

The Clerk of Session

By TE Andy Jumper who was one of the Five EPC Founding Fathers.

TE Jumper was as a Pastor in the PCUS (Southern Presbyterian Church) at the time of this document writing in the early 1960s and The Clerk of Session was a chapter from the PCUS Elder Training Manual “The Noble Task”.

Terms in some sections were edited to align with current EPC Terminology such as membership classifications as an example.

THE CLERK OF THE SESSION

KEY PERSON IN A KEY JOB

As the Clerk of your Session, you hold one of the most important jobs in your church. How well you do your job and how faithfully you perform your various duties will, to a large extent, determine how adequately the program of your church is carried on. Yours is an exacting job. There are many records that must be kept, most of them in more or less permanent form. There are letters to write, minutes to capture accurately on paper, programs to be kept up with, and a host of other duties and tasks to be performed. Since your duties are so varied, let us see if we can break them down into various phases to give you a clear picture of the total responsibility that falls upon you as Clerk.

Records To Be Kept

Aside from the minutes of the Session meetings, there are various records that should be taken care of. These records logically fall under your duties as Clerk.

The membership categories listed below are from the EPC Book of Government 8-3

A. Baptized Roll

1. This roll shall include the names of those infants and children baptized in the local church, and the names of those baptized children of confirmed members received from other churches.

2. Those on the baptized roll are members of the covenant by right of birth and adoption. As such, they are entitled to pastoral oversight, instruction, nurture, and should be encouraged to embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior. Their rights and privileges under the Covenant of Grace should be frequently and fully explained, and they should be warned of the sin and danger of neglecting their covenant obligations. All those baptized are entitled to this pastoral care even though they are adults and have not made a profession of faith in Christ.

3. The Session shall remove a person from the baptized roll upon enrolling that person as a confirmed member (G.8-3A.3) or upon receiving credible information that the person has become a member of another church.

B. Active Roll

1. This role includes confirmed members, that is, those who have been baptized, made a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, have had their membership confirmed by the Session, and are entitled to participate in the governing of the Church by voting in meetings of the congregation. Only this Active Roll shall be reported to Presbytery for membership purposes.

2. Persons may be received into active membership in the following manner:

a. By profession of faith

Ordinarily the person(s) being received on profession of faith shall make that profession in a public service of worship in the presence of the congregation. If not previously baptized, each person shall be baptized in accordance with the Book of Worship as it deals with adult baptism.⁴¹ If already on the baptized roll,⁴² the person shall be transferred to the active roll.

b. By reaffirmation of faith

Persons who have previously made a profession of faith who apply for active membership may be unable to secure a certificate of membership or may wish to reaffirm their faith.

c. By transfer of membership

Persons may be received by a transfer of membership from another Evangelical Presbyterian Church or from some other body recognized as a part of the true Church.

The Session may not deny membership for any reason not related to profession of faith and obedience.

3. Those being received by profession or reaffirmation of faith shall answer the following or like questions before the Session:

- a.** Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God and without hope for your salvation except in His sovereign mercy?
- b.** Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of sinners, and do you receive and depend upon Him alone for your salvation as He is offered in the gospel?
- c.** Do you now promise and resolve, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
- d.** Do you promise to serve Christ in His Church by supporting and participating with this congregation in its service of God and its ministry to others to the best of your ability?
- e.** Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and to the spiritual oversight of this Church Session, and do you promise to promote the unity, purity and peace of the Church?

4. Persons coming from bodies other than the Evangelical Presbyterian Church shall be asked the following questions:

- a.** Do you promise to serve Christ in His Church by supporting and participating in this congregation in its service of God and its ministry to others to the best of your ability?

b. Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and to the spiritual oversight of this Church Session, and promise to further the unity, purity and peace of the Church?

5. The Session shall announce to the congregation the names of those received into active membership and commend them to the congregation for their Christian confidence and affection.

C. Affiliate Roll

1. This role shall include those believers temporarily residing in locations other than their permanent homes. Such believers may be received as affiliate members of a local church without ceasing to be members of their home churches.

