

THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER ONE

PARTICULAR CONGREGATIONS AND THEIR MEMBERSHIP

1.01 THE PARTICULAR CONGREGATION

1.0101 The Mission of the Particular Congregation

The particular congregation is the agent of God's mission in the church. There God's people perform especially the ministries of worship, proclamation, sharing the Sacraments, evangelism, nurture, counseling, personal and social healing, and service. Without this basic ministry to persons, neighborhoods, and communities, and the support given at the congregational level through prayer, personnel, and money, any other significant ministry of the church becomes impossible. Congregations serve as essential mission arms of the presbytery and of the larger church.

1.0102 The Fellowship of the Particular Congregation

The members of a particular church put themselves under the leadership of their officers, whom they elect. The polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presupposes the fellowship of women and men with their children in covenanted relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests upon the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.

1.02 THE ORGANIZING OF THE PARTICULAR CONGREGATION

A particular church in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can be organized only by the authority of a presbytery and shall function under the provisions of this Constitution.

1.03 THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE PARTICULAR CONGREGATION

1.0301 The Meaning of Membership

God calls women and men to faith in Jesus Christ and to membership in the church, the body of Christ. One becomes an active member of the church through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and acceptance of his Lordship in all of life. Baptism and a public profession of faith in Jesus as Lord are the visible signs of entrance into the active membership of the church.

1.0302 Welcome and Openness

The congregation shall welcome all persons who respond in trust and obedience to God's grace in Jesus Christ and desire to become part of the membership and ministry of his Church. No persons shall be denied membership because of race, ethnic origin, worldly condition, or any other reason not related to profession of faith. Each member must seek the grace of openness in extending the fellowship of Christ to all persons. Failure to do so constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal to the gospel.

1.0303 The Ministry of Members

A faithful member accepts Christ's call to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church. Such involvement includes

- (a) proclaiming the good news,
- (b) taking part in the common life and worship of a particular congregation,
- (c) praying and studying Scripture and the Christian faith,
- (d) supporting the work of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,

- (e) demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church,
- (f) responding to God's activity in the world through service to others,
- (g) living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,
- (h) working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment,
- (i) participating in the governing responsibilities of the church.

1.0304 Entry into Membership

Persons may enter into active church membership in the following ways

(a) Baptism and Public Profession of Faith

When a person baptized as an infant is ready to accept responsibility for their life in the church, or when persons not previously baptized desire to profess their faith in Christ and be incorporated into the life of a particular congregation, he or she shall make public profession of his or her faith and, if not already baptized, receive the sacrament of baptism. The session shall judge, after careful examination, the readiness of those who apply for active membership. Particular care shall be taken to prepare children of members for public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Instruction shall be given in the meaning of this profession, the responsibilities of membership, and the faith and order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

(b) Certificate of Transfer

Persons who have made a profession of faith and have been received into membership in a particular church may be received by the session upon receipt of a certificate of transfer from the church in which they have been most recently a member.

(c) Reaffirmation of Faith

Persons who have previously made a profession of faith and became active members in a particular church but are unable to secure a certificate of transfer or other evidence of church membership, shall, after instruction and examination by the session, reaffirm publicly their profession of faith and their acceptance of responsibility in the life of the church.

1.04 CATEGORIES AND PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP

The membership of a particular congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) includes baptized members, active members, inactive members, and affiliate members.

1.0401 Baptized Member

A baptized member of a particular congregation is a person who has received the Sacrament of Baptism and who has been enrolled as a baptized member by the session but who has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Such baptized members are entitled to the pastoral care and instruction of the church, and to participation in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

1.0402 Active Member

An active member of a particular congregation is a person who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into membership of the church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of this church, and participates in the church's work and worship. An active member is entitled to all the rights and privileges of the church, including the right to participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, to present children for baptism, to take part in meetings of the congregation, and to vote and hold office. The

session shall have responsibility for preparing those who would become members of the congregation. Other conditions of active membership that meet the needs of the particular congregation and are consistent with the order and confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may be adopted by the session after careful study and discussion with the congregation.

