



REVIEWING THE ROLLS

NURTURING THE COVENANT COMMUNITY

CHURCH OFFICER TRAINING

Welcome to Church Officer Training, I'm Brent Anderson.

What we are talking about today could sound administrative on the surface, but it is really much deeper than that.

We are talking about the annual review of the active member roll of the church.



ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE ACTIVE MEMBER ROLL

- Why it matters
- How the process works
- Roles of Deacons, Community Life, and Session



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And before we talk about process,

I want us to begin with the reason behind it.

I want us to begin with the theology, the philosophy, and the pastoral heart of this work.



WHY THIS MATTERS

- Not just paperwork
- A spiritual responsibility
- Part of nurturing the covenant community
- A matter of truthful care



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Because if we do not begin there, this will feel like paperwork. And it is not paperwork. It is part of the church's spiritual responsibility. It is part of nurturing the covenant community. And it is a matter of truthful care.



BOOK OF ORDER RESPONSIBILITY



Session is to:

- review the roll of active members at least annually
- counsel with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership

One of the responsibilities the Book of Order gives to the Session is to review the roll of active members at least annually and to counsel with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership. This is not simply an administrative task. And this is important: It is part of how we nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.

The Book of Order also says that the clerk of session is to keep the rolls of membership and attendance and maintain the required registers. So yes, there is an administrative side to this. The church keeps records. The church maintains rolls. The church knows who belongs to this covenant community in an official and accountable way.

And the Session is to do two things in particular: review the roll of active members at least annually, and counsel with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership.



MEMBERSHIP IS MORE THAN A NAME ON A LIST



Membership is:

- relationship to Jesus Christ
- relationship to the body of Christ
- relationship to a particular congregation
- lived out in worship, service, prayer, fellowship, and care

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But the reason for that is not bureaucratic. The reason is theological and pastoral.

In the Presbyterian understanding of the church, membership is not just a name on a list so that we can collect per capita.

Membership is a covenant relationship. Let me repeat that again. Membership is a covenant relationship – with promises made by both parties.

It is a relationship to Jesus Christ, to his body the church, and to a particular congregation in which that belonging is lived out in worship, fellowship, service, generosity, prayer, and mutual care.



WHAT ARE WE REALLY ASKING?

- Who is connected?
- Who has become disconnected?
- Who needs encouragement?
- Who needs pastoral care?
- Who has joined another church?
- How should we respond faithfully?



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So when we review the active member roll, we are not simply asking, “Who should still be on the list?” We are asking, “Who is connected? Who has become disconnected? Who needs encouragement? Who needs pastoral care? Who has joined another church?”

And then we are asking, “How should we respond faithfully?”

That matters because the church is not served well by pretending that the roll is healthier than it is.

And the church is not served well by allowing people to quietly disappear without anyone noticing or reaching out.

A faithful membership roll should reflect real relationship, real accountability, and real care.

THE GOAL OF THE PROCESS

NOT

- cutting people off
- removing names
- a cold administrative review

BUT

- faithful care
- truthful records
- loving accountability
- faithful stewardship of our shared life together

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And membership carries mutual responsibility. The church has responsibilities toward its members (to care for them, to nurture them), and members have responsibilities toward the church (to be active and involved and to review regularly their connection to the church). This annual review is one of the ways the church takes that mutual responsibility seriously.

So tonight, what we are putting in place is not merely a mechanism for removing members from the rolls. It is not about removing names for its own sake. It is about faithful care, truthful records, loving accountability, and faithful stewardship of our shared life together.



WHY DEACONS MATTER

Deacons are essential because:

- they already have members assigned to their care
- they are the first line of relational contact
- good communication leads to good care
- good care leads to faithful roll review

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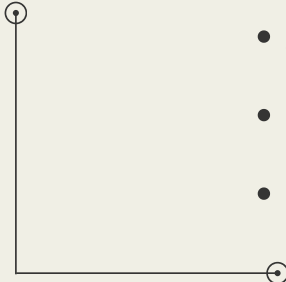
Because our deacons already have members assigned to their care, they are essential to this work. They are the first line of relational contact.

Good communication leads to good care.
And good care leads to faithful roll review.

It is really important that each deacon be in communication with the people in their assigned group. The better we know the people entrusted to us, the better we can care for them, and the more faithfully we can maintain the membership rolls of the church.



THE PROCESS AT A GLANCE

- Deacons contact members in their care
 - Deacons categorize and report
 - A Session Committee reviews and verifies
 - Clerk receives verified recommendations
 - Session takes action
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So the process we are putting in place is simple.

Deacons contact members in their care.

Deacons categorize and report.

A Session committee reviews and verifies.

The clerk receives verified recommendations.

And the Session takes action.

That is the process at a glance.

That is the why. Now let me briefly walk through the roles.



THE ROLE OF THE DEACONS

Deacons are to:

- make contact
- listen
- care
- assess
- report faithfully



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First, the role of the deacons.

The deacons are the first line of contact in this process. Because they already have members assigned to their care, they are in the best position to reach out and gather the information we need.

And I want to say again: this process only works if the deacons are actually in communication with the people assigned to them.

It is really important that each deacon be in communication with everyone in their assigned group. If that communication is not happening, then we do not really know the present status of the people entrusted to our care. And if we do not know that, we cannot care well and we cannot review the roll faithfully.

So the role of the deacon is to make contact, to listen, to care, to assess, and to report faithfully.



MEMBERSHIP REVIEW CATEGORIES

- **Active** — meaningfully connected
- **Borderline Active** — connected, but diminished or uncertain
- **Stopped Coming** — no meaningful participation for a significant period
- **Joined Elsewhere** — now attached to another congregation

We are using four basic categories: active, borderline active, stopped coming, and joined elsewhere.