2. An affiliate member shall have all the rights and privileges of the Church, with the exception of voting in a congregational or corporate meeting, and holding an elected office in the Church. The procedure for receiving affiliate members shall be the same as that for receiving members by transfer of membership. An affiliate membership is effective for one year and is renewable.

D. Inactive Roll

1. This role shall include those who have failed to actively participate in the life of the local church for a period of one year (or six months in the case of changing residence) and have been moved by the Session to this roll.

2. To place a person on the inactive role not only reflects on the commitments made to Christ by that individual, but it may also reflect on the failure of the Session to be diligent in its pastoral duties. For that reason, certain requirements are placed on the Session before it may place a person on inactive status.

- a.** The Session must earnestly seek to discover the causes of the failure to participate, and seek to encourage the person to resume active involvement in the life of the congregation.
- b.** When a member changes residence so that it is no longer possible or practical to participate actively in the life of the local church, the Session shall encourage that person to establish a relationship to a church where participation is possible. After six months, the Session may then move that person's name to the inactive roll. In any event, the Session should notify a church in the area of the member's residence and suggest that pastoral oversight be given.
- c.** A person placed on the inactive roll may be restored to the active roll upon request to the Session and when the individual has resumed active participation in the life of the church. The Session shall satisfy itself of the intention of renewed commitment.
- d.** If a person remains on the inactive roll for a period of at least one year and has not resumed active participation in the life of the church despite the diligent efforts of the Session in its pastoral duties, that individual may be removed from membership of the local church upon written notification from the Session.
- e.** If a member of the Session or Deacon Board is placed on the inactive roll that active officer relationship is automatically dissolved. This fact shall be reported to the congregation by the Session.
- f.** Members on the inactive roll remain under the government and discipline of the Session.

1. Record of Significant Events

In addition to these three rolls which record the relationship of individuals to the local church, other significant events in the lives of members should be carefully recorded.

Therefore, the Book of Church Order requires that the Session keep an accurate record of dismissals, baptisms, deaths, and marriages. As Clerk you will record any such events that have taken place since the last meeting and will ensure that the records affected are properly corrected.

2. Other Items to Be Recorded

While you are not responsible for the reading of the minutes of the Board of Deacons each six months (though it may be assigned to you by your Session), it is your duty to see that the report of such examination is recorded in the minutes of the Session semiannually. Also, you will want to be sure that the representatives to the courts of the Church report their diligence at meetings and that their report is recorded in the minutes. In addition, you will want to remind the Session of pending events, such as the election of officers if you have the limited term of service, or other actions that may be required at certain times by your Standard of Procedure.

3. A “Record Reminder”

A diligent Clerk might desire to have available at each stated meeting a “record reminder” to check over with the Session. It would simply be a list of things to remember. It might look like this:

1. Active Roll

- (1) Additions—by reception and by restoration from inactive roll.
- (2) Removals—by death, dismissal to another church, transfer to inactive roll, or other action.

2. Inactive Roll

- (1) Additions—by transfer from the active roll.
- (2) Removals—by transfer, reactivation, death, or other means.

3. Baptized Roll

- (1) Additions—by baptism.
- (2) Removals—by transfer to active roll upon profession of faith or by transfer to another church.

4. Record of Significant Events

- (1) Marriages.
- (2) Representatives to Church courts—election of or report from.
- (3) Deaths or baptisms not otherwise reported.

5. Other Items

Do not leave these important responsibilities and items to chance. In the busy job of “clerking” at the meeting, you may forget some of these items if you do not have some way of reminding yourself, particularly if they do not recur at each meeting, as in the case of the report to representatives to courts.

Reports to Be Made

Not only are you responsible for the records of the Session; you are also responsible for the various reports it makes from time to time. One of these concerns extracts from the minutes of the Session. You are required to furnish such extracts when requested by your own Session or by a higher court. Your minutes must be submitted to the Presbytery at least once a year for review and control. Another report that your Session must make each year is the Annual Statistical Report, along with the Educational Report Form. These reports go to the Stated Clerk of your Presbytery. You will need help and information from others in making this report, particularly from the church treasurer and the Christian Education Committee; but the primary responsibility for the completion and return of this important annual report falls upon your shoulders.

