

SESSION HANDBOOK

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SESSION RESPONSIBILITIES FROM THE BOOK OF ORDER G-3.02

G-3.0201 COMPOSITION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service as ruling elders, together with all installed pastors and associate pastors. All members of the session are entitled to vote. The pastor shall be the moderator of the session, and the session shall not meet without the pastor or designated moderator. If there is no installed pastor, or if the installed pastor is unable to invite another moderator, the presbytery shall make provisions for a moderator. Presbyteries shall provide by rule for moderators when the session is without a moderator for reasons of vacancy or inconvenience.

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. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the session shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have identified themselves throughout history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

In light of this charge, the session has responsibility and power to:

- a. ***provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.*** This responsibility shall include
 - a. providing a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, education, and spiritual nurture;
 - b. providing for regular preaching of the Word by a minister of the Word and Sacrament or other person prepared and approved for the work;
 - c. planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world with the message of salvation and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship;
 - d. planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community in accordance with the prophetic witness of Jesus Christ;

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- e. and initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to the love and grace of God
- b. ***provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received.*** This responsibility shall include
 - a. authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate, in accordance with the principles of the Directory for Worship; and
 - b. 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.
- c. ***nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.*** This responsibility shall include
 - a. receiving and dismissing members;
 - b. reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and
 - c. counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership;
 - d. providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship;
 - e. training, examining, ordaining, and installing those elected by the congregation as ruling elders and deacons;
 - f. encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources;
 - g. managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission;
 - h. directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation;
 - i. employing the administrative staff of the congregation;
 - j. leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church;
 - k. warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community;
 - l. and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Church Discipline.

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Sessions have a particular responsibility to participate in the life of the whole church through participation in other councils. It is of particular importance that sessions:

- a. elect, as commissioners to presbytery, ruling elders from the congregation, preferably for at least a year, and receive their reports;
- b. nominate to presbytery ruling elders from the congregation who may be considered for election as commissioners to synod and General Assembly, and to serve on committees or commissions of the same, bearing in mind principles of inclusiveness and fair representation in the decision making of the church (F-1.0403);
- c. see that the guidance and communication of presbytery, synod, and General Assembly are considered, and that any binding actions are observed and carried out;
- d. welcome representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits;
- e. propose to the presbytery, or through it to the synod and General Assembly, such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church; and
- f. send to presbytery and General Assembly requested statistics and other information according to the requirements of those bodies, as well as voluntary financial contributions.

G-3.0203 MEETINGS

The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly. The moderator shall call a special meeting when he or she deems necessary or when requested in writing by any two members of the session. The business to be transacted at special meetings shall be limited to items specifically listed in the call for the meeting. There shall be reasonable notice given of all special meetings. The session shall also meet when directed by presbytery.

Sessions shall provide by rule for a quorum for meetings; such quorum shall include the moderator and either a specific number of ruling elders or a specific percentage of those ruling elders in current service on the session.

G-3.0204 MINUTES AND RECORDS

Minutes of the session shall be subject to the provisions of G-3.0107. They shall contain the minutes of all meetings of the congregation and all joint meetings with deacons and trustees.

Each session shall maintain the following rolls and registers:

- a. ***Membership Roll***

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There shall be rolls of baptized, active, and affiliate members in accordance with G-1.0401, G-1.0402 and G-1.0403. The session shall delete names from the roll of the congregation upon the member's death, admission to membership in another congregation or presbytery, or renunciation of jurisdiction. The session may delete names from the roll of the congregation when a member so requests, or has moved or otherwise ceased to participate actively in the work and worship of the congregation for a period of two years. The session shall seek to restore members to active participation and shall provide written notice before deleting names due to member inactivity.

b. Registers

There shall be registers of baptisms authorized by the session, of ruling elders and deacons, of installed pastors with dates of service, and such other registers as the session may deem necessary.

G-3.0205 FINANCES

In addition to those responsibilities described in G-3.0113, the session shall prepare and adopt a budget and determine the distribution of the congregation's benevolences. It shall authorize offerings for Christian purposes and shall account for the proceeds of such offerings and their disbursement. It shall provide full information to the congregation concerning its decisions in such matters.

