

## **Consideration of Policies and Procedures** *to Include in an Administrative Manual for Your Church*

### **Session Procedures that will Maintain the Status Quo**

1. “Persons may enter into active church membership by reaffirmation of faith only after instruction and examination by the session in the meaning and responsibilities of membership.” (Former G-5.0101f)

*New G-1.0303c omits the requirement found in Former G-5.0101f for the session to examine persons becoming members of a congregation by reaffirmation of faith.*

- 2a. (To be adopted if a congregation has a board of deacons) “The pastor, co-pastors, and associate pastors shall be advisory members of the board of deacons. The board of deacons shall elect a moderator and a secretary from among its members. The secretary shall keep a record of the board’s proceedings. The records of the board of deacons shall be submitted to the session at least annually and at other times upon the request of the session. The session may void or amend any action of the board of deacons, or direct the board to reconsider such action.” (Former G-6.0403a and 6.0404)

- 2b. (To be adopted if a congregation has individually commissioned deacons) “The session shall ordinarily conduct an annual review of the deacons’ service, at which time their commission may be renewed, altered, or terminated.” (Former G-4.6.0403b)

*New G-2.0202 omits these details about the organization and supervision of deacons. Sessions should adopt one of these two policies if the congregation currently uses the office of deacon.*

3. “If the examination of a person who has been elected to the ordered ministry of deacon or elder is not approved, the session shall report its action to the congregation’s nominating committee, which shall present another nominee to a meeting of the congregation.” (Former G-14.0240)

*This provision is missing from New G-2.0402.*

4. “The moderator may, in an emergency, convene the session by written notice at a time and place different from that previously designated by the session.” (Former G-9.0202)

*New G-3.0203 does provide that “The moderator shall call a special meeting when he or she deems necessary,” but the specific situation of an emergency is not included. Adopting this provision would remove all doubt as to the propriety of an emergency session meeting.*

5. “The treasurer shall be elected annually by the session, if permitted by the state in which the congregation is located.” (Former G-10.0401)

*New G-3.0205 allows a session to “elect a treasurer for such term as the session shall decide.” Sessions must therefore designate the treasurer’s term of office, and a one-year term is the former constitutional provision.*

6. “The session may invite members of the congregation to attend and observe its meetings if it so desires, without restricting its right to meet in executive session whenever circumstances indicate the wisdom of doing so.” (Former G-10.0201)

*New G-3.0203 omits any mention of session meetings as being open to members of the church.*

7. “A quorum of the session shall be the pastor or other presiding officer and one third of the elders but no fewer than two, except for the reception and dismissal of members, when the quorum shall be the moderator and two members of the session.” (Former G-10.0202)

*New G-3.0203 says, “Sessions shall provide by rule for a quorum for meetings.” Sessions desiring to retain the current requirement should adopt this policy.*

8. “The session shall keep complete registers of

- 1) Marriages, including marriages of all members of the congregation, all marriages conducted by the ministerial staff of the congregation, and all marriages performed on church property;
- 2) Baptisms
  - a) Infant Baptisms. Include name, parents’ names, and date of birth of those being baptized and the names of persons presenting the children for Baptism.
  - b) Adult Baptisms. Include name, parents’ names, and date of birth of those being baptized.
- 3) Elders, with the name of the congregation in which each was ordained, the date of ordination, terms of active service, and the record of removals;
- 4) Deacons, with the name of the congregation in which each was ordained, the date of ordination, terms of active service, and the record of removals;
- 5) Pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, interim pastors, stated supplies, and parish associates serving the congregation, with dates of service.” (Former G-10.0302)

*New G-3.0204 simply provides that registers of baptisms, of ruling elders, of deacons, and installed pastors be kept. Sessions that desire to keep registers of marriages and to provide more specificity in what the other registers should include should adopt the suggested language.*

#### **New Mandate for Sessions**

1. “The session has the responsibility and power . . . to obtain property and liability insurance coverage . . .” (Former G-10.0102o). In contrast, Former G-11.0308 says “The presbytery shall obtain property and liability insurance coverage . . .”

