

A Quick Trip through *The Book of Order, 2007-2009*

Purpose

How does the Presbyterian Church (USA) govern itself? Having the reputation of doing things “decently and in order” requires reliable principles, policies and guidelines. *The Book of Order* is for day-to-day organization and functioning of the church as well as a source of guidance during times of change or disagreement.

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) consists of *The Book of Order* and the *Book of Confessions*. As officers in the church, we promise to be “governed by our church’s polity” and “instructed and led by the confessions” as we lead the people of God. Answering the questions in this course will help you become familiar with The Form of Government, a significant section of *The Book of Order* especially useful to elders and deacons. An overview of The Directory for Worship and The Rules of Discipline is also included.

This course offers exercises and Points to Ponder on *The Book of Order*. These exercises require the reader to have a copy of *The Book of Order* or to access one on-line at www.pcusa.org. This is not intended to be an exhaustive study, but a basic familiarization with the organization of Part II of Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Except where indicated, it is not necessary to read every chapter, but to be able to retrieve specific information in order to complete the exercises. This course can be used for more in-depth individual study or as part of a discussion within a larger group.

Organization

The Book of Order is divided into three parts and abbreviated as shown:

The Form of Government - **G**

The Directory for Worship - **W**

The Rules of Discipline - **D**

The Form of Government (G-1.0000 – G-18.0400)

There are 18 chapters in this part of *The Book of Order*. Chapters I through IV include:

- I. Preliminary Principles
- II. The Church and Its Confessions
- III. The Church and Its Mission
- IV. The Church and Its Unity

Note that there are no page numbers, only chapter designations. Is this an advantage or disadvantage? Why?

Chapters I – IV (G-1.0000 – G-4.0403)

Exercise #1 – After reading Chapters I-IV, answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Using Chapter 1 of *The Book of Order* for reference, answer the following questions:
 - a. Who is head of the church?
 - b. What are the great ends of the church?
 - c. What do the Historic Principles of Church Order say about the role of officers?

2. What is the purpose of the confessional statements found in G-2.0100?

3. What does G-3.0100 say about the mission of the Church?

4. In Chapter IV, answer these two questions:
 - a. What is the difference between a ruling elder and a teaching elder?
 - b. How does the Presbyterian Church (USA) provide for full participation?

Points to Ponder

1. What do you see as the primary purpose of *The Book of Order*?
2. How is the particular church related to the Church universal?

Chapter V – The Church and Its Members (G.5000 – G.5.0502)

Chapters V-VIII deal with the Church's members, officers, organization and property.

Exercise #2

1. G-5.0102 lists several examples of how a faithful member should be involved in the ministry of Christ's church.
 - a. Which of these speak to you as most important for your life at this time?
 - b. Which of these seem the most difficult for you to accomplish?

2. How is an "Active Member" defined in the Presbyterian Church (USA)?

3. What is the difference between an "Active Member" and an "Affiliate Member"?

4. Who is eligible to take communion in the Presbyterian Church (USA)?

5. What are the session's duties regarding church membership?

Points to Ponder

1. How were you prepared for church membership?
2. What do you wish you had known then that you know now?
3. A baptized 6 year old child wants to take communion. Is this permissible? What responsibility does the session have in this decision?

Chapter VI – The Church and Its Officers (G-6.0000 – 6.0703)

Exercise #3

1. What are the gifts and requirements for church officers?
2. What do you learn in G-6.0108 about “freedom of conscience”?
3. What are the responsibilities of elders?
4. What are the responsibilities of deacons?

Points to Ponder

1. What surprises you in your “job description” as an officer?
2. What do you see as most important in this job description?
3. What part(s) might you find most difficult to accomplish?

Chapter VII - The Particular Church (G-7.0000 – G7.0404) and Chapter VIII – The Church and Its Property (G-8.0000 – 8.0700)

Exercise #4

1. Chapter VII outlines how each church is organized and administered. What body authorized and supervised the beginnings of your church?
2. What types of business may be conducted during a congregational meeting?
3. What notice is required in order to call a meeting of the congregation?
4. What is a quorum for a congregational meeting?
5. What powers do trustees have?
6. What is the purpose of the “trust clause” (G-8.0201)?
7. When does the congregation need to consult with presbytery about church property matters?

Points to Ponder

1. At a meeting of the congregation to elect elders, a church member asks to be recognized and then makes a motion that the congregation starts a new church in the next town. Is this motion in order?
2. What agenda items were included in the last meeting of your congregation?

Chapter IX – Governing Bodies (G-9.0000 – 9.0902)

Exercise #5

1. What are the governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (USA)?
2. How are church governing bodies different from civil governing bodies?
3. Who are the officers of governing bodies?
4. How are decisions made in governing bodies?
5. What guides the form of structure and administration?
6. What is the difference between a committee and a commission?
7. What are the powers of commissions?

Points to Ponder

1. Why do Presbyterians open and close each meeting with prayer?
2. How does the Presbyterian Church (USA) demonstrate its connectional nature?
3. What is the reasoning behind the emphasis on equal numbers of ministers and elders for administrative and judicial commissions of presbytery, synod, and the General Assembly?