The session shall elect a treasurer for such term as the session shall decide and shall supervise his or her work or delegate that supervision to a board of deacons or trustees. Those in charge of various congregational funds shall report at least annually to the session and more often as requested. Sessions may provide by rule for standard financial practices of the congregation, but shall in no case fail to observe the following procedures:

- a. All offerings shall be counted and recorded by at least two duly appointed persons, or by one fidelity bonded person;
- b. Financial books and records adequate to reflect all financial transactions shall be kept and shall be open to inspection by authorized church officers at reasonable times;
- c. Periodic, and in no case less than annual, reports of all financial activities shall be made to the session or entity vested with financial oversight.

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MISSION (FROM CURRENT GOALS)

1. **Connect with Our Neighborhood**, seeking effective ways to deepen relationships with our neighbors and partners, and grow new partnerships.
2. **Enhance a robust online ministry** that engages people in community far beyond our current membership.
3. **Build a Strong and Comprehensive Pastoral Care Ministry** that reaches every member of the congregation, and addresses short term, long term, and emergency care needs.
4. **Design and Implement a Process that Welcomes and Integrates People** into our culture and the life of our church. The focus is integration and engagement, not just welcome.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Session is the council for the congregation. The Session has responsibility for the life of the congregation, it has responsibility to the congregation for governing and guiding the congregation to become a community of faith, hope, love and witness.

SESSION MEMBERSHIP, QUORUM, VOTING

The Session shall consist of from 12-15 ruling elders plus the installed pastor who is also the Presbytery designated Moderator of Session. Ruling elders are elected by the congregation. All members are entitled to vote. No proxy voting is allowed.

A quorum is a majority of the session.

The term of service for ruling elders is three years with the possible re-election to another three years, for a maximum of six years, after which the person is ineligible for one year.

SESSION MEETINGS

FREQUENCY

The Session shall meet monthly or at a minimum each quarter and at the call the of the pastor or the Presbytery. Typically, we meet every month, sometimes skipping July.

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SPECIAL MEETINGS

The agenda is limited to items specifically listed in the call for the meeting.

MODERATOR

The installed pastor is the moderator of session. The session shall not meet without its moderator. If it is not feasible for the installed pastor to moderate, the pastor will find a Minister of Word and Sacrament or other individual approved by the presbytery to moderate.

METHOD OF MEETING

Meetings may be in person, over the internet or hybrid. We meet the 3rd Thursday at 6:30 pm. Generally, we prefer meeting in person, however if someone is unable to be there in person, we have an AltarLive link so they can join online.

AGENDA

The agenda for each meeting will be set by the pastor and shall include reports from existing committees and other business related to the ministry of the congregation.

CLOSED MEETINGS

Session meetings are closed by default, unless Session takes action to make them open. The Open Meeting Policy of the PCUSA applies to General Assembly – not sessions.

OUTSIDE PARTICIPATION

Ruling Elders have been elected by the congregation to discern Christ's leading, to deal with issues, and to set the direction of the church. The Moderator by fiat or the session by vote can grant voice to individuals to present information or participate in a discussion. Normally voice is given only for specific reasons and only for a specific time of the meeting when the relevant discussion will happen.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

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Executive Sessions are confidential. Only members of the session and persons who are necessary for the business to be conducted, as approved by session, are allowed to attend.

Minutes can be taken, however they can only be read and acted upon in executive session and the confidentiality of the executive session must be maintained. They should also record only what was decided, not what was said. However, actions taken that are not secret, or where the secrecy has been lifted by the body, should be recorded in the regular minutes of the meeting.

OUR PRACTICE has been to go into executive session by consensus (and to leave executive session by consensus), to take no minutes, and to take no action during the executive session itself. However, we may decide in the executive session what actions we want to take, and then after we leave executive session we make a motion to the effect of whatever we decided in the executive session, so that the action gets entered into the official minutes of the session meeting.

Normally we use executive session if we are dealing with personnel issues or issues of a sensitive nature, legal issues, or when the session needs the safety and freedom of a more open conversation.

VOTING BY ELECTRONIC OR DIGITAL MEANS

We try to reserve email votes for issues that are time sensitive and non-controversial.

Questions for clarification are allowed, debate is not, as email is not a helpful way to debate important issues. If the discussion turns into a debate, the moderator will cease the question and voting process and the item will be tabled until we secure another location for the festival to bring down the balloons.

When a request for an email vote is sent, it will include a deadline for questions, and a deadline for voting. Once the deadline for voting has been reached no more email votes will be accepted.

SAMPLE AGENDA

- **Opening Prayer & Prayer for Members –**
 - Led by Session members. We divide up the congregation membership rolls into 10 groups, and pray for each group once during the year. This assumes we skip a summer meeting, and gives us the flexibility to do something different at one meeting.

