is approved by the General Assembly for study in the church.
- b. The General Assembly appoints a committee of ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament, numbering not fewer than fifteen, of whom not more than two shall be from any one synod, to consider the proposal. This committee shall consult with the committee or council from which the proposal originated. It shall report its findings to the next General Assembly.
- c. The next ensuing General Assembly considers the report of the study committee and approves the proposed amendment and recommends it to the presbyteries for vote.
- d. The proposed amendment receives the approval in writing of two thirds of the presbyteries.
- e. The proposed amendment is approved and enacted by the next ensuing General Assembly following the amendment's receipt of the necessary two-thirds approval of the presbyteries.

G-6.04 AMENDING THE *BOOK OF ORDER*

Amendments to the *Book of Order* shall be made only if all the following steps are completed:

- a. All proposals requesting amendment of the *Book of Order* are communicated in writing to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly no later than 120 days prior to the convening of the next session of the General Assembly.

b. The Stated Clerk shall refer all such proposals to amend the *Book of Order* to the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (G-6.02), which shall examine the proposed amendment for clarity and consistency of language and for compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The advisory committee shall report its findings to the General Assembly along with its recommendations, which may include an amended version of any proposed constitutional changes as well as advice to accept or decline the proposals referred to the committee. The General Assembly shall not consider any amendment until it has considered the report and any recommendations from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution.

c. The same General Assembly approves the proposal to amend and transmits the proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their vote.

d. The proposed amendment receives the approval in writing of a majority of the presbyteries. Presbyteries shall transmit their votes to the Stated Clerk no later than one year following the adjournment of the assembly transmitting the proposed amendments.

e. The Stated Clerk receives written advice that a proposed amendment to the *Book of Order* has received the affirmative votes of a majority of all the presbyteries. The proposed amendment so approved shall become effective one year following the adjournment of the assembly transmitting the proposed amendment.

G-6.05 EXCEPTIONS

The provisions of G-4.0208 of this Constitution shall not be amended.

G-6.06 AMENDMENTS TO SPECIAL PROVISIONS

The processes for amending the confessional documents and for effecting full organic union (G-5.03) can be amended only by the same method that they prescribe.