

THE
BOOK OF
CHURCH ORDER
OF
THE ORTHODOX
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Containing the Standards of
Government, Discipline, and Worship

Together with
Suggested Forms
for Use in Connection with
the Book of Discipline
and Particular Services
and
The Recommended Curriculum
for Ministerial Preparation

— 2020 edition —

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Contents

Preface.....vii

THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

I. Christ, the King and Head of the Church.....1
II. The Church.....3
III. The Nature and Exercise of Church Power.....4
IV. The Unity of the Church.....6
V. Offices in the Church8
VI. Ministers or Teaching Elders9
VII. Evangelists10
VIII. Pastors 11
IX. Teachers12
X. Ruling Elders.....13
XI. Deacons.....14
XII. Governing Assemblies16
XIII. The Local Church and Its Session17
XIV. The Regional Church and Its Presbytery.....20
XV. The Whole Church and Its General Assembly23
XVI. Congregational Meetings26
XVII. Congregations without Pastors.....28
XVIII. Moderators.....29
XIX. Clerks.....30
XX. Ordination and Installation.....31
XXI. Licensing Candidates to Preach the Gospel.....33
XXII. Calling a Minister.....37
XXIII. Ordaining and Installing Ministers44
XXIV. Dissolving Ministerial Relationships64
XXV. Electing, Ordaining, and Installing Ruling Elders
and Deacons67
XXVI. Divesting from Office75
XXVII. Missions78

XXVIII.	Ministers Laboring outside the Church	79
XXIX.	Organizing and Receiving Congregations	81
XXX.	Organizations of Members of the Church	86
XXXI.	Incorporation and Corporations.....	87
XXXII.	The Constitution and Its Amendment.....	89

THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE

I.	The Nature and Purposes of Discipline.....	91
II.	Jurisdiction.....	92
III.	Steps in the Institution of Judicial Process	98
IV.	The Trial of Judicial Cases.....	102
V.	Cases without Full Process	110
VI.	Censure and Restoration.....	112
VII.	Appeals.....	116
VIII.	Dissents and Protests	118
IX.	Complaints	119

THE DIRECTORY FOR THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD

	Preface	121
I.	The Principles of Public Worship	123
II.	Elements of Ordinary Public Worship.....	133
III.	The Administration of the Sacraments	141
IV.	Public Reception of Church Members	156
V.	Special Occasions of Public Worship.....	167

SUGGESTED FORMS FOR USE IN CONNECTION WITH THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE

I.	Charge and Specifications.....	169
II.	Citation of Accused.....	170
III.	Citation of Witness.....	171
IV.	Notice of Intention to Appeal (in Judicial Cases).....	172
V.	Appeal (in Judicial Cases)	173
VI.	Complaint	174
VII.	Appeal (in Administrative Cases)	175
VIII.	The Public Imposition and Removal of Censures	176

SUGGESTED FORMS FOR PARTICULAR SERVICES

I. The Solemnization of Marriage	181
II. The Burial of the Dead.....	189
III. Thanksgiving for a Church Building.....	207

THE RECOMMENDED CURRICULUM FOR MINISTERIAL PREPARATION IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH	213
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Index	221
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Preface

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is governed by three sets of documents: its primary, secondary, and tertiary standards (cf. Form of Government, Chapter XXXII, Section 1). The primary standard of the Church is the Word of God, contained in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. Standing above the Church's constitution, the Word of God is "the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him" (Shorter Catechism, Q/A 2). Subordinate to the Word of God is the constitution, consisting of two sets of standards. The doctrinal standards of the Church (the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) are its secondary standards, and the standards of government, discipline, and worship comprise its tertiary standards.

The book that you hold in your hand contains the tertiary standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church: its Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory for the Public Worship of God. While printed separately from the secondary standards, they are not conceived, nor should they be used, in isolation from them. Several sections of the doctrinal standards refer directly or indirectly to worship and ecclesiology, such as those dealing with the sufficiency of Scripture, Christian liberty and liberty of conscience, religious worship and the Sabbath day, the civil magistrate, the church, the sacraments, church censures, and synods and councils.