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- **Approval of the Agenda**
 - Also a time for adding any last minute items or rearranging the agenda if needed.
- **Major Discussion Items**
 - Those things we need to be at our best for.
- **Omnibus**
 - Committee, ministry team, and staff routine reports and motions.
 - Session members may request items to be withdrawn for discussion.
- **Reports Not Included or Withdrawn**
 - Reports not received in time for inclusion in the first distribution of the Session Packet.
 - Anything that is withdrawn from the Omnibus for discussion or question
- **Unfinished Business**
 - Any business in process that still needs attention
- **New Business**
 - Things not previously discussed or considered
- **Announcements & Thank You's**
 - The Stewardship & Finance Committee provides pens, notecards, and stamps, the session members write thank you notes to those who have been supporting the church through responsible giving and participation.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SESSION MEMBERS

1. Read the documents in preparation for the session meeting.
2. Attend all stated and special session meetings.
3. If you are unable to attend a session meeting, please give notice to the moderator at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.
4. If you are unable to attend a session meeting in person but are available to meet online, the link for the session meeting can be found at fpcincoln.org/altarlive. Please let the

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moderator and clerk know if you need online access so the equipment can be set up in advance.

5. Serve as chair or vice chair of a committee or ministry team and send a monthly report to the Clerk of Session one week prior to the session meeting.
6. Support the decisions of the session.
7. Honor the confidentiality of the session.
8. Give the session devotional once per year.
9. Attend the Session Retreat to plan for change, reformation and renewal
10. Pray for the congregation, the pastors and leaders of the church
11. Write a devotion for distribution to the congregation once a month
12. Act as a role model for stewardship and encourage others within the congregation to practice responsible giving on a regular basis.
13. Visibly participate in the activities of the church, including helping serve communion in worship several times a year.
14. Attend worship on a regular basis
15. Serve as a liturgist at least once a year.

CLERK OF SESSION

1. Record the minutes of all session and congregation meetings
2. Send the minutes of said meetings to the moderator within three days of the meeting for review, and after review, to the session within one week of the meeting.
3. Submit to the Church Administrator the unapproved minutes of session and congregational meetings for distribution to the session by Monday noon of the week of the session meeting.
4. Prepare and submit the annual report for the General Assembly.
5. Summarize the denominational annual report inclusion in the congregation's annual report
6. Prepare the monthly Clerk of Session report and submit to the Church Administrator by Monday noon the week of the session meeting for inclusion in the session meeting.

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7. Handle all correspondence related to receiving, transferring and dismissing members
8. Ensure that the rolls of the church are accurate, with a detailed review at least once a year. This includes active, baptized and affiliate members, as well as inactive and active non-members.
9. Submit to the Session any changes in membership, including deaths, and a record of weddings and funerals.
10. Record the celebration of communion, including the number of people participating.
11. Maintain the Session Records, submitting them annually to Presbytery for review and approval.
12. Participate in Presbytery trainings for Clerks of Session and participate and assist in the annual minutes review as requested by Presbytery.
13. Provide training and support to an associate Clerk of Session
14. Handle official correspondence of the Session when requested.

RESPONSIBILITIES & TIPS FOR MODERATORS/CHAIRPERSONS

HOW TO BE A MODERATOR/CHAIR

1. Keep your committee description before the group – review it periodically to see if you're on track.
2. Be in contact between meetings – remind people of deadlines, who volunteered to do what, etc. so that people can be prepared for the next meeting.
3. Make sure that there is someone taking minutes and filling out the Session report – that should not be the moderator – you have enough to do.
4. Roberts Rules: We tend to be somewhat lax with Roberts Rules in committee and ministry team meetings, however when making decisions, we ask that formal motions be made and voted on so there is clarity regarding actions decided on. Voting by consensus is OK.

COMMUNICATING MEETING DATES & TIMES

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All meetings need to be communicated (date & time) to the Church Administrator, whether those meetings are in person, online, or hybrid. This way we can ensure that the church calendar is accurate, that the meeting dates are available for sharing in the weekly announcements, and that the proper rooms are reserved without overlapping another group.

