

# **BYLAWS AND INSTRUMENTS**

## **PRESBYTERY OF MICHIGAN AND ONTARIO**

Revised April 25, 2020

Office of the Assistant Clerk  
[all-of-grace.org/pres](http://all-of-grace.org/pres)

## Preamble

The general powers and duties of the presbytery are clearly stated in the Form of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory for the Public Worship of God of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. This code of Bylaws for the Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario comprises only such rules as are necessary to facilitate the proper handling of its business. These Bylaws are subordinate to the Standards of the church as a whole. All cases that may arise that are not provided for in the following Bylaws shall be governed by *Robert's Rules of Order*.

## Article I. Name of the Presbytery

The name of the presbytery shall be the Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

## Article II. Bounds of the Presbytery

The bounds of the presbytery shall include those determined by the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. They include the lower portion of Michigan (Upper Peninsula not included), the northern portion of Indiana north of the southern boundaries of Newton, White, Cass, Miami, Wabash, Huntington, and Allen counties (the counties traversed by US Highway 24), and the province of Ontario, Canada.

## Article III. Meetings of Presbytery

A. Stated meetings of presbytery shall be three each year, to be held as follows: the third Friday in January, the last Saturday in April, and the third Saturday in September. All meetings shall convene at 9:00 AM and conclude no later than 6:00 PM that evening. All ministerial members of the presbytery, except for those who have been emeritated, are expected to attend stated meetings. One ruling elder from each congregation shall be commissioned by the respective sessions to each stated meeting of presbytery. Ministers who cannot attend and sessions that cannot send a commissioner will request in writing (giving reasons) to have their absence excused, and presbytery shall act on absences and requests for excuse.

B. Presbytery shall not call meetings on Sunday, in keeping with the spirit of the requirement of our Form of Government, "Meetings of the presbytery shall be composed, insofar as possible, of all the ministers on the roll and one ruling elder from each congregation" (FG XIV.3).

C. Stated meetings of presbytery may be canceled or postponed with the agreement of the moderator, clerk and the chairmen of all standing committees. The agreement of all the parties listed is required to cancel or postpone a stated meeting of presbytery. Any such action shall be recorded in the minutes of the next stated meeting of presbytery, along with the reasons for such action.

D. The session of the host church and the moderator and the clerk shall constitute a committee on arrangements, and its duty shall be to provide hospitality for the presbytery. The pastor of the host church shall be chairman and shall report at the opening session of presbytery.

## Article IV. Officers

### A. Officers

1. A moderator shall be elected at the September meeting to begin his year of service at the opening of the January meeting and to continue until the opening of the following January meeting.
2. A vice moderator shall be appointed at the September meeting to serve for the same period as the moderator.
3. A stated clerk shall be elected at the January meeting of every even-numbered year to serve for a period of two years. The stated clerk shall receive \$750.00 annually.
4. An assistant clerk shall be elected at the January meeting of every even-numbered year, to serve for a period of two years. In the case of a vacancy in the clerk's office, the assistant clerk shall assume the functions of interim clerk until a successor can be elected. The assistant clerk shall receive \$750.00 annually.

### B. Duties

1. The **moderator's** duties shall be to open each meeting with the appropriate devotional exercises, preside at each meeting and make all necessary appointments. He shall be able to use his own discretion to limit debate on any issue, unless his decision is overruled by a two-thirds vote. The moderator has the authority to appoint temporary committees between stated meetings of presbytery.
2. The **vice moderator** shall perform all the functions of the moderator in the moderator's absence.
3. The **stated clerk** shall:
  - a. Keep a roll of the permanent members of the presbytery.
  - b. Inform absentees of presbytery's actions on their absence and/or request for excuse.
  - c. Keep a record of the transactions of presbytery in permanent form on numbered pages.
  - d. Number and file all papers referred to in the minutes, preserving them from loss.
  - e. Refer promptly to the appropriate standing committee all pertinent matters submitted to him between meetings.
  - f. Produce at the stated meetings of presbytery its records, the standards of the church and the latest published minutes of the General Assembly.
  - g. Submit a docket for each stated meeting.
  - h. Write a letter of appreciation to the host church of each stated meeting.

- i. Call attention to all acts of the General Assembly of which he has received official notice and to all other communications that may come into his hands.
- j. Communicate officially any acts of presbytery to the parties whom they concern and duplicate the minutes, sending a copy to each minister and each clerk of session, including a copy for ruling elder commissioners.
- k. Keep a copy of the Bylaws constantly corrected to date and deliver to each minister and session that may come under jurisdiction of presbytery a copy of the same.
- l. Certify, upon request, the standing of all ministers on the roll of presbytery.
- m. Inform the stated clerk of the General Assembly following each stated meeting of the presbytery of all changes that should be included in the OPC Directory or Yearbook, including changes in the status of mission works and particular congregations and ministers.
- n. Perform such other duties as may rightfully fall upon the stated clerk.
- o. Deliver to his successor all presbyterial records promptly and in good order.
- p. Process all calls received.

