



THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

RESPONSIBILITIES

OF ELDERS & THE SESSION

CHURCH OFFICER TRAINING

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES

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*.

The session has responsibility and power to:

- provide that *the Word* of God may be truly preached and heard.
- provide that *the Sacraments* may be rightly administered and received.
- nurture *the covenant community* of disciples of Christ.

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING THE WORD

This responsibility shall include:

- *providing a place...* for worship, education, and spiritual nurture;
- *providing for regular preaching...*;
- *planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world...*
- *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.

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING THE SACRAMENTS

This responsibility shall include:

- *authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate...; 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.*

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING THE COMMUNITY OF DISCIPLES

This responsibility shall include:

- *receiving and dismissing **members**;*
- *reviewing the roll of **active members** at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership;*
- *providing programs of **nurture, education, and fellowship**;*
- *training, examining, ordaining, and installing **those elected** by the congregation as ruling elders and deacons;*
- *encouraging **the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship** of personal and financial resources;*

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING THE COMMUNITY OF DISCIPLES

This responsibility shall include:

- *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 Church Discipline.*

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING OTHER CHURCH COUNCILS

It shall participate in other church councils and shall:

- *elect **ruling elders** as **commissioners** to presbytery;*
- *nominate **ruling elders** to presbytery for election as **commissioners** and to serve on committees...*
- *see that the guidance and communication of presbytery, synod, and General Assembly are considered, and that any binding actions **are observed and carried out**;*
- *welcome **representatives of the presbytery** on the occasions of their visits;*
- *propose **measures of common concern** to the mission of the church; and*
- *send to **presbytery** and **General Assembly** requested statistics and other information...*

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING CHURCH PROPERTY

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. All property held by or for a congregation is held in trust for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

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.

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING WORSHIP

Ruling elders are called to **nurture** the common life of the people of God through their gifts of discernment and governance. They should also **cultivate** an ability to teach the Word when called upon to do so.

When appropriately prepared and commissioned by the presbytery, ruling elders may proclaim the Word and administer the Sacraments in a particular congregation.

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING WORSHIP

When serving together on the session, **ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament:**

- make provision for the **regular preaching of the Word** and **celebration of the Sacraments, corporate prayer,** and **the offering of praise to God in song;**
- oversee and approve all **public worship** in the congregation;
- determine **occasions, days, times, and places** for worship; and
- have responsibility for the arrangement of **worship space,** the use of **special appointments,** and the ministries of **music, drama, dance, and visual arts.**

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING WORSHIP

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament are responsible for:

- the selection of **Scriptures** to be read,
- the preparation of **the sermon**,
- the **prayers to be offered**,
- the **selection of music** to be sung, **printed worship aids** or **media presentations** for a given service, and
- the use of **drama, dance, and other art forms** in a particular service of worship.

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING WORSHIP

- The **order of worship** is the responsibility of the minister of the Word and Sacrament with the concurrence of the session.
- The selection of **hymnals, service books, Bibles, and other more permanent worship resources** is the responsibility of the session with the concurrence of the minister of the Word and Sacrament, and in consultation with church musicians and educators.
- Where there is a music leader or choir director, the minister will confer with that person on **anthems** and **other musical offerings**; the session will see that these conferences take place appropriately and on a regular basis.

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING WORSHIP

The session is responsible for *educating the congregation about the church's worship*, in order to facilitate their full and active participation.

It is appropriate that the session provide for the regular study of the **Directory for Worship**, particularly in the training of ruling elders and deacons.

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING BAPTISM

Baptism shall be authorized by **the session** and administered by **a minister of the Word and Sacrament**.

The **session's responsibilities for Baptism** include: *encouraging parents* (or those exercising parental responsibility) to present their children for Baptism without undue haste or undue delay; encouraging new believers to be baptized; examining candidates for Baptism, or their parents, and instructing them in the significance of the Sacrament; enrolling those who are baptized as members of the congregation; and providing for their ongoing nurture and formation for baptismal life in the world.

THE SESSION

RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper shall be authorized by **the session** and administered by **a minister of the Word and Sacrament**.

Ordinarily ruling elders, deacons, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament serve the bread and cup; the session may authorize other church members to do so.

RULING ELDERS

Resigning from Session

G-2.0405 Dissolution of Relationship

A ruling elder may resign from the session, with the session's consent.

On ceasing to be an active member of a congregation, a ruling elder ceases to be a member of its session.

When a ruling elder, because of change of residence or disability, is unable for a period of one year to perform the duties of the ministry to which he or she was installed, the active relationship shall be dissolved by the session unless there is good reason not to do so, which shall be recorded.

RULING ELDERS

Released from Ministry

G-2.0406 Release from Ministry

If a ruling elder or deacon who is in good standing, against whom no inquiry has been initiated, and against whom no charges have been filed, shall make application to the session to be released from the exercise of the ordered ministry, the session of the congregation in which he or she holds membership, upon granting the release, shall delete that person's name from the appropriate register of ruling elders or deacons of the congregation. No judgment of failure on the part of the ruling elder or deacon is implied in this action.

RULING ELDERS

Renunciation of Jurisdiction

G-2.0407 Renunciation of Jurisdiction

When a ruling 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.**

Renunciation of jurisdiction shall remove the ruling elder or deacon from membership and ordered ministry and shall terminate the exercise of the ministry.