AGENDAS, MINUTES & SESSION REPORTS

1. Meet with the staff person for your committee to go over what's happening and things that need to be considered. Put the agenda together. Do you need to invite any other participants to a particular meeting? Do you need the Pastor to attend? Communicate in plenty of time to get on people's calendar.
2. Send out an agenda a few days in advance
3. Review the minutes with the secretary within a couple days after the meeting, and then send the minutes to the members while it is fresh in people's minds. It also serves as a reminder to people of what they are responsible for / what they volunteered for.
4. Review the finance report for your committee. Jennifer sends out the updated finance report monthly, including all relevant budget lines and fund balances for your committee/ministry team.
5. Prepare the Session report and send it to Carrie within a couple days of your meeting, along with the Committee minutes.
6. MAKE SURE ALL SESSION REPORTS AND MINUTES ARE TURNED IN TO CARRIE BY MONDAY NOON THE WEEK OF THE SESSION MEETING. (If your committee meets that week, send them in the morning after your meeting.)

A sample agenda is under the Session Documents section of the Leadership Resources page on the website.

MINISTRY/EVENT PROPOSAL AND EVALUATION FORM

This form can be a helpful tool in thinking through why you want to do what you want to do. It is especially useful to help us think through how we can focus our efforts on meeting our church goals and objectives. While this form is not required, all committees and ministry teams are encouraged to utilize this to help with their planning. The form can be found under the FORMS section of the Leaders Resource Page.

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COMMITTEE MAILBOXES

Every committee, board and ministry team has a mailbox in the main office. It is to the left of the door that leads to the finance office. Please check your box regularly. Any mail or packages that come in for your committee, board or ministry team will be placed there with the expectation that you'll be checking your box on Sundays.

DESIGN SERVICES

Please utilize our Communications Specialist, Maria Brown, for design services, so that we can ensure that everything we put out is consistent with our branding, style, and values. See the Communication Document under the FPC Bylaws, Policies and Procedures Section for more

PRINTING

The printer will print in color or black and white, single sided or two sided, as well as scan. It will also do a single fold (not a tri-fold.) If you need assistance using the copier, please ask the Church Administrator or Communications Specialist. The access code for the printer is 45900. Please only use the copier for church business. If you have a large printing job, coordinate that with the Church Administrator so it does not tie up the copier when it is needed for other jobs.

It is the responsibility of the committee/ministry team to fold and assemble items as necessary.

MAILING

The Church Administrator can print mailing labels as requested and can provide envelopes and stamps if necessary. We do have a postage machine which gives us a discount on postage, so whenever possible, please use that instead of stamps.

It is the responsibility of the committee/ministry team to fold and stuff mailings and to prepare them for mailing.

OUTSIDE BANNERS

We have two outside banner locations. One is at the corner of 17th & G, the other is between the entrance/exit driveways of the 18th St. parking lot. All banner orders need to go through the Communications Specialist, Maria Brown. She will help you design them, and will order

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them. The banners are 3 ft tall and 6 ft long. Banners for the 17th & G location must be double-sided. Banners for the 18th & F location may be single-sided.

The committee/board/ministry team that requested the banner is responsible for putting the banner up, taking it down, and replacing it with another banner. Please consult with the Church Administrator about when the banner can go up, and what banner to put up when yours comes down.

COLLECTIONS & DONATIONS

If your team is collecting donations of items, please consult with the Church Administrator about the best place to store those donations. Donations should not be left in the Main Office. You will also be responsible for delivering or arranging for someone to pick up the donations in a timely manner.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

FREQUENCY & CALL

Typically, we have two regular congregational meetings per year:

1. Annual Meeting in January or February, for receiving the annual report of all organizations and boards, committees and ministry teams in the church, as well as celebrating significant events in the life of the congregation.
2. Fall meeting to elect ruling elders, deacons, and Foundation board members, and to vote on changes to the pastor's compensation.

Special meetings may be called as deemed necessary by the session, presbytery, or by the session upon written request of one-fourth of the members of the corporation.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

Notice shall be given no less than two consecutive Sundays prior to the meeting, nor more than fifty days before the meeting. The meeting can be held on the date of the second Sunday stipulated in the notice.

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Notice may be oral or printed, stating the place, day and hour of the meeting. Notice shall be sent either by mail, or by electronic or digital means sent to each member entitled to vote at the meeting. Notice may also be given by an announcement at regular Sunday worship service or included in the newsletter or Wednesday e-news.