(1) Upon receipt of a call from another presbytery, the clerk shall send notification of this fact to both the minister who has been called and to his session.

(2) When a minister receives notification that a call directed to him is in the hands of the clerk, he shall be requested to consult with the session on the matter and to decide within two weeks.

(3) If the minister expresses his desire to accept a call, when such a call is presented to him, the session shall call a congregational meeting at which the congregation will be asked to concur with him in requesting the presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship.

(4) When the minister expresses his desire to accept a call, and the congregation concurs with him in requesting the presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship, a meeting of presbytery shall be called as soon as possible to review the situation. If the call is found in order, it shall be placed into the hands of the minister, who shall state his intentions. The presbytery, if it feels it is advisable, shall then dissolve the pastoral relationship and appoint a moderator for the session.

(5) When a minister expresses his desire to decline a call, the clerk shall immediately send notification of this fact to the presbytery from which the call originated.

(6) In case a congregation refuses to concur with its pastor requesting the presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship, and the pastor still desires to accept a call, a meeting of presbytery shall be called as soon as possible to review the situation. If the call is found in order, it shall be presented to the minister, who shall state his intentions. The presbytery then shall hear both the pastor and the representatives of the congregation and shall render its decision.

q. Keep on file a copy of Presbytery Policies and Guidelines on Pastors' Salaries as presbytery's official policy guide and standard and provide copies to presbyters or sessions that request them.

#### 4. The **assistant clerk** shall:

a. Send notices for all meetings of the presbytery in accordance with Form of Government XIV.7.

b. Record the transactions of all meetings of the presbytery, prepare them for inscription in the

permanent minute book and place them in the hands of the stated clerk for distribution and inscription.

c. Serve as treasurer:

- (1) Receiving and disbursing funds as directed by the presbytery.
- (2) Making a financial report at each meeting of the presbytery.
- (3) Submitting the books for audit at each April meeting.

d. Inform the General Assembly's Committee on Pensions of the name and address of each licentiate or minister who is received into the presbytery.

e. Perform such other duties as the presbytery or stated clerk may request.

## **Article V. Expenses**

A. Travel expenses of all presbyters traveling to and from presbytery meetings and committee meetings shall be paid by the treasurer, upon submission of travel vouchers, at the rate of \$.30 per mile. Other traveling expenses will be paid at the discretion of the presbytery.

B. All proper and necessary expenses of committees or clerks of presbytery shall be paid by the treasurer upon submission of an expense report by the committee chairman or stated clerk.

C. No commissioner shall receive any portion of his travel expenses unless he is present at all sessions of the presbytery meeting or has been excused by an action of presbytery.

## **Article VI. Permanent Committees**

### **A. Bills and Overtures**

1. Shall consist of three presbyters.
2. Shall recommend to presbytery responses to bills and overtures.
3. Shall gather, summarize, and/or index the relevant documents and data for appeals and complaints, and recommend the whole order of the proceedings, but not the disposition of the appeals and complaints.
4. Shall give aid, upon request from individuals and/or sessions, in formulating complaints and appeals which may come before Presbytery.
5. When possible, shall seek pastorally to resolve disputes surrounding complaints and appeals before such complaints and appeals are brought before Presbytery, and in so doing shall correspond with the Visitation Committee.
6. If a member of the committee must recuse himself in a particular case, the moderator may appoint a member of presbytery to augment the committee temporarily.

### **B. Candidates and Credentials**

1. The Candidates and Credentials Committee shall exist for the purpose of assisting the

Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario in receiving ministers into the presbytery according to the provisions of the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, providing oversight to those under care and licentiates.

2. The committee shall consist of at least five members, two being ministers and two being ruling elders, elected according to the provisions of these Bylaws, Article VII.B.
3. Shall conduct the examination of those applying to come under care.
4. Shall conduct the examinations of those applying for licensure or ordination. All examinations may be conducted by the committee or by an examiner(s) appointed by and immediately responsible to the committee, except the examination in Christian faith and life, examination in theology, and the trial sermon. These three must be conducted on the floor of presbytery.
5. Shall conduct the examination of ordained ministers coming from outside the OPC who are requesting to be received (FG XXIII.12.a). All examinations may be conducted by the committee or by an examiner(s) appointed by and immediately responsible to the committee, except the examination in Christian faith and life and examination in theology. These two must be conducted on the floor of presbytery.
6. Shall arrange for an interview on the floor of presbytery of ministers coming to the presbytery from other presbyteries of the OPC (FG XXII.10).
7. Shall maintain records of all licentiates or ministers with outstanding requirements for further education which have been required by the presbytery, and shall report on progress (or lack thereof) at the September stated meeting of the presbytery.
8. Shall administer the Student Aid Fund according to the direction of the presbytery and shall encourage candidates for the gospel ministry to apply to the committee for financial assistance during their training if it is needed (see Instruments VI).
9. Shall maintain an up-to-date list of names, addresses, and phone numbers of men under care and licentiates.
10. Shall immediately communicate to the General Assembly's Committee on Pensions the names and addresses of all ministers received into the presbytery by ordination or transfer.
11. Shall deal with other matters referred to it by the presbytery.