The genius of Presbyterian church government lies in its appreciation for the value of such tertiary standards. They do not replace or compete with the Scriptures. Rather, they set forth rules and procedures by which the church corporately interprets and applies the Word of God. That is, this *Book of Church Order* provides the effective means by which the teaching of Scripture is applied to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's government, discipline, and worship. As Presbyterians have put this in the past, a book that rightly orders the

church is not necessary for the *being* of the church (since there are true churches that do not follow these rules and procedures), but is necessary for the *well-being* of the church. The rules and procedures set forth in this book will promote and encourage the spiritual health of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The differences in authority among the primary, secondary, and tertiary standards come to expression in two important respects. First, the language of the church officer ordination vows takes into account the relative weight of these standards. Ministers, elders, and deacons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are required to *believe* the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and practice, to *sincerely receive and adopt* the Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in Scripture, and to *approve of* the government, discipline, and worship of this Church. There is a lessening of the required commitment to the lower levels of these standards. Second, the standards are distinguished by the processes by which amendments may be made to them. The primary standard of Scripture cannot be altered, the secondary standards of doctrine may be amended only with difficulty and rarely, and the tertiary standards of church order may be more easily and frequently revised.

This 2020 edition of *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* represents the current understanding of what this branch of the church believes the Scriptures teach about the government, discipline, and worship of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was in 1941, five years after the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, that its General Assembly ordered the first edition of *The Book of Church Order* to be printed. In 1979 the General Assembly approved a substantially rewritten Form of Government. A major revision of the Book of Discipline was adopted in 1983. Beginning in 1995, further approved changes to these tertiary standards could ordinarily come into effect only in years ending in 5 or 0. And the General Assembly completed a sixty-two-year process of revising the Directory for the Public Worship of God by authorizing the publication of a special edition of these standards of government, discipline, and worship in 2011 (instead of 2010).

This edition of *The Book of Church Order* has been prepared in accordance with instructions of the General Assembly, in consultation with the stated clerk of the Assembly. The Committee on Christian Education has taken on the responsibility of publishing and distributing the book. Since the publication of the 2015 edition, no amendments have been made to any of these tertiary standards, though a few grammatical corrections have been made. In accordance with the Form of Government, Chapter XXXII, Section 2, this particular edition of the book will remain in use in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church until at least 2025.

Ross W. Graham, *stated clerk*
Willow Grove, Pennsylvania
November 2019

THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

Chapter I Christ, the King and Head of the Church

1. Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government is, whose name is called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and justice, from henceforth even forever, having all power given unto him in heaven and in earth by the Father, who raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come, and put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all; he being ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things, received gifts for his church and gave offices necessary for the building of his church, for making disciples of all nations and perfecting his saints.

2. There is therefore but one King and Head of the church, the only Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, who rules in his church by his Word and Spirit. His mediatorial office includes all the offices in his church. It belongs to his majesty from his throne of glory not only to rule his church directly but also to use the ministry of men in ruling and teaching his church through his Word and Spirit, thus exercising through men his own authority and enforce-

ing his own laws. The authority of all such ministerial office rests upon his appointment, who has ordained government in his church, revealed its nature to us in his Word, and promised his presence in the midst of his church as this government is exercised in his name.

3. Christ orders his church by the rule of his Word; the pattern of officers, ordinances, government, and discipline set forth in Scripture is therefore to be observed as the instruction of the Lord. Church government must conform to the scriptural pattern and follow the specific provisions revealed in the New Testament. In those circumstances not specifically ordered by Scripture the church must observe the general rules of the Word. Among the biblical admonitions applicable to all circumstances are those requiring that all things must be done decently, in order, and for edification. A particular form of church government is bound to set forth what Christ requires for the order of his church and to arrange particular circumstances only in the manner, to the degree, and for the purposes that the Lord of the church has appointed in Scripture. The presbyterian form of government seeks to fulfill these scriptural requirements for the glory of Christ, the edification of the church, and the enlargement of that spiritual liberty in which Christ has set us free. Nevertheless, while such scriptural government is necessary for the perfection of church order, it is not essential to the existence of the church visible.

4. Jesus Christ, having ascended into heaven, abides in his church by the Holy Spirit whom he has sent. Through his Spirit he has given his Word revealing his ordinances; through the Spirit also he exerts his saving and governing power in the teaching of his Word and the administration of his ordinances. Only by the gifts and calling of the Spirit are men endued and qualified for office in Christ's church.

Chapter II

The Church

1. Jesus Christ, being now exalted far above all principality and power, has erected in this world a kingdom, which is his church.

2. The universal church visible consists of all those persons, in every nation, together with their children, who make profession of saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and promise submission to his commandments.

3. In accordance with the teaching of Scripture, the many members of this church universal are to be organized in local and regional churches, confessing a common faith and submitting to a common form of government.