BUSINESS

G-1.0504 Business Proper to Congregational Meetings

Business to be transacted at meetings of the congregation shall be limited to matters related to the following:

- a. electing ruling elders, deacons, and trustees;
- b. calling a pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor;
- c. changing existing pastoral relationships, by such means as reviewing the adequacy of and approving changes to the terms of call of the pastor or pastors, or requesting, consenting to, or declining to consent to dissolution;
- d. buying, mortgaging, or selling real property;
- e. requesting the presbytery to grant an exemption as permitted in this Constitution (G-2.0404);
- f. approving a plan for the creation of a joint congregational witness, or amending or dissolving the joint congregational witness (G-5.05);
- g. receiving a disciplinary decision against a member of the congregation as required by D-9.0102.

Whenever permitted by civil law, both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting.

NOTE: Nebraska allows ecclesiastical and corporate business to be conducted at the same meeting, therefore we do not adjourn the congregational meeting to hold the Foundation meeting – they are held at the same time. The President of the FPC Foundation Corporation presents all Foundation business.

Other than the annual meeting, only business listed in the call to the congregational meeting may be conducted at that meeting. At the annual meeting any time of business permitted by the Book of Order (G-1.0504) may be raised.

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QUORUM & VOTING

The greater of 25 members or one-tenth of the members of the corporation. Each member on the Active Membership Roll is entitled to one vote. No members may vote by proxy.

ELECTRONIC MEETINGS

Meetings may be held by electronic means if all members have been notified per the bylaws, and if all participating members have the ability to discuss and vote on business items.

MODERATOR

Per G-1.0505, the installed pastor moderates all congregational meetings. If it is impractical for the pastor to preside or the pastor is not available, he/she/they shall invite another minister of the Word and Sacrament who is a member of the presbytery or a person authorized by the presbytery to serve as moderator. In such cases a fee for moderating will be paid according to the fee structure established by the presbytery.

DOES THE CONGREGATION GET TO VOTE ON BIG PROJECTS?

Questions are occasionally asked about what “big” items the congregation get to vote on. The congregation only has the authority to vote on items listed specifically in G-1.0504. The congregation elected the Session to make all other decisions. On occasion the congregation has voted on big-ticket items, however they were not voting on whether or not to proceed with a project, rather they were voting on whether or not to access the principle of funds kept at either the Foundation or the Church to pay for the project. Some of the funds gifted to either the Foundation or Church require the members to approve invading the principal. If there is sufficient income and capital gains available to fund a project without invading the principal, no congregational vote is needed or allowed.

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MISCELLANEOUS

WORKROOM SUPPLIES

We are not staffed to regularly check the workroom supplies. If you use the last of something, please send an email or text to the Church Administrator. Staplers, scissors, tape dispensers, etc., are not to leave the office unless they will be put back immediately after use, so they are available for the next person who needs them. Under no circumstances should they leave the church. Depending on what you need, some supplies are in the staff kitchenette off of the main office, others are in the office storage room, which is kept locked. Please ask a staff person for assistance.

PROMOTIONAL SUPPLIES/SWAG

Promotional Supplies/Swag are kept in the office storage room. Please ask a staff person for access if you need anything. Any promotional supplies/swag is available for use by any committee, board or ministry team. Our goal is to use them to help our church be seen and remembered. If you have questions, please ask the Church Administrator.

BUILDING ACCESS & KEYS

Every member or regular active attender of First Presbyterian Church may have a key fob to enter the building. Those fobs will allow access between the hours of 6:30 AM – 10:30 PM

Should you lose your key fob, let the Church Administrator know right away and she can disarm it. She can also get you a new one. We do ask \$10 for the replacement fob if one was lost.

Session Members are entitled to have a key that opens classroom and storage room doors, so if a staff person isn't available to let you into a room for a meeting or to access supplies, you can open those doors.

Main program and support staff have keys that open all doors, should you need access to a different space than your key allows.

We do have a security system that automatically arms at 11 pm, so we require all persons to exit the building no later than 10:30 pm. Please ensure that all outside doors are closed. If the

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alarm is set off by someone overstaying, or because a door wasn't completely closed, the individual responsible may be asked to cover the \$250 fee from the alarm company.

BUILDING USE REQUESTS

Any event your committee, board or ministry team plans, other than a regular meeting, you need to fill out a building use request. There is no fee for church events, however this helps us be clear on what space is needed and when, so that space can be reserved. After any event or activity, PLEASE RESET THE ROOM. There may be another event soon after that you are not aware of.

Any individual or organization can request use of the building for uses not specifically related to FPC. We typically charge a usage fee for that. A Building Use Request Form is required in all cases.