### **C. Christian Education**

1. Shall consist of three presbyters (at least one being a minister).
2. Shall promote the work of Christian education within the presbytery.
3. Shall promote and conduct the ministry of fellowship within the presbytery throughout the year primarily through the use of fellowship meetings (see Instruments VII). The purpose of the meetings is for the building up of the congregations in the regional church as the ordained officers, especially the preachers of the Word, are enriched by participation in this presbyterial fellowship. Fellowship meetings shall ordinarily consist of prayer, a study (exegetical, theological, historical, etc.), and a sermon. No presbytery business shall be conducted at fellowship meetings, since fellowship meetings are different in nature from the rules of stated and special meetings (FG XIV.3, 7). Ministers, ruling elders who desire to preach, and candidates for the ministry shall participate in preparing studies and sermons in rotation. Each candidate for

licensure and ordination shall ordinarily be required to present at least one study and one sermon to a fellowship meeting.

4. May form subcommittees involving any member of the regional church to better carry out its task.

#### **D. Church Extension**

1. Shall consist of three ministers and three elders.
2. Shall oversee the establishment of new churches within the bounds of presbytery.
3. Shall confer with churches seeking admission to presbytery.
4. Shall deal with all other relevant matters referred to it by presbytery.

#### **E. Church Visitation**

1. Shall consist of four presbyters: two presbyters from the western part of the presbytery and two from the eastern part of the presbytery.
2. Shall oversee and arrange for visits to each church of the presbytery normally every two years by means of a joint meeting with the session. The visitation committee shall usually consist of the membership of the Church Visitation Committee. However, an alternate special visitation committee may be appointed that shall consist of two ministers and one ruling elder. The visitation committee quorum shall consist of two members, one being a minister.
3. Shall ask questions and discuss the general health and well-being of the church, chiefly as it is included under the following heads.
  - a. The evangelistic and teaching ministry of the church
  - b. The administration of the sacraments
  - c. Administrative discipline
  - d. Judicial discipline
  - e. Adequacy of the pastor's financial support
4. Shall be informed of the pastor's terms of call in each church and include these terms within its yearly reports to the presbytery.
5. Shall review with the session the spiritual life of the church, advising and encouraging the session concerning the spiritual welfare of the church. All matters of judicial discipline shall be reviewed. When it is deemed appropriate, and with the approval of the session, the committee may meet with members of the congregation.
6. Shall report a summary of its visit, especially noting any issues that may be pertinent to the regional church, to the next stated meeting of presbytery and, upon approval by presbytery, shall send a copy of its report to the session involved.
7. Shall keep a list of each church and mission work of the presbytery.
8. Shall have power to solicit funds from the churches of presbytery for the support of organized churches and mission works with special needs, except for those of a diaconal nature.

## **F. Diaconal**

1. Shall consist of three deacons and a minister; one deacon is to be elected each year and the minister once every three years.
2. Shall promote the work of disaster relief among the churches of our presbytery, in coordination with the OPC Committee on Diaconal Ministries, other OPC presbyteries, and the broader church in general.
3. Shall communicate and promote various diaconal ministry opportunities uniquely available to the churches of our presbytery.
4. Shall have authority to aid local diaconates. Decisions made by the committee may be made by meeting together, telephone or letter, and members will be reimbursed for expense incurred.
5. Shall have authority to seek aid from the denominational Committee on Diaconal Ministries in meeting local needs.
6. Any minister may request aid from the committee, normally after requesting aid from his local diaconate. Ordinarily, a diaconal need is of temporary duration growing out of extraordinary circumstances.
7. Shall establish a bank account.
  - a. A treasurer shall be elected by the committee and need not be a member of the committee.
  - b. Each local congregation shall be asked to contribute periodically to maintain a balance of approximately \$1,000 in the account.
  - c. In cases of extreme need the committee shall appeal to the local congregations for additional funds.
8. Shall present its books for auditing each year at the April stated meeting of presbytery.

## **G. Ecumenicity**

1. Shall consist of two ministers and one ruling elder.
2. Shall arrange for the exchange of fraternal delegates with corresponding classes/presbyteries of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC and shall report on the committee's activities to each stated meeting of presbytery.
3. Shall be responsible for developing closer ties with other churches and shall establish and develop fraternal relations with churches of Reformed and Presbyterian persuasion.
4. Shall conduct studies to clarify for presbytery the biblical principles of church unity.
5. Shall gather information to help presbytery clarify similarities and differences between the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and other churches of like faith and practice.

## **H. Foreign Missions**

1. Shall consist of at least three presbyters, at least one of which shall be a minister, and at least one member of the Hub-Spokes Committee(s) within our regional church.
2. Shall promote support for and interest and involvement in foreign missions among the



congregations of the presbytery in coordination with the Committee on Foreign Missions of the General Assembly, through activities such as:

- a. Networking for short-term foreign missions opportunities for OPC members;
  - b. Encouraging pastors and elders to go on short-term mission trips;
  - c. Publicizing missions conferences and missionary speakers throughout the presbytery.
3. Shall confer with the denominational Committee on Foreign Missions regarding the needs of missionaries and raise awareness of and funds for special projects on foreign mission fields in cooperation with the Hub-Spokes Committee(s) within our presbytery.
  4. Shall work with the General Assembly's Committee on Foreign Missions to plan itineraries for visiting missionaries who wish to visit churches within the presbytery.
  5. Shall deal with all other relevant matters referred to it by the presbytery.
  6. Shall meet at least annually.