Active means the person is still meaningfully connected to the life of the church.

Borderline active means the person is connected, but that connection is diminished or uncertain. Often these people need encouragement and care more than immediate action.

Stopped coming means the person has had no meaningful participation for a significant period and appears disconnected from the life of the congregation.

Joined elsewhere means the person is now attached to another congregation, has joined another church, or has made clear that they no longer intend to maintain active membership here.



WHAT THE DEACONS ARE TO SUBMIT



Each report should include:

- member name
- category/recommendation
- reason for recommendation
- contact made or attempted
- any needed pastoral concerns



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The deacon's task is to place the person, as best they can, in one of those categories and then record the reason for that designation.

That is why we need a form. Each report should include the member's name, the category or designation, the reason for the designation, the contact that was made or attempted, and any needed pastoral concerns.

The form helps us be consistent, fair, and clear.



WHAT DEACONS DO NOT DO

Deacons do NOT:

- remove people from the roll
- make final decisions on membership status
- conduct discipline
- shame people



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And just as important, let me say clearly what deacons do not do.

Deacons do not remove people from the roll.

Deacons do not make final decisions on membership status.

Deacons do not conduct discipline.

And deacons do not shame people.

Their task is relational, pastoral, and factual – contact, listen, care, assess, and report faithfully.



THE ROLE OF THE SESSION COMMITTEE



The Committee:

- receives the deacon reports
- reviews the information
- verifies recommendations
- makes sure a reasonable effort has been made
- prepares final recommendations

Second, the role of the Session committee.

A session committee serves as the body of review and verification. Once the deacons have done their work and submitted their reports, the committee receives the deacon reports, reviews the information, verifies recommendations, makes sure a reasonable effort has been made, and prepares final recommendations.

This step matters because the church should not move directly from one report to Session action without review. There needs to be a place where the information is examined and verified.



REASONABLE EFFORT MATTERS



Before recommending removal or inactive status:

- make real contact efforts
- seek to understand the situation
- verify the information
- act fairly and pastorally

And that is why reasonable effort matters.

Before recommending removal or inactive status, the church should make real contact efforts, seek to understand the situation, verify the information, and act fairly and pastorally.

That means the church should be able to say honestly that we made a real effort to reach this person, to understand their situation, and to act fairly. The session committee may need to make another call, send a follow-up email, or ask for pastoral contact. The point is not delay. The point is care, fairness, and verification.

The committee's task is not to be harsh. The committee's task is to be careful.



ROLE OF THE SESSION

Others assist. Session Acts.



Session:

- receives final recommendations
- asks needed questions
- takes formal action
- oversees the integrity of the roll

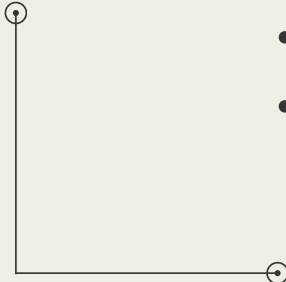
Third, the role of the Session.

The Session is the body that holds this responsibility under the Book of Order. Others assist. Session acts.

The Session receives final recommendations, asks needed questions, takes formal action, and oversees the integrity of the roll.



WHO DOES WHAT

- **Deacons** — contact and report
 - **Session Committee** — review and verify
 - **Clerk** — prepare and update records
 - **Session** — take formal action
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And that means, very simply:

The deacons contact and report.

The Session committee reviews and verifies.

The clerk prepares and updates records.

And the Session takes formal action.

Others assist, but the responsibility remains with the Session.

The Session is exercising spiritual oversight. The Session is tending to the covenant life of the congregation. The Session is encouraging the church to be the church – a community of faith, hope, love, and witness and is encouraging members of the congregation to live into their commitments. In all of this, the Session is helping make sure that the church's rolls reflect truth and that the church's care reflects compassion.

TONE MATTERS

This process should be:

- pastoral
- respectful
- hopeful
- honest
- orderly
- compassionate

Let me close with a word about tone, because tone matters a great deal in this kind of work.

This process should be pastoral, respectful, hopeful, honest, orderly, and compassionate.

When deacons make contact, the spirit should not be,
“Are you still one of us or not?”

The spirit should be,

“We are reaching out because you matter, because the church cares about you, and because we want to understand your present relationship to this congregation.”

When the committee follows up, the spirit should not be suspicion.
It should be diligence joined to care.

When Session acts, the spirit should not be detachment.
It should be sober responsibility exercised with compassion.

This process should reflect the heart of the church.
It should be honest without being harsh.
It should be orderly without being cold.
It should be pastoral without being vague.
And it should be accountable without losing compassion.



WHAT WE ARE ASKING

- **Deacons:** be in communication with all assigned members
- **Session Committee:** review and verify carefully
- **Session:** act with integrity and care

So, what we are talking about today is simple but very important.

We are asking the deacons to be in communication with all assigned members.

We are asking the Session committee to review and verify carefully.

And we are asking the Session to act with integrity and care.



OUR HOPE

This process will:

- strengthen our care
- deepen our knowledge of the congregation
- help us notice those who are slipping away
- help us reconnect where possible
- help the roll reflect the living covenant community



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If we do that well, then this annual review will not simply produce a cleaner roll.

It will strengthen our care.

It will deepen our knowledge of the congregation.

It will help us notice those who are slipping away.

It will help us reconnect where possible.

And it will help the roll reflect the living covenant community.

Thank you.

A decorative graphic on a light beige background. It features four L-shaped corner lines, each ending in a small circle. The top-left and bottom-right corners have lines extending from the top and right edges respectively. The top-right and bottom-left corners have lines extending from the top and left edges respectively. In each of the four corners, there is a triangular pattern of small black dots, with the top-right and bottom-left patterns being larger and more dense than the top-left and bottom-right ones.

THANK YOU