Chapter X – The Session (G-10.0000 – G10.0401)

This chapter is particularly important for elders to help focus on the responsibilities, organization and duties of session. After reading this chapter in its entirety, please answer the following questions.

Exercise #6

1. What are six duties of session?
2. What rolls does the session keep?
3. When may a church member be deleted from the rolls?
4. What is the responsibility of the treasurer?
5. How often is a session required to meet? When does your session meet?

Points to Ponder

1. What do you see as the most important duties of session? Why?
2. What is the session's responsibility to members who have stopped attending? What actions do officers or church members take when this is noted in your church?

Chapters X – XII – The Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly (G-11.0000 – G13.0203)

Exercise #7

1. In examining the many responsibilities of a presbytery, what do you see as the ones that directly relate to your church at this point in time?
2. How many commissioners may your church send to presbytery?
3. What is the purpose of the presbytery's Committee on Ministry?
4. How do the responsibilities of the synod differ from the responsibilities of the presbytery?
5. How often is a synod required to meet?
6. What is the General Assembly?
7. What would you consider as six of the most important duties of the General Assembly?
8. How often is a General Assembly required to meet?
9. What is a quorum for General Assembly and how are the commissioners constituted?

Points to Ponder

1. To what presbytery does your church belong and how often does it meet?
2. How many churches comprise your presbytery?
3. What is the name of your church's synod and how many presbyteries does it include?
4. When did General Assembly last meet and when will it meet again?

Chapter XIV – Ordination, Certification, and Commissioning (G14.000 – G.14.0744)

Exercise #8

1. Who ordains church officers?
2. When officers are ordained can they lay aside that ordination?
3. How are officers elected in a congregation?
4. What is the role of the congregation's nominating committee?
5. What preparation is required of candidates for the offices of elder and deacon?
6. Who examines ministers for ordination and where is a minister's membership?
7. What positions are eligible to be called to certified ministry and who certifies them?

Points to Ponder

1. What does it mean to say that "...God elects God's people both for service and salvation."?
2. What is your church's process for preparing officers?
3. Does your church have any persons called to certified ministry? If so, what are their responsibilities?

**Chapters XV – XVIII - Relationships, Union Governing Bodies, Amendments
(G-15.0000 – 18.0401)**

Exercise #9

1. What is ecumenical commitment?
2. What are union congregations?
3. How is the constitution amended?

Points to Ponder

1. What does it mean to you for the Presbyterian Church (USA) to be part of the ecumenical movement?
2. What actions did the last General Assembly take regarding amending particular confessional documents?

The Directory for Worship (W-1.000 - W-7.7001)

The Preface to this section of *The Book of Order* states that “This Directory for Worship reflects the conviction that the life of the Church is one, and that its worship, witness, and service are inseparable.” Not intended as a collection of prayers and rituals, these seven chapters describe the theology encompassed in Reformed worship and “...suggests possibilities for worship, invites development in worship, and encourages continuing reform of worship.” For purposes of officer training, only Chapter I through Chapter III are considered here.

Chapter I – The Dynamics of Christian Worship (W-1.0000 – W-1.4009)

Exercise # 10

1. What is the purpose of Christian worship?
2. Who has the responsibility for oversight of worship (W-1.4002)?
3. Who may participate and lead in worship?
4. What are the responsibilities of session and presbytery in providing education in Christian worship?

Points to Ponder

1. What is your earliest memory of worship?
2. What is the most meaningful part of worship for you?
3. How do you feel the congregation can best be educated about Christian worship?

Chapter II and Chapter III– The Elements of Christian Worship (W-2.0000 – 2.6001) and The Ordering of Christian Worship (W-3.0000 – W-3.6205)

Exercise #11

1. What are the elements of Christian worship?
2. What are the session's responsibilities regarding baptism and the Lord's Supper?
3. What is included in the Service for the Lord's Day?
4. What other occasions for worship are included in this chapter?
5. What does the Church say about Children in Worship?
6. Who may offer the Lord's Supper to congregational shut-ins?

Points to Ponder

1. What is your church's practice about the frequency and serving of the Lord's Supper?
2. What is your favorite season of the Church Year? Why?

The Rules of Discipline (D-1.0000 – D-14.0502)

For purposes of officer training, only Chapter I – Principles of Church Discipline and Chapter II - Judicial Process Defined will be considered here.

Exercise #12

1. What is the purpose of Church Discipline?
2. What steps is a member to take to settle a matter prior to beginning formal proceedings?
3. What is judicial process and what kinds of cases does it involve?

Points to Ponder

1. What situations within a church might call for members to “...conciliate, mediate, and adjust differences without strife...”?
2. How can you as an officer “promote peace and unity” within the church during times of conflict?

Looking Back – Exercise #13

Having made this quick trip through *The Book of Order*, consider the following questions.

1. What would you say to a person who is considering uniting with your church about what is distinctive about the Presbyterian church?
2. What is the most important section of *The Book of Order*?
3. What issues do you see in our church that test the balance between *order* and *freedom*? How do you think they can best be resolved?
4. A member of the Worship Committee does not like the Prayer of Confession because it seems like such a “downer.” How would you respond to this concern and where would you look for information about Reformed worship?
5. Someone wants to have communion more often. Who makes the decision about that?