

FOG

Officer Training
First Presbyterian Church

Slides

Content of slides used in this training session is a mixture of slides from Paul H. Lang, content from a presentation by Rev. Dan Williams, and content from Office of the General Assembly - PC (USA)



Principles of Order & Government

F-3.01-3.04

Historic Principles of Church Order F-3.01

- “God Alone is the Lord of Conscience . . . Therefore, we consider the rights of private judgement . . . as universal and unalienable.”
- “That in perfect consistency with the above principle . . . every Christian Church . . . is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion . . .; that in the exercise of this right they may, notwithstanding err, . . .; yet even in this case, they do not infringe upon the liberty or rights of others, but only make an improper use of their own.”

Historic Principles of Church Order F-3.01

- "Our Savior . . . appointed officers not only to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments, but also to exercise discipline . . . and that it is incumbent upon these officers . . . to censure, to cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing in all cases, the rules contained in the word of God."

Historic Principles of Church Order F-3.01

- “That truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness and that no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level and represents it as as no consequence what a man’s opinions are”
- “That, while under the conviction of the above principle we think it necessary [to say] that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ . . . exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.”

Great Ends of the Church

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
- The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
- The maintenance of divine worship;
- The preservation of the truth;
- the promotion of social righteousness;
- the exhibition of the kingdom of heaven to the world.

Principles Of Presbyterian Government F3.02

- F-3.0201 One Church
- The particular congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) wherever they are, taken collectively, constitute one church, called the church.

Principles Of Presbyterian Government F3.02

- F-3.0202 Governed by Presbyters
- This church shall be governed by presbyters, that is, ruling elders and teaching elders. Ruling elders are so named not because they “lord it over” the congregation (Matt. 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Teaching elders shall be committed in all their work to equipping the people of God for their ministry and witness.

Principles Of Presbyterian Government F3.02

- F-3.0203 Gathered in Councils
- These presbyters shall come together in councils in regular gradation. These councils are sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly. All councils of the church are united by the nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers as provided in this Constitution. The councils are distinct, but have such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church performed by it through the appropriate council. The larger part of the church, or a representation thereof, shall govern the smaller.

Principles Of Presbyterian Government F3.02

- F-3.0204 Seek and Represent the Will of Christ
- Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ.

Principles Of Presbyterian Government F3.02

- F-3.0205 Decision by Majority Vote
- Decisions shall be reached in councils by vote, following opportunity for discussion and discernment, and a majority shall govern.

Principles Of Presbyterian Government F3.02

- F-3.0206 Review and Control
- A higher council shall have the right of review and control over a lower one and shall have power to determine matters of controversy upon reference, complaint, or appeal.

Principles Of Presbyterian Government F3.02

- F-3.0207 Ordination by Council
- Presbyters (ruling elders and teaching elders) and deacons are ordained only by the authority of a council.

Principles Of Presbyterian Government F3.02

- F-3.0208 Shared Power, Exercised Jointly
- Ecclesiastical jurisdiction is a shared power, to be exercised jointly by presbyters gathered in councils.

Principles Of Presbyterian Government F3.02

- F-3.0209 General Authority of Councils
- Councils possess whatever administrative authority is necessary to give effect to duties and powers assigned by the Constitution of the church. The jurisdiction of each council is limited by the express provisions of the Constitution, with powers not mentioned being reserved to the presbyteries.

The MAIN change

- Mission determines the forms and structures needed for the church to do its work — G-3.0102.
- Do you know what Peace's mission is?

G-3.0201, 2nd paragraph

- 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).

nFOG Aims at “Permissive” governance.

- Not “anything goes.”
- But “permission granting.” nFOG trusts local councils to act in faithful ways to respond to the lordship of Jesus Christ.
- Many “nuts & bolts” which were formerly legislated through the FOG are now meant to be included in a particular council’s manual of operations.

nFOG Aims at "Permissive" governance.

- Moving from "prescriptive," where constitution must specify power and BOO is regulatory.
- Moving to "permissive," where councils are given freedom to act within broad principles.

A new Mindset . . .