### **I. Presbyterial Membership**

1. Shall consist of three presbyters.
2. Shall require ministers not in pastoral charges (FG XXIV.4, 5; XXVI.3) and ministers laboring outside the bounds of presbytery (FG XXVIII.4) to make an annual report to the presbytery at the September stated meeting. These ministers may also include in their report any personal needs of significance to their ministry.
3. Shall maintain contact with ministers emeritus and shall report annually to the presbytery at the April stated meeting the activities in the gospel ministry of these ministers and any personal needs of significance which they may have.
4. Shall keep record of attendance at all stated and special meetings, and report annually at the January meeting.
5. Shall recommend action on requests for excuse at each stated meeting of presbytery.
6. Shall recommend action on requests for late arrival and early departure from presbytery.
7. Shall oversee members on the roll of the regional church.

### **J. Sessional Records**

1. Shall consist of three presbyters, including at least one minister and at least one ruling elder (each from different sessions).
2. Shall report to the September stated meeting of presbytery each year.
3. Shall receive a copy of the previous year's minutes and statistical report from each session by March 1 at the latest.
4. Shall request one minister and one ruling elder from the presbytery to review each set of minutes, which review shall be completed no later than June 1.
5. Shall enclose a copy of the Rules for Review of Sessional Records with each set of minutes sent out for review. The following definitions will be used:

- a. *Notations*: typographical errors, misspellings, improper punctuation, non-prejudicial misstatements of fact, and failure to provide sufficient information or identification.
- b. *Exceptions*: violations of presbytery's Rules for Keeping Sessional Records and actions which appear not to conform to the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
6. Shall communicate all exceptions to the appropriate session in order to allow for a response prior to reporting to the presbytery.
7. Shall communicate matters of urgent concern to the Church Visitation Committee immediately.
8. All sessions shall bring their minute books to the September stated meeting to be signed by the moderator.

## **K. Youth Ministry**

1. Shall consist of three members of the regional church (at least one being a presbyter).
2. Shall organize annual presbytery youth camps, seasonal youth retreats and regular mission/service projects for the youth of the presbytery.
3. Shall encourage, promote and assist youth ministry among the congregations of the presbytery, through activities such as:
  - a. Sponsoring regular fellowship meetings for OPC youth leaders, youth workers, and student leaders from the churches of the presbytery;
  - b. Encouraging communication and cooperation between the youth ministries of the churches of the presbytery;
  - c. Publicizing OPC youth conferences, youth missions and youth ministry opportunities from across the denomination.
  - d. May form subcommittees involving any member of the regional church to better carry out its task.

## **L. Ontario Committee**

1. The Ontario Committee shall consist of all this presbytery's ministers serving within the geographic boundaries of Ontario.
2. The committee shall inform the appropriate government authorities regarding the ministerial status of this presbytery's ministers serving within Ontario, and any changes in their ministerial status.
3. The committee shall report annually, at the January stated meeting, regarding any reports that they have submitted to the Ontario government.

## **M. Spring Offering Committee**

1. The Spring Offering Committee shall consist of the chairman from each of the following committees: CHEX, Foreign Missions, Christian Education, and Diaconal. The chairman of the Diaconal Committee shall serve as convener.
2. The committee shall annually recommend the purpose of the offering to the presbytery, usually

at the January meeting.

3. This presbytery-wide offering will go to a variety of uses and needs, either in part or in whole, from assisting in the building of a new facility, to facility-related upkeep, to missions needs, support for seminarians, etc.
4. The offering will usually be received in the spring of the year.

#### **N. Nominations Committee**

1. The committee shall be composed of the moderator and two clerks of the presbytery.
2. The committee shall report only at the April meeting, unless there is a resignation prior to the September or January meeting.
3. The committee shall be responsible for letting the sessions know what positions would be available at the April meeting.
4. The committee shall be responsible for notifying the members of each committee whose terms are set to expire at the April meeting, to see if the individual desires to have his name remain on the ballot. This would include ruling and teaching elders (and deacons, where applicable).
5. The committee shall be designated first to report at the April meeting.
6. This does not preclude nominations being able to be made from the floor by a presbyter at the time of each committee's report and the election for that committee.

#### **O. Deadline for Committee Reports**

Each committee shall submit its report in writing to the clerk by January 1 (for the January meeting), April 15 (for the April meeting) and September 1 (for the September meeting) for distribution before each respective stated meeting. Communications and reports received by the clerks less than five days before a meeting will not be considered at that meeting unless the presbytery, by a two-thirds majority, votes to take up the matter.