Other Duties of the Clerk

In addition to these responsibilities, there are other duties that are yours by the nature of your office. It is through you that proposals made to Presbytery will pass. It is your job to issue certificates of transfer or dismissal to other churches. You must see to it that the lawful injunctions of the higher courts are brought to the attention of the Session, particularly as reports and instructions from these higher courts come down to you. In examining your records annually, the Presbytery will ascertain whether the lawful injunctions of higher courts have been obeyed, so careful notation of this should be made. As you can see, there is much detail involved in your duties as Clerk of the Session.

But all of them are important duties that should be carefully and diligently fulfilled to the very best of your ability. You will want to exercise care that you do your job well so that your Session will not be open to criticism from higher courts.

Recording the Minutes

One of the most important parts of your job as Clerk is to record accurately the transactions of your Session. Let us examine some of the implications of this duty. Of course you must come prepared to write! Have an adequate supply of good paper and writing implements. As you prepare to record the minutes, there are several preliminaries to be observed. Let us look at some of them.

1. Statement of Time, Place, and Date of Meeting

Each set of minutes should begin by stating when the Session met, where it met, and what time it convened. Undated minutes are of little help in attempting to determine the value a particular action might have or in furnishing extracts that will serve as “evidence to any ecclesiastical court and to every part of the Church.” The Presbytery will be examining your records each year, and you will want them to be in proper form and order. For example, your minutes might begin:

The Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Anywhere, U.S.A., met for its stated meeting of the month on July 10, 19--, at the church. The meeting was called to order by the Moderator, Mr. Jones, and opened with prayer by Mr. Smith.

Incidentally, be careful to note that the meeting was opened and closed with prayer.

2. Recording of Attendance

It is important that the Clerk keep an accurate record of individual attendance for each meeting of the Session, both stated meetings and called meetings. It might be wise to have a standard Word document form which would include the information in Section 1 above, leaving blanks at the appropriate places. Then the name of each member of the Session could be listed, with a line in front of each name for an “X” to indicate presence and an “A” (or some other sign) to represent absence. This will save you considerable time as the meeting gets under way; at the same time it prevents you from forgetting anyone. When the Moderator calls for the recording of absences, you simply glance at your list and read off the names. Be sure to record excuses of those absent if they have been presented to you. If action against an officer becomes necessary for failure to fulfill his covenant obligation, your records will serve as a sound basis for such action.

3. Recording of Committee Reports

If a committee makes its reports to the Session properly, the report will be in written form, including the recommendations of the committee. It will be helpful to you and save considerable time at the meeting if the person making a motion to be voted on by the Session presents it to the Clerk in written form. With a little persistence and insistence, this can be accomplished. In this way you are assured of getting the motion as the maker intended it to be.

Also, when committee reports are adopted by the Session for inclusion in the minutes, a great deal of time is saved if the Clerk requests committee chairmen to prepare these reports in written form in advance. There is nothing more time-consuming or deadening to a meeting than to halt all business while the Clerk laboriously records a report or a motion. Even when the report as a whole is not adopted for inclusion in the minutes, a good Clerk will keep a copy of such reports in a separate file for each committee, for easy reference. Most Sessions make the mistake of keeping inadequate records. Consequently, the plans, ideas, and actions of a few months past are forever lost.

Sometimes a committee that has labored long and hard over a report has it come to naught simply because the fruits of their labor have been misplaced or lost through carelessness. A good Clerk with a wise use of effort and time can keep an accurate and up-to-date set of minutes and files that will prove of invaluable aid to the Session. This is your task.

