

Session Minutes Review Checklist
 Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey
2022 Minutes

Please fill out, including page numbers, and return this Checklist with your Session Minutes.

Name and location of Church _____

Pages submitted are from Page Number _____ to _____ and Date ____/____/____ to ____/____/____
You must submit beginning with the page bearing the most recent Presbytery "Approval" stamp.

Number of Elders _____. Do the Elders also serve as Trustees? (Yes/No) and/or as Deacons? (Yes/No)

Two page number citations are sufficient for items that occur on multiple occasions

Session Minutes	Pages
1. The meeting is opened with prayer.	_____
2. Date, hour, type, and place of the meeting is recorded.	_____
3. The name of the moderator is recorded.	_____
4. Names of present, absent, and excused are listed and quorum declared.	_____
5. Election of commissioner to Presbytery	_____
6. Report to session by the commissioner to Presbytery	_____
7. The minutes of the prior meeting(s) are approved.	_____
8. Clerk or clerk <i>pro tem</i> has signed the minutes	_____
9. The meeting is closed with prayer.	_____

The following items are to be recorded in the minutes, not necessarily on a monthly basis:

Item	Page #/Comments
10. Dates for the celebration of the Lord's Supper recorded. Can be set annually, quarterly or at each time of celebration, in advance (Must be celebrated at least quarterly).	
11. Baptisms authorized by session prior to celebration, and candidates instructed and examined.	
12. Session shall keep a Baptized Members' Roll. Paper is highly recommended; electronic is optional. For infant baptisms, record full name of infant, parents' names, date of birth and names of persons presenting the child; for adult baptisms, record full name of the individual, including the full maiden name of a married woman, parent's names, and date of birth of those being baptized.	

13. Minutes should record full names of those received into membership and how they are received: confession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or certificate of transfer. If by certificate, the church transferred from should also be recorded.	
14. Record in full names of those transferred to other churches, including the names of any children and whether or not they are baptized. If the member is a ruling elder and/or deacon, a notation to that effect should also be made. The record should also include the name of the church to which they are transferring.	
15. Session shall keep both an Active Members' and Affiliate Members' Roll. <i>(an Inactive or Friends of the Church Roll is optional)</i>	
16. Session shall keep a register of baptisms, ruling elders, deacons, and installed teaching elders with dates of service. Paper is highly recommended; electronic is optional.	
17. Regular (at least quarterly) financial reports received by Session.	
18. Election of a treasurer by the session with length of term noted, or if elected previously note end of term date.	
19. Election of a clerk with length of term noted, or if elected previously note end of term date.	
20. Roster(s) of currently serving ruling elders, deacons, and trustees, with end of term date.	
21. Electronic Voting Policy in your bylaws or standing rules (covering voting by email and/or meeting by electronic means).	<i>Yes or No, and if not applicable, why?</i>

ANNUAL CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

The items following shall be included in the minutes annually:

Item	Page #/Comments
22. Annual review of the membership rolls.	
23. Instruct, examine, ordain, install and welcome new ruling elders and deacons (and if not, why not).	
24. Budget established and approved annually by the session.	

25. Full annual financial statement included in the session minutes.	
26. Annual financial review of all books and records for the church.	
27. Annual review of financial records of all church organizations (<i>accounts separate from primary church accounts</i>).	
28. Annual review of terms of call for pastor. (<i>By congregation for installed pastors, by session for all other pastors</i>)	
29. Annual review summary of all committees and organizations under its nurture. (<i>an annual report may be included in session record, but must be presented to the congregation, and so noted</i>)	

CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS:

The following is a checklist for Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Congregation:

Note: both ecclesiastical (church) and corporate business may be done at the same congregational meeting. In most cases the business for each is the same.

Item	Page #/Comments
30. An annual meeting of the congregation is held.	
31. Special meetings of the congregation are properly called and the business to be transacted is specified in the call for the meeting..	
32. A quorum is attested to.	
33. A moderator is named.	
34. The minutes are attested (signed) by the moderator and the clerk/secretary for the meeting.	
35. A statement that the congregation <u>acted</u> on the terms of the pastoral call (<i>installed pastors only</i>).	
36. Full annual financial statements are reported to the congregation.	
37. All minutes of meetings of the congregation are included in the session minutes book.	

PRESBYTERY REQUIREMENTS:

Item	Page #/Comments
38. The General Assembly statistical report is included in the session records.	
39. Notice of any official communications to the session from the Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly, including those by email.	
40. Session notified of previous exceptions to minutes taken by presbytery. Exceptions are to be noted in the minutes and correction is to be made where necessary.	

ONE-TIME CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS: *(indicate if completed)*

For an approved document or one being revised, mark "Y." For no document or in process, mark "N."

Item	Y/N	Date Approved/Comments
41. Approved Sexual misconduct policy.		
42. Approved manual of administrative operations.		
43. Approved Child and Youth protection policy.		