### **Article VII. Elections**

A. When the number of nominees exceeds the number of persons to be elected, if, after the first balloting, the required number of persons is not elected, the name of the person receiving the lowest number of votes shall be dropped, providing that the resultant number of remaining nominees is never less than one more than the number of persons to be elected.

#### **B. Election of Permanent Committees**

1. Elections shall be held at the April stated meeting.
2. Nominations shall be from the floor, and the elections shall be by ballot, except when the number of nominees does not exceed the number of vacancies.
3. Each committee shall be divided as equally as possible into three classes, with each class to serve a three year term and one class to be elected each year.
4. When presbytery initially forms the classes of a committee, the nominee(s) with the highest majority shall be elected to the longest term, the nominee(s) with the second highest majority to

the next longest term and the nominee(s) with the third highest majority to the shortest term.

5. In case of a resignation an election shall be held to fill the unexpired term.

C. Procedure for Electing Commissioners to General Assembly (see Instruments V)

## **Article VIII. Amendments**

These Bylaws, except for this article, may be temporarily suspended by a two-thirds vote of those present at a stated meeting of presbytery. No bylaw shall be permanently suspended, amended or repealed nor shall any new bylaw be added except at a stated meeting of the presbytery by a two-thirds vote of the members present, the amendment having been proposed in writing to the previous stated meeting.

## **Article IX. Trustees**

A. The moderator, vice moderator, stated clerk and assistant clerk shall constitute the trustees of the presbytery. If necessary, additional trustees may be elected by the presbytery.

B. The term of office of trustees shall coincide with their term of office as officers of the presbytery, or in the case of non-officers, for a term to coincide with the election of the moderator.

C. The trustees shall have the care, custody and control of the real and personal property of the presbytery, subject to the direction of the presbytery, and the trustees may receive, sell or convey such property subject to the direction of the presbytery, and as provided by, and pursuant to, the laws of the state of Michigan.

D. The trustees may designate persons who are not trustees to serve as custodians, caretakers, a treasurer and an assistant treasurer for the care, custody and control of the property of the presbytery; and the trustees may conduct their business through rules and procedures that they adopt.

E. The trustees, however, are responsible to the presbytery and shall report annually to the January stated meeting, and as required by the presbytery. The presbytery shall have the right to audit and investigate the actions, records and books of the trustees through a committee of the presbytery, which committee may include, if necessary, outside auditors and accountants.

F. The trustees shall maintain documents and records and keep suitable books of account for all property under their care, custody and control.

## **Article X. Situs of the Presbytery**

The situs of the presbytery shall be:

The Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario  
The Orthodox Presbyterian Church  
12710 17 Mile Road  
Gowen, MI 49326-9419

## Article XI. Articles of Incorporation

The articles of incorporation for the Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, shall be those adopted by a meeting of presbytery held January 15, 2005 at Ada, Michigan.

### Instruments

#### I. The Docket

Normally the business of the stated meeting shall be according to the following docket.

##### A. General items.

1. Devotional service (led by moderator)
2. Constituting prayer
3. Roll call
4. Report of the Committee on Arrangements
5. Reading and approval of minutes (corrections are to be submitted to the clerk in writing, if possible, before the meeting)
6. Presentation and disposition of communications (each summarized by the clerk in writing, and read in full only at his discretion or by common consent of the presbytery)
7. Adoption of docket
8. Report of the stated clerk
9. Appointment of temporary committees:
  - a. Auditing
  - b. Absences and Excuses
  - c. Others
10. Reception of ministers and presentation of calls
11. Report of the permanent committees (these will be scheduled on a regular rotating basis, except for the Presbyterial Membership Committee, which shall report last, with special requests docketed at the discretion of the moderator and the clerk)
  - a. Bills and Overtures
  - b. Candidates and Credentials
  - c. Christian Education
  - d. Church Extension
  - e. Church Visitation
  - f. Diaconal

- g. Ecumenicity
  - h. Foreign Missions
  - i. Presbyterial Membership
  - j. Sessional Records
  - k. Youth Ministry
12. Report of the treasurer
  13. Report of ministerial advisors
  14. Report of special committees (submitted in writing to the clerk for mailing with docket, unless approved for docket by a three-fourths vote)
  15. Report of temporary committees
  16. Miscellaneous business (items must be submitted to the clerk in writing before the docket is approved; other such business will be presented only at the discretion of the moderator)
  17. Set place of next stated meeting
  18. Adjournment
- B. Special Items
1. At the January meeting (even-numbered years only, see Bylaws IV.A.3–4)
    - a. Election of stated clerk
    - b. Election of assistant clerk
  2. At the April meeting
    - a. Annual report of the stated clerk
    - b. Election of all standing committees
  3. At the September meeting
    - a. Election of moderator
    - b. Set the amount recommended as per capita giving for presbytery and General Assembly
    - c. Consider communications from General Assembly
    - d. Elect commissioners to General Assembly

## **II. Rules for Keeping Presbyterial Minutes**

- A. The minutes of the presbytery shall be kept in lock-type record books with numbered pages.
- B. The minutes shall be typewritten or printed, or reproductions from typewritten or printed masters, and shall be neat and legible.
- C. The minutes shall state the date and place of each meeting and the times of convening and adjourning.
- D. If a meeting is held at a date, time or place other than that for which it is called, such facts shall be recorded in the minutes, together with a statement of the reason(s) therefor.