- Can we learn to approach our polity not as a set of rules but as a description of our common life?
- Can we change the pattern of creating a rule to address every uncertainty, and learn to apply the broad principles of our polity with creativity and flexibility?

nFOG

- About the “what”
 - basic, broad, principles of governance.
- Not much interested in the “who” or “how.”
 - These are left to individual councils to determine.

Where are things?

- Congregational – meetings: G-1.05
- Session
 - Membership matters: G-1.03
 - Ordered Ministries – Deacons/Ruling Elders: G-2.01-2.04
 - General procedures for Councils: G-3.01
 - Specific items for Session: G-3.02
 - Trustees; Church Property: G-4.01-4.02

10 Important First Steps

Things to do sooner rather than later . . .

10 First Steps

- ① 10 - Study the Foundations!
- ① Remember G-3.0201

10 First Steps

• 9 – Quorum

- Congregational (G-1.0501)
- Session (G-3.0203)
- No more system-wide minimum standard.

10 First Steps

- ① 8 – Notice for Special Meetings
 - ① Both session and congregation
 - ① Notice must be “reasonable,” as locally defined.
 - ① Guard against “unrepresentative action,” RONR p. 20f.

10 First Steps

- ⑦ 7 – Nominations Process G-2.0401
 - ⑦ At least 3 active members, with at least 1 ruling elder currently on session.
 - ⑦ How selected up to congregation.

10 First Steps

- ⑥ 6 – Treasurers' terms G-3.0205
 - ⑥ Elected by Session.
 - ⑥ Supervised by Session – OR delegated by session action to committee/trustees.

10 First Steps

- 5 – Clerk of Session term G-3.0104
 - Elected by Session.
 - Term length set by Session.

10 First Steps

- 4 – Non-active members
 - Inactive roll no longer required
 - “Other participants” G1.0404

10 First Steps

- 3 - Sexual Misconduct Policy G-3.0106
- We have one already . . . "Safe Places"

10 First Steps

① 2 – Preparation & Examination of those elected to serve

- ① Criteria to examine fitness for service
- ① G2.0402; G-2.0403; G-2.0104b

10 First Steps

① 1 – Develop or Amend Sessional

MOO G-3.0106

- ① Standing Policies.
- ① As detailed or as brief as meets our needs.
- ① Help from Presbytery and OGA

10 Important Later Steps

Things to do later rather than sooner . . . but OK
to do now if we like.

10 Later Steps

- ① 10 – Review Mission Study
 - ① Impact on structure, personnel.
 - ① Is Session too big, too small, just right?
G-1.0503

10 Later Steps

- 9 – Inclusiveness & Representation?

- F-1.0403

- G-3.0103

10 Later Steps

⑧ 8 – Financial Matters

- ⑧ Do we budget by mission-mindset, or by some other criteria? G-3.0205
- ⑧ Property & Liability Insurance G-3.0112
- ⑧ Full financial Review G-3.0113

10 Later Steps

- ⑦ 7 – New Members: how received and nurtured
 - ⑦ Baptism-related issues?
 - ⑦ G1.0303–1.0304
 - ⑦ Review & evaluate integrity of membership.

10 Later Steps

⑥ 6 – Membership Rolls

- ⑥ Keep current through just management (G-3.0204)
 - ⑥ Active, Baptized, Affiliate Rolls

10 Later Steps

- ⑥ 5 - Regular Observance of the Lord's Supper

10 Later Steps

- ④ 4 – Regular Meetings of Session G-3.0203
 - ④ Gathering congregational leaders for:
 - ④ Measuring, Discerning, Ruling.

10 Later Steps

- ① 3 – Engaging in Work of Presbytery G-3.0202
 - ① More than just Commissioners
 - ① Shared Initiatives
 - ① Other councils too!

10 Later Steps

• 2 – Develop / Amend Congregational Bylaws

- <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/sample-bylaws-congregations/>

10 Later Steps

① 1 – Develop or Amend Sessional

MOO G-3.0106

- ① Ongoing process
- ① Change to address changing missional needs of congregation.