*New G-3.0112 says that “each council shall obtain property and liability insurance coverage . . .” The use of the word “shall” requires sessions to do what was once only suggested.*

#### **Congregational Procedures that will Maintain the Status Quo**

1. “Public notice of congregational meetings shall be given at regular services of worship on two consecutive Sundays. The meeting may be convened following the notice given on the second Sunday.” (Former G-7.0303b)

*If a congregation desires, it could adopt a shorter or longer notification period. New G-1.0502 states that “congregations shall provide by their own rule for minimum notification requirements and give notice at regular services of worship prior to the meeting.”*

2. “All meetings of the congregation shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of Robert’s Rules of Order” (Former G-7.0302c )

*This rule is missing from the new Form of Government. The first paragraph of new G-3.0105 makes such a provision for meetings of councils (governing bodies), but a congregation is not a council. Former G-7.0302c provides that congregations may adopt “a comparable parliamentary authority” to Robert’s Rules of Order, but some authority is required before a congregation meets or there will be no rules to govern debate or to convene the meeting properly.*

3. “The quorum of a meeting of the congregation shall be one tenth of the members. No meeting of fewer than three members shall be considered a congregational meeting.” (Former G-7.0305)

*Former G-7.0305 allows congregations to obtain presbytery approval for smaller quorums. This approval is no longer necessary under new G-1.0501 – congregations may now “provide by rule the quorum necessary to conduct business.”*

4. “If the congregation does not approve the minutes of a congregational meeting before adjournment, the session shall read, correct, and approve the minutes of that congregational meeting at its next scheduled meeting and shall enter them into the permanent record. At the next meeting of the congregation, the clerk shall have the minutes available and shall report the session’s action. The congregation may ask to have them read and may make additions or corrections by vote. The minutes of each meeting of the congregation shall be attested by the moderator and the secretary and shall be entered in the minute book of the session.” (Former G-7.0307)

*This rule has been omitted from the new Form of Government. Without some sort of similar provision, it would be possible for congregations never to have access to the minutes of their own meetings.*

5. “Since a teaching elder is not a member of the congregation, she or he may not vote in the meeting of the congregation. When there is a tie vote, a teaching elder who is presiding shall put the question a second time. If there is a tie vote again, the motion is lost.” (Former G-7.0308)

*This rule is missing from the new Form of Government. It avoids potential confusion that could occur at congregational meetings.*

### **Procedures that Should be Adopted**

#### **Before the Process of Electing Elders and Deacons Begins**

1. “Nominations shall be made by a representative nominating committee of active members of the church. The committee shall itself include both women and men, giving fair representation to persons of all age groups, of all racial ethnic members, and of persons with disabilities who are members of that congregation. At least two members of this committee shall be elders designated by the session, one of whom shall be currently on the session and serve as moderator of the committee. At least one member of this committee shall be

designated by and from the board of deacons, if the church has deacons. Other members of the committee, in sufficient number to constitute a majority thereof (exclusive of the pastor), shall be chosen by the congregation or by such organizations within the church as the congregation may designate, none of whom may be in active service on the session or in active service on the board of deacons. The pastor shall be a member of this committee, serving ex officio and without vote.” (Former G-14.0223)

*The committee prescribed by this paragraph may be difficult for small congregations to form. New G-2.0401 provides some flexibility: “Congregations may provide by their own rule for a congregational nominating committee, providing that the committee shall consist of at least three active members of the congregation, and shall include at least one ruling elder who is currently serving on the session. The pastor shall serve ex officio and without vote.”*

*It would therefore be possible for a small church to form a smaller committee. Nevertheless, the principle that a majority of the committee should not be in active service on the session or the board of deacons should be observed, if at all possible. Regardless of the size and constitution the congregation chooses, a decision on this must be made before the nominating process can begin.*

2. “The nominating committee shall be elected by the congregation annually and no member of the committee shall serve more than three years consecutively.” (Former G-14.0224)

*These requirements are omitted from the new Form of Government. They should be adopted if at all possible to prevent a small clique from controlling the nominating process.*

3. “Persons to be nominated from the floor shall have given prior permission to be nominated and declared assent to serve if elected, or, if present, shall be asked to declare willingness to serve.” (Former G-14.0232)

4. “When the number of nominees equals the number of elders and deacons to be elected, the congregation may vote by voice vote or show of hands. When the number of nominees is greater than the number of elders and deacons to be elected, the congregation shall vote by secret ballot.” (Former G-14.0233)

*These two requirements are missing from the new Form of Government. It is easy to see how such policies would lead to good order in elections. It would be better to adopt such policies before elections are held, to avoid confusion.*

### **Rule that Should be Adopted Before the Annual Business Meeting of a Congregation**

1. “The annual meeting of the congregation required in G-1.0501 shall include a review of the adequacy of the compensation of the pastor or pastors upon report of the session.” (Former G-7.0302a)

*This requirement is missing from the new Form of Government.*