- E. The name of the person serving the meeting as moderator shall be indicated in the minutes.
- F. If the stated clerk is not present, a clerk pro tem shall be selected, and his selection shall be indicated in the minutes.
- G. The minutes shall state the names of those present at each meeting, using the following categories.
1. Ministers
  2. Elder commissioners (with indication as to the churches they represent)
  3. Alternate elder commissioners (with indication as to the churches they represent)
- H. The names of absent ministerial members and of churches not represented by elder commissioners shall be indicated in the minutes of stated meetings.
- I. The portion(s) of the call for a special meeting stating the purpose of the meeting shall be recorded verbatim in the minutes.
- J. The minutes shall identify those who have offered opening and closing prayer at each meeting.
- K. The minutes of each meeting shall be approved by the presbytery at the same or a subsequent meeting, such approval being recorded in the minutes. When minutes of a previous meeting (or meetings) are approved, the date(s) of said meeting(s) shall be given.
- L. The minutes shall state that which is required to describe intelligibly the motions adopted and the business transacted; the terms of all ministerial calls as described in the Form of Government, chapter XXII:9, the entire call shall be recorded in the minutes; and such additional information as the presbytery deems desirable for historical purposes.
- M. Each main motion shall normally be recorded in a separate paragraph. Subsidiary and procedural motions may be recorded in the same paragraph with the main motions to which they pertain. Main motions may be recorded in the same paragraph if they are closely related and pertain to the same item of business.
- N. The minutes of the meetings of the presbytery shall appear in the minute book in the order in which the meetings occur. When a previous action of the presbytery is referred to, the date of the meeting in which the action occurred shall be given.
- O. Insofar as possible, erasures, interlineations and footnotes shall be avoided.
- P. Documents and their specific location may be referred to in the minutes and filed separately in a file maintained by the clerk; however, such documents shall be included in the minutes only by transcription.
- Q. The stated clerk shall be responsible for the custody of the minutes of the presbytery, and he shall be responsible for the presentation at each stated meeting of the minutes or such portion thereof as the presbytery may direct.
- R. The minutes of each meeting of the presbytery shall be signed by the clerk of the meeting.
- S. The stated clerk shall be responsible for the presentation to the General Assembly for approval of all minutes of the presbytery that have been approved by the presbytery and not previously approved by the General Assembly. All other minutes of presbytery to which specific reference is made in the minutes submitted to the General Assembly for approval shall be submitted for the

purpose of information. Presbytery minutes shall be placed in the hands of the stated clerk of the assembly no later than the start of the assembly's recess for advisory committee meetings.

T. A copy of the rules for keeping presbyterial minutes shall be kept with the minutes of the presbytery.

U. A copy of the Bylaws of the presbytery, corrected as amended, shall be kept with the minutes.

V. The presbytery shall record in its minutes any exceptions taken to sessional minutes in its annual review of those minutes.

### **III. Rules for Keeping Sessional Records**

A. The records shall be:

1. Legibly written or typed
2. In chronological order
3. On consecutively numbered pages. Erasures, interlineations and footnotes shall be avoided. A format where each item or paragraph is numbered is encouraged.

B. The record for each meeting shall state:

1. Time and place of the meeting
2. Names of all members, indicating whether present and absent, and all guests. In the case of congregational meetings the number of members present is acceptable.
3. That the meeting was opened and closed with prayer
4. The name of the moderator of the meeting
5. That records from the previous meeting were reviewed and approved. The record referred to should be listed by date. If any corrections are made, these may be shown in the record of the current meeting when they were made, or the original record may be corrected.
6. All votes and proceedings which are necessary to give a complete history of the church, including:
  - a. Election of elders and deacons
  - b. Changes in actively serving ruling elders and deacons
  - c. Reception and dismissal of members
  - d. Dates of celebration of the Lord's Supper
  - e. Baptism of infants and adults
  - f. Marriages and deaths
  - g. Actions of church discipline, including restorations
  - h. The appointment of the elder commissioner to presbytery

C. The full name of applicants for church membership shall be recorded, including:

1. Baptismal status [NOTE: When a covenant child becomes a communicant member, "X, covenant child, (son of) (daughter of) Y" is appropriate. "Covenant child" indicates baptismal



status].

2. For married females, the maiden name and indication of husband's name or an indication of "widow of" [NOTE: When a wife is received with the husband, "X and Y (last name), both baptized" is sufficient indication of the marital relationship]. 3. For minors, an indication of whether male or female (if not apparent from the given name) and the parents' name [NOTE: When children are received with parent(s), "X and Y, A (son), B (daughter) (last name), all baptized" is sufficient indication of the family relationship].

D. All records of members joining by letter of transfer shall state from what church the members came.

E. All records of dismissal shall state to what congregation the member is recommended.

F. The record of each meeting shall be signed by the clerk of that meeting before the minute book is presented to the moderator of presbytery for his signature.