1.0403 Inactive Member

An inactive member of a particular congregation is one who does not participate in the church's work and worship. An inactive member is entitled to all the rights and privileges of an active member except the right to speak in the meetings of the congregation and to vote and hold office.

1.0404 Affiliate Member

An affiliate member of a particular congregation is an active member of another congregation of this denomination or of another denomination or Christian body, who has temporarily moved from the community where the congregation of active membership is situated, has presented a certificate of good standing from the appropriate governing body of that congregation, and has been received by the session as an affiliate member. An affiliate member is entitled to all the rights and privileges of an active member except the right to vote and hold office.

1.0405 Non-member Privileges

Persons not members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are entitled to the following privileges:

- a. All persons are welcome to participate in the life and worship of this church.
- b. All baptized persons, whether children or adults, even though they have made no profession of their faith in Christ, are entitled to participation in the Lord's Supper, to pastoral care and instruction of the church.
- c. Confessing members of other Christian churches may participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and may present children for baptism.

1.05 MEETINGS OF THE PARTICULAR CONGREGATION

1.0501 Annual and Special Meetings

The congregation shall hold an annual meeting and may hold other special meetings as necessary. The annual meeting shall review the adequacy of the compensation of the pastor or pastors and shall elect officers, and it may transact other business as is appropriate. Special meetings may be called for any or all of the purposes appropriate to an annual meeting or to conduct such other business as may be proper for congregational consideration. The business to be transacted at special meetings shall be limited to items specifically listed in the call for the meeting. Adequate public notice of all congregational meetings shall be given. All active members of the congregation present at either annual or special meetings are entitled to vote.

1.0502 Calling a Congregation Meeting

Meetings of the congregation shall be called

- (1) by the session whenever it determines such a meeting is necessary,
- (2) by the presbytery whenever it determines such a meeting is necessary,
- (3) by the session when requested in writing by one fourth of the members on the active roll of the particular church.

1.0503 Business Proper to Congregational Meetings

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

- (a) election of elders, deacons, and trustees;
- (b) calling of a pastor or pastors;
- (c) changes in existing pastoral relationships, such as changing the terms call, or requesting, consenting to, or declining to consent to dissolution;
- (d) buying, mortgaging, or selling real property;
- (e) exercise of permissive powers of a congregation, such as the desire to lodge all administrative responsibility in the session, or the request to presbytery for exemption from one or more requirements because of limited size.

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

1.0504 Moderator

The pastor or co-pastors shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the congregation. If it is impractical for the pastor to preside, the presbytery shall make provision for an alternate moderator.

1.0505 Secretary and Minutes

The clerk of session shall serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If the clerk of session is unable to serve, the congregation may elect its own secretary. The secretary shall record the actions of the congregation in minutes of the meeting.

1.06 INCORPORATION AND TRUSTEES

1.0601 Incorporation

Where permitted by civil law, each particular congregation shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained. If incorporation is not permitted, individual trustees shall be elected by the congregation. The corporation so formed, or the individual trustees, shall have the following powers: to receive, hold, encumber, manage, and transfer property, real or personal, for the church, provided that in buying, selling, and mortgaging real property, the trustees shall act only after the approval of the congregation granted in a duly constituted meeting; to accept and execute deeds of title to such property; to hold and defend title to such property; to manage any permanent special funds for the furtherance of the purposes of the church, all subject to the authority of the session and under the provisions of the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*. The powers and duties of the trustees shall not infringe upon the powers and duties of the session or the board of deacons.

1.0602 Trustees

Only members on the active roll of the particular church shall be members of the corporation and eligible for election as trustees. The elders in active service in a church who are eligible under the civil law shall, by reason of their office, be the trustees of such corporation, unless the corporation shall determine another method for electing its trustees.