4. Letters and Communications

Most letters and communications to the Session will come to you. It is your task to see that they are brought to the attention of the Moderator and that the Session takes the proper action. You should have a special folder or file in which correspondence to the Session is placed as it is received. Then, at the very first meeting of the Session, your folder is at hand, and you are not forced to rely upon what may be a faulty memory. When presenting correspondence to the Session, you might say something like this:

Mr. Moderator, we have a letter from the F.C.A. requesting the use of our church for Reformation Day services. I move that the request be answered in the affirmative and the details be referred to the Committee on Worship.

Or you might refer to a letter in this way:

Mr. Moderator, we have a request from a local charitable organization asking that they be included in our benevolence program.

I move that this matter be referred to the Session's Committee on Commitment and that they, in conjunction with the Budget Committee of the Board of Deacons, present a recommendation to the Session; further, that the Clerk be instructed to advise this group that their request is under consideration.

In this manner requests, information, etc., coming to the Session are channeled by you to the proper committees for action; and the Session does not waste valuable time discussing issues which, at the moment, might be debatable.

5. Unfinished Business or Old Business

It is your responsibility to see that unfinished business, tabled motions, etc., are not left hanging, but are properly brought to the attention of the Session. At each meeting where unfinished business, etc., is left, you would do well to make a note to yourself and perhaps include it in your folder of correspondence; otherwise, a month later when the Session meets again, you may have completely forgotten the matter.

6. Minutes: A careful record of the proceedings of the court shall be kept by the Clerk. When the Church Session has approved the minutes, they shall be signed by the Clerk and the Moderator. The Clerk shall submit the minutes to the Presbytery annually. The Clerk shall be careful to record deaths, births, adoptions, baptisms, marriages, reception of members, transfers to the inactive roll. Dismissals, and other records required regarding members.

7. Keeping Minutes as Permanent Records

The records that you have been elected to keep are to be permanent records of the Church Session. Much of the history and life of the church are going to be recorded therein. Therefore, you will want to do several things about your minutes. First, the records should be kept neatly. It is best to have the minutes typed. If this is not possible, be sure they are written in a clear, legible hand. As your work becomes a matter of record and history, you want the minutes to be something that will be a credit to you and the Elders with whom you serve. Second, keep them in some permanent form. A loose-leaf binder is not satisfactory because pages can get torn out too easily. There are numerous permanent binders available at your Presbyterian Book Store for nominal cost. Pick the one that best suits your needs. Third, keep the minutes in a safe place. They should not be left where anyone can get to them or read them.

They are *not* public property; and matters may be recorded therein that should not be common to all. Also, you will want to put them in a place where insects, pests, dampness, etc., cannot damage them. If possible, records should be placed where fire cannot destroy them.

“Edit Note” Any EPC member in good standing has access to Session minutes that person is a member of.

Addendum 2026, Executive Minutes procedure not included in this original document:

1. Motion and time are needed to go into Executive session and the reason for going into Executive session (Example: personnel)
2. Motion and time are needed to leave Executive session
3. Executive minutes are to be locked away in secure storage device
4. Any action from the results of an executive session must be acted on in the form of a motion in the session meeting after exiting the executive session. (as per TE Howard Shockley many years ago)
5. Access to these minutes is limited to the Pastor/Moderator, Clerk of Session, & Presbytery including Ministerial Committee. Any additional access would require an act of session listing each person having access only to view.

The Clerk as Parliamentarian

Another important duty of the Clerk at any meeting of the Session is to assist the Moderator by acting as parliamentarian. This means that you need to familiarize yourself thoroughly with the standard orders of procedure. So much so, in fact, that without having to stop and look it up, you will be able to answer almost any question that may arise. The demands on you at this point will depend on the size of the Session.

The smaller the Session, the less strict it will be; and the larger it gets, the more exact the parliamentary process should be. In any event, you should be prepared if and when the need arises. You will find some help in a section of the back of the Book of Church Order entitled “Rules of Parliamentary Order.” Although these rules are for the General Assembly meetings and are not binding on the Session, you are free to adopt them if you desire. You should study some such book as *Robert’s Rules of Order Revised*. **One point to remember is that the Moderator is the one who must rule on a point of procedure. You are simply to advise and counsel him upon his request. However, it may be necessary on occasion to remind him of a point of order.**

For example, if someone starts to make a motion when another motion is already before the Session, you might say, “Mr. Moderator, a point of order.