G. When previous actions of the session are referred to, the page on which it is recorded and/or the date (and paragraph number if available) shall be cited.

H. Once each year, at the end of that year's records, a facsimile of the statistical report to the denomination shall be inserted. This statistical report shall be on numbered pages.

I. The record book of the session shall include formal records and proceedings of all congregation meetings. Any other records (e.g., corporation meeting records) necessary to record any changes in the congregation's support of its pastor(s) and any changes in the terms of the call shall also be included. All such records shall be on numbered pages.

J. The session shall take note in its records of exceptions taken by presbytery to its records as presented. A letter from the clerk of session to the stated clerk of presbytery shall normally be sent within two months of the presbytery meeting where such exceptions were taken and shall include:

1. The exception taken, date of presbytery meeting and item number in presbytery minutes
2. The correction or explanation adopted by the session to rectify the exception

K. All sessional records shall be presented annually to the Sessional Records Committee of presbytery for its review.

#### **IV. Rules for Review of Sessional Records**

A. The Sessional Records Committee shall report all recommendations for approval of minutes without exception and recommendations on exceptions. All exceptions will be included in the minutes of presbytery.

B. After the report of the Sessional Records Committee the presbytery shall vote on the recommendation of the Committee. The following indications shall be used to indicate scope of approval:

1. *Approved without exception.* Records are approved; no action by the session is required.
2. *Approved with exceptions.* Records are approved, but the session must respond as required in Instruments III.J.
3. *Not approved.* The records are not approved. In such cases, detailed and specific requirements,

as explained on the Sessional Records Exceptions and Notations Form, must be reviewed and the records resubmitted at the next presbytery meeting.

C. Should the presbytery desire to see the records book of any particular session, it shall be presented at the next stated meeting.

D. Should any session desire to challenge any exceptions made by the Sessional Records Committee, it should formally communicate this to the stated clerk. The session should then bring its records book to the next stated meeting. A temporary committee shall be erected during the stated meeting to review the challenge. Should the challenge be upheld, the report of the Sessional Records Committee will be amended.

## **V. Procedure for Electing Commissioners to General Assembly**

A. The choice of ministerial commissioners to General Assembly shall be made at the September stated meeting of presbytery, and at that meeting the churches shall be advised of their eligibility to select ruling elder commissioners. The selection of commissioners shall be concluded at the January stated meeting of presbytery to replace any unable to attend.

B. Selection of ministerial commissioners to the General Assembly

1. One-third of the commissioners shall be selected by turn from the top of the current selection list of ministerial members of presbytery. Newly enrolled ministers shall be placed at the bottom of the current selection list.

2. The remaining commissioners shall be elected by presbytery.

3. A foreign missionary ministerial member of presbytery shall automatically be elected to attend General Assembly once during his furlough.

4. Alternates of those chosen by turn shall be those next in order from the current selection list. Alternates for those elected by presbytery shall be elected up to 50% of the total commissioners. The alternate receiving the highest number of votes shall be first alternate, the one receiving the next highest, second alternate, etc.

5. Upon the adjournment of the General Assembly a new selection list for the next General Assembly shall go into effect. The new selection list shall be drawn up from the current selection list in this manner: commissioners selected by turn or elected who are unable to attend General Assembly shall be placed at the bottom of the current selection list in the order their names appeared on the list but before those who do attend. Commissioners who do attend shall be placed in the order their names appeared on the list below those who were unable to attend. This then becomes the current selection list for the next General Assembly.

C. Selection of ruling elder commissioners to the General Assembly

1. This selection shall be made by the sessions from churches entitled to send commissioners. The selection of eligible churches shall be made from the top of the current selection list of churches.

2. Alternate eligible churches shall be selected from the remaining churches in the order in which they appear on the list.

3. Newly enrolled churches shall be placed at the bottom of the current selection list.

4. The sessions of eligible churches shall notify the stated clerk in writing at least six weeks before the January stated meeting of their choices of commissioners or of their inability to send any. The stated clerk shall then notify the alternate churches, which thus become eligible to select commissioners. The presbytery shall finalize the list of ruling elder commissioners and alternate ruling elder commissioners at the January stated meeting of presbytery and shall certify them to the General Assembly by the stated clerk of presbytery.

5. Upon the adjournment of General Assembly a new selection list shall be drawn up from the current selection list of churches in this manner: eligible churches unable to send a ruling elder commissioner shall be placed at the bottom of the current selection list in the order the churches appeared on the list but before those who do send commissioners. Churches that do send commissioners shall be placed in the order their churches appeared on the list below those churches that were unable to send commissioners. This then becomes the current selection list for the next General Assembly.

## **VI. Rules for Administering the Student Aid Fund**

A. The Student Aid Fund may be used either to provide funds for seminary students or for internships. The amount of assistance shall depend upon the resources of the Fund.