Signature of Clerk of Session _____

Reviewer's Notes

The minutes of _____ were
 ___ Approved without exception ___ Approved with [] exceptions ___ Not approved
 on ___ / ___ /20___ (Date)

Name of Reviewer _____ Church _____

Exceptions (include item number), Commendations, and Comments

For your attention...

There are no more confusing asterisks (“*”). If it is on this review form it is important, and so if it is missing, it is an exception.

There are also far fewer “yes” or “no” options. A page number means “yes,” and no page number suggests “no,” unless the comment explains something out of the ordinary.

#1-9 — For the standard elements of session minutes that happen with every meeting (opening and closing with prayer, quorum, etc.) only TWO page numbers citations are needed. Show they happened in January and February, or any two months, and you don’t need to prove it after that.

NA (“Not Applicable”) is not enough on its own, for any item. Comments may include “no new members,” “no baptisms.

On #23, if you have no instruction, examination, ordination, installation and welcome of new elders or deacons, NA does not explain why.

#5-6 — Electing a commissioner to Presbytery is an important part of our Presbyterian theology and polity. But if that person does not report back to the Session orally or in writing, the important information from that meeting may not be shared.

#12 and #16 recommends (only because I cannot require) that you maintain a paper register for baptisms, weddings, membership, ordinations, and installations. Like Commodore computers and 8-Track tapes from the 1970s, current software and software programs will not last forever. On the other hand, many have birth certificates from the early 1900s, and some will have Bible, books, or photos from the 1800s. Cared for properly, paper will last centuries, and no equipment needed.

Call the Presbyterian Historical Society at (215) 627-1852 or go to www.history.pcusa.org on best practices to preserve your records, and how to digitally record your church’s history and store your materials safely there.

#17 — Financial accountability and transparency are vital. The session should be informed no less than quarterly the church’s financial situation.

#18-20 — It is important that a Session and congregation know when each elected leader’s term is expiring. Recording this at the same meeting each year makes this information available.

#23 — Many churches use email for voting, and in recent years Zoom meetings have become common. But not all of these churches have written guidelines on how and when these electronic means of decision-making can be used. See the Clerk of Session Manual for some guidance to develop written policies that can be agreed upon.

#25 — Churches may have reasons why new ruling elders and/or deacons are not instructed, examined, ordained, installed or welcomed. These should be stated, so that the Committee on Ministry can be informed.

#40-1 — File folders in a cabinet make sense for our immediate storage. As the years pass, however, the first and perhaps only place a person may have find such information will be in your session minutes.

#43-45 — Note that words like “update” and “revise,” suggest there is an existing document which is under revision. You are under the direction of that existing document until you replace it with a new document that has been voted upon. Providing the date of last revision in the Comment section is very helpful, and can be

important to the insurers that cover the Presbytery and its congregations. On the other hand, “in process,” suggests that there is no current authoritative document.

The following items were missed more frequently in this year's review. While some may say "who cares?" in addition to the Book of Order caring, reasons for these being an exception include:

I try to be fair, giving a lot of discretion to the readers who are able to review the entire document. And I am willing to review places where you disagree.

No longer the confusing asterisk (*). Now, like Yoda, "Do or not do." A page number means "Yes," or N/A means that this question does not apply to your congregation for some reason. Where relevant, you may be asked why it did not apply, so you may want to include a note explaining your N/A (for example, you received permission from the Presbytery not to elect and install new elders).

9 Required by the Book of Order

16 Required by the Book of Order. Also, as years pass, it can be hard to remember when a term starts or ends. Regular notation in session minutes makes this easier to track.

19 Required by the Book of Order. It is important that a commissioner attend from each congregation, not just for their ability to vote on matters, but to report the content of the meeting to the rest of the session.

21 If a congregation has not instructed, examined, ordained, installed, or welcomed new ruling elders and deacons, it suggests that no one has rotated on or off. The Committee on Ministry and/or the Presbytery must grant permission for a church to have no rotation of officers. That permission should be noted in the "Comment" section, or by noting the page number with record of the permission being granted. And yes, it is required by the Book of Order.

24 In the interest of financial transparency, a regular audit, internally or externally, is required. I would recommend that a financial report be presented to the session at each meeting.

36 Required by the Book of Order. Also, file folders in a cabinet make sense for our immediate purposes when it comes to tracking down information. As the years pass, however, the first and only place a person may have access to will be your session minutes. Your individual files will not necessarily be saved in the Presbyterian Historical Society, but your session minutes will be.

39-41 These are required by the Book of Order, and are too important to not be updated and right at hand. When I see words like "update" and "revise," I assume there is an existing document which is under revision. You are under the direction of that existing document until you replace it with a new document that has been voted upon. Providing the date of last revision in the Comment section is very helpful, and can be important to the insurers that cover the Presbytery and its congregations.