There is already a motion before the house.” On this matter of parliamentary procedure, you can render a real and valuable service to the Moderator and the Session. It will depend on how well you are prepared. Do not take this part of your responsibility lightly, as you may be able to save the Session much valuable time and keep it out of verbal and procedural log-jams.

Notifying Members of Meetings

Sometimes the record of attendance of Elders at meetings of the Session is somewhat less than satisfactory. At this point the Clerk can render a valuable service to all by being diligent to remind the members of meetings, both stated and called. Sometimes it is said, “They know that the meeting is on that day every month and should not need to be reminded.” Ideally, that is perfectly true, and for many people it is sufficient. Practically, it doesn’t always work out that way! Even the most devoted of Elders is subject to lapses of memory and occasionally needs to be reminded of meetings.

The Clerk has several methods at his disposal of notifying members of meetings. If the Session is sufficiently small, he may personally call each member. Again, he can notify the committee chairmen; and they in turn can notify the members of their committees. A letter or postcard will often do the job. Some Clerks mimeograph a supply of postal cards in addressed sets with blanks for the date, time, and place. It is then a simple matter each time to fill in the blanks quickly and drop the cards in the mail. Also, it would be wise to include an announcement in the Sunday bulletin prior to the meeting. It not only serves as a further reminder to the Elders, but also lets the congregation know that the Session is diligently pursuing its business. Don’t leave this announcement to the church office staff to remember. It’s *your* job! Write out what you want to put in and leave it with the person who prepares the bulletin.

Correspondence of the Session

Usually, it will be your job to conduct the correspondence of the Session. Any time you write a letter from the Session, you are doing public relations work for the church. Those to whom you write are going to judge your church and your Session by that letter.

Since good public relations never hurt anyone, you will want your letters to reflect neatness, good taste, courtesy, and correctness in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Remember that often it is not so much what you say as how you say it. Also, you should take care of necessary correspondence as soon as possible.

It is disconcerting to direct a question or inquiry to some group and be forever in getting a reply. The ordinary process of getting the letter answered by the Session takes enough time without the Clerk's compounding the felony!

A further duty that every competent Clerk will want to take upon himself is to notify persons or committees of actions or policies that may affect them. Even when a committee chairman has been at the meeting where his committee was instructed to do a particular thing, it is helpful to his committee to have the exact wording of the instructions from the Clerk.

Also, actions and policies that affect the Board of Deacons should especially be transmitted to them immediately as a matter of courtesy, since they have no other way of knowing what has taken place. Misunderstandings are often avoided in this manner.

“Edit Note” When this book was originally written in the early 1960s, obviously the internet didn't exist and thus in the current 21st century E-Mail and other electronic methodologies are acceptable and commonly utilized today in church communications as well as in secular communications.

The Place of Meeting

It is important that the place of meeting be prepared before the business of the Session begins. The Clerk should arrive sufficiently early (or make prior arrangements) to arrange tables, comfortable chairs, ashtrays, etc., so that as the Elders arrive, they can take their places and the meeting can begin on time. Be sure there are sufficient chairs for latecomers so that the business will not be disturbed as someone noisily drags in a chair. You will also make sure that the room is properly ventilated and well heated or cooled, as the need may be. A room too hot can make the elderly so drowsy as to ruin the best meeting. This is a small detail, but a very important one.

A Brief Summary

At this time, you are probably overwhelmed by the extent of your duties and responsibilities! It is true that as Clerk you have a very large responsibility in your church. Your job is a demanding one, and its tasks should not be assumed lightly. To do the job well will take constant vigilance and continued application of your very best. In a large measure you can tremendously help or seriously hinder the work of your Session and your church by the manner in which you do your job. It is indeed a noble task. It is one that asks much of you, but which—at the same time—is as rewarding as any you will have the privilege of doing.