B. For a seminary student to qualify for receiving aid to assist with the cost of seminary, he must:

1. be either under the care of or licensed by the presbytery
2. be studying at a theological seminary to meet the requirements of FG XXIII.3
3. be preparing specifically for the gospel ministry (cf. FG VI–IX)
4. demonstrate financial need

C. The amount of assistance for seminary students shall not ordinarily exceed \$500 per semester to any individual (or up to \$2,000 per semester if matching funds are provided by his home church).

D. For a church to qualify for receiving aid to assist with an internship, it must:

1. ordinarily meet the requirements for mentoring churches for the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training of the General Assembly's Committee on Christian Education and submit a duplicate of its application to the presbytery's C&C Committee
2. demonstrate financial need

E. The amount of assistance for an internship shall not ordinarily exceed \$600 per month for up to one year.

F. The committee shall include the Student Aid Fund in its annual budget request, and may also receive special gifts.

G. Matching fund proposals and funding for internships exceeding six months must be approved by presbytery.

H. The committee should also encourage needy students to apply for the General Assembly Christian Education Committee's interest free student loan.

## VII. Schedule for Conducting Fellowship Meetings

- A. Fellowship meetings shall be held from time to time as determined by the Christian Education Committee or the presbytery.
- B. Each meeting shall ordinarily begin at 12:30 PM and conclude no later than 4:00 PM.
- C. Each particular church within the presbytery shall be placed on a rotation to host a fellowship meeting as its facilities and resources permit.

## VIII. Policy Statement and Guidelines for Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse at Presbytery-sponsored Youth Events

A. **Preventing Abuse.** All children and volunteers of the presbytery should be able to enjoy a safe, fair, and healthy environment in which to grow in Christ and develop healthy Christian friendships. As such, the OPC Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario has instituted several guidelines for all volunteers who work with our children and youth at presbytery-sponsored events. These guidelines have been set in place in order to protect children and youth from any abusive behavior, and help our adult volunteers avoid situations that might lead to allegations against them, including false allegations. The presbytery currently recognizes five types of abusive behavior that we are seeking to prevent.

1. *Emotional abuse*: attacking the emotional well-being and stability of an individual.
2. *Physical abuse*: harming the physical well-being of an individual.
3. *Sexual abuse*: harming an individual through inappropriate sexual conduct or lewd behavior.
4. *Ethical abuse*: harming an individual by convincing him or her to do an act that is against his or her mental, physical and spiritual interests.
5. *Neglect*: harming an individual by abandoning, ignoring or rejecting basic needs.

B. **Operational Guidelines.** In order to prevent situations where abuse is most likely to occur, the presbytery has established a set of operational and supervisory guidelines by which all adult volunteers and adult participants should abide. They are as follows:

1. More than one adult should always be present with children and youth at all presbytery events and all related activities during those events.
2. All activities should be done in an open area or room, not in a private or restricted location (e.g., rooms with no windows or behind a closed door).
3. Some forms of touching are suitable as long as they are respectful, appropriate and follow these guidelines:
  - a. Touching should be in response to the need of the child, not the need of the adult.
  - b. Touching should be with the child's permission.
  - c. Resistance to touching must be respected.
  - d. Touching should never include the breast, the buttocks or the groin.
  - e. Touching should be done in the open, not in private.
  - f. Touching should have a brief, limited duration.

g. Touching is age and developmentally dependent; what is appropriate changes over time.

4. At each presbytery event, the Youth Committee will organize a periodical inspection of rooms, offices, work areas and other areas where children and adults are together. We will also check bathrooms, closets and other areas where sexual abuse might occur.

5. At each presbytery event, the Youth Committee will designate two “confidential counselors”—one male and one female—to whom any student, camper or other child can go at any time, without special permission, to discuss any problems he or she may be having.

6. A fair and discreet investigation will occur into all alleged incidents of abuse, with due respect for people’s privacy and confidentiality.

**C. Presbytery Response Plan.** In the case of an allegation of abuse, the Youth Committee—on behalf of the presbytery—shall follow these guidelines:

1. We shall take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim’s family—showing care and support to prevent further hurt, pain or anger; and fostering an atmosphere where reconciliation between all involved parties can be reached outside of formal litigation.

2. We shall treat the accused with dignity and support, respecting the need for privacy and confidentiality, and shall not approach the accused until the safety of the young person is secured.

3. If reconciliation or a right understanding of the situation is not agreed upon by the Youth Committee and the accuser, we shall immediately contact the moderator of presbytery, our church insurance company and our church attorney. The Committee shall not attempt an in-depth investigation, but shall leave it to professional assistance familiar with such procedures.

4. We shall report any suspected abuse required by state law to the appropriate enforcement agency.

5. We shall document all our efforts at handling any alleged incidents.

6. We shall designate a specific spokesperson (ordinarily the Youth Committee chairman) on behalf of the church to communicate to the presbytery—and the media, if necessary—in a discrete, informed and diplomatic way, in order to present a consistent and unified message. We will not deny the incident occurred when there is clear evidence to the contrary, nor minimize the incident, nor blame the victim or the victim’s family, nor assume guilt of the accused, but will seek to deal equitably with all parties involved.