

Presbyterian Structure

Foundational Principles of Presbyterian Order

1. Christ, the Head of the Church

G-1.0100 1. The Head of the Church

Christ is Head of the Church

G-1.0100a. All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God, who raised Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body.

G-1.0100b. Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission to the world, for its building up, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. It belongs to Christ alone to rule, to teach, to call, and to use the Church as he wills, exercising his authority by the ministry of women and men for the establishment and extension of his Kingdom.

2. Scripture, the Law of the Church

G-1.0100c. Christ gives to his Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its officers and ordinances. Insofar as Christ's will for the Church is set forth in Scripture, it is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3. Pyramid of Authorities

G-1.0100d. In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope and that the Church, as Christ's body, is bound to his authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God.

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G-2.0200 Confessional Statements as Subordinate Standards

These confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. While confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. The church is prepared to counsel with or even to discipline one ordained who seriously rejects the faith expressed in the confessions. Moreover, a more exacting amendment process is required to change the confessions of the church than is required to change the Constitution in matters of government, worship, or discipline. Yet the church, in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as of governance. The church affirms "Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda," that is, "The church reformed, always reforming," according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.

G-1.0500 5. The Constitution Defined

Definition of the Constitution

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) consists of the Book of Confessions and the Book of Order.

4. Courts of the Church

G-1.0307 Church Power

(7) That all Church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no Church governing body ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God. Now though it will easily be admitted that all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity, yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws than from the right of judging upon laws already made, and common to all who profess the gospel, although this right, as necessity requires in the present state, be lodged with fallible men.

5. Prescriptive Constitution

G-9.0103 Unity of Governing Bodies

All governing bodies 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 governing bodies are separate and independent, but have such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church performed by it through the appropriate governing body. The jurisdiction of each governing body 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 governing body.

6. Rule by Elders

The Bible in the RSV uses the word “elder” 18 times. It uses the word “elders” 230 times. Clearly, this is an important concept in the Bible. Listed below are a few of the more significant passages

A. Old Testament

Exodus 3:6 Go and gather the **elders** of Israel together, and say to them, “The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt 21 Then Moses called all the **elders** of Israel, and said to them, “Select lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the passover lamb.

Exodus 19:7 So Moses came and called the **elders** of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. 8 And all the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

Exodus 24:1 And he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the **elders** of Israel, and worship afar off.

Exodus 24: 9 Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the **elders** of Israel went up,

Numbers 11:16 And the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the **elders** of Israel, whom you know to be the **elders** of the people and officers over them; and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. 17 And I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit which is upon you and put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.

B New Testament

Acts 4:4 But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand. 5 On the morrow their rulers and **elders** and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem,

Acts 14:21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had appointed **elders** for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.

Acts 15: 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the **elders**, and they declared all that God had done with them. 5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses.” 6 The apostles and the **elders** were gathered together to consider this matter.

Acts 20:16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. 17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church.

I Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of **elders** laid their hands upon you.

I Timothy 5:17 Let the **elders** who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching;

Titus 1:14 5 This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint **elders** in every town as I directed you, 6 if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate. 7 For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, 8 but hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy, and self-controlled; 9 he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it.

James 5:13 Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 Is any among you sick? Let him call for the **elders** of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

1 Peter 5:1 So I exhort the **elders** among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. 2 Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, 3 not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.

Rev. 4:4 Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four **elders**, clad in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads.

C. PCUSA

G-4.0104 A Particular Presbyterian Church

Each particular church of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be governed by this Constitution. Its officers are ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, and deacons. Its government and guidance are the responsibility of the session. It shall fulfill its responsibilities as the local unit of mission for the service of all people, for the upbuilding of the whole church, and for the glory of God.

G-6.0102 Offices of Ministry

One responsibility of membership in the church is the election of officers who are ordained to fulfill particular functions. The existence of these offices in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church. These ordained officers differ from other members in function only.

G-6.0103 Offices Named

The Church offices mentioned in the New Testament which this church has maintained include those of presbyters (ministers of the Word and Sacrament and elders) and deacons.

G-6.0105 Called to Ministry

Both men and women shall be eligible to hold church offices.

G-6.0106 Gifts and Requirements

G-6.0106a. 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, natural and acquired, 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.

G-6.0106b. 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.

G-6.0107 Election by the People

The government of this church is representative, and the right of God's people to elect their officers is inalienable. Therefore, no person can be placed in any permanent office in a congregation or governing body of the church except by election of that body.

G-1.0306 Election by the People

(6) That though the character, qualifications, and authority of Church officers are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, as well as the proper method of their investiture and institution, yet the election of the persons to the exercise of this authority, in any particular society, is in that society.

7. The Unity of the Church

G-4.0000 CHAPTER IV. THE CHURCH AND ITS UNITY

G-4.0100 1. The Church--Universal and Particular

G-4.0101 Universal Church

The Church universal consists of all persons in every nation, together with their children, who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and commit themselves to live in a fellowship under his rule.

G-4.0102 Universal and Particular

Since this whole company cannot meet together in one place to worship and to serve, it is reasonable that it should be divided into particular congregations. The particular church is, therefore, understood as a local expression of the universal Church.