4. The work of the church, in fellowship with and obedience to Christ, is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness. The means appointed by Christ through which the church does this work include the confession of the name of Christ before men; the exercise of fellowship in encouraging one another; the reading, teaching, and preaching of the Word of God; praying; singing; fasting; administering baptism and the Lord's Supper; collecting and distributing offerings; showing mercy; exercising discipline; and blessing the people.

Chapter III

The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

1. The power which Christ has committed to his church is not vested in the special officers alone, but in the whole body. All believers are endued with the Spirit and called of Christ to join in the worship, edification, and witness of the church which grows as the body of Christ fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplies, according to the working in due measure of each part. The power of believers in their general office includes the right to acknowledge and desire the exercise of the gifts and calling of the special offices. The regular exercise of oversight in a particular congregation is discharged by those who have been called to such work by vote of the people.

2. Those who join in exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction are the ministers of the Word or teaching elders, and other church governors, commonly called ruling elders. They alone must exercise this authority by delegation from Christ, since according to the New Testament these are the only permanent officers of the church with gifts for such rule. Ruling elders and teaching elders join in congregational, presbyterial, and synodical assemblies, for those who share gifts for rule from Christ must exercise these gifts jointly not only in the fellowship of the saints in one place but also for the edification of all the saints in larger areas so far as they are appointed thereto in an orderly manner, and are acknowledged by the saints as those set over them in the Lord.

Government by presbyters or elders is a New Testament ordinance; their joint exercise of jurisdiction in presbyterial assemblies is set forth in the New Testament; and the organization of subordinate and superior courts is founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, expressing the unity of the church and the derivation of ministerial authority from Christ the Head of the church.

3. All church power is only ministerial and declarative, for the

Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority; all its decisions should be founded upon the Word of God. “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship” (Confession of Faith, Chapter XX, Section 2).

4. All church power is wholly moral or spiritual. No church officers or judicatories possess any civil jurisdiction; they may not inflict any civil penalties nor may they seek the aid of the civil power in the exercise of their jurisdiction further than may be necessary for civil protection and security.

5. Nevertheless, church government is a valid and authentic jurisdiction to which Christians are commanded to submit themselves. Therefore the decisions of church officers when properly rendered and if in accord with the Word of God “are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in his Word” (Confession of Faith, Chapter XXXI, Section 2).

Chapter IV

The Unity of the Church

1. Since the church of Christ is one body, united under and in one God and Father, one Lord, and one Spirit, it must give diligence to keep this unity in the bond of peace. To this end the church must receive those endued with gifts of Christ as Christ himself, must submit to those whose call to govern in the church has been properly acknowledged, and in particular must learn of those with gifts of teaching the Word of God. Further, since every Christian is endued with some gift for the edification of the body, he must minister this gift to the church as a faithful steward. Church government must maintain this fellowship in Christ and in the gifts of the Spirit and seek its restoration when it has been disrupted through schism.

2. It is the right and duty of those who rule in the church of God to maintain order and exercise discipline, for the preservation both of truth and duty. These officers and the whole church must censure or cast out the erroneous or scandalous, always observing the requirements of the Word of God, and seeking the honor of Christ's name, the good of his church, and the reclamation of the offender.

3. The manifestation of the unity of the church requires that it be separate from the world. Apostasy in faith and life is destructive of the fellowship in Christ; only by rejecting such error can Christian fellowship be maintained. There are many antichrists, many false apostles and teachers. From these the church must turn away, and those who steadfastly hear the voice of false shepherds and follow them cannot be regarded as the sheep of Christ. There are organizations which falsely call themselves churches of God, and others which once were churches, but have become synagogues of Satan. Communion with such is spiritual adultery and an offense against Christ and his saints.

4. The visible unity of the Body of Christ, though not altogether

destroyed, is greatly obscured by the division of the Christian church into different groups or denominations. In such denominations Christians exercise a fellowship toward each other in doctrine, worship, and order that they do not exercise toward other Christians. The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error, and some have gravely departed from apostolic purity; yet all of these which maintain through a sufficient discipline the Word and sacraments in their fundamental integrity are to be recognized as true manifestations of the church of Jesus Christ. All such churches should seek a closer fellowship, in accordance with the principles set forth above.

Chapter V

Offices in the Church

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ established his church of the new covenant on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The apostles were appointed to be witnesses to the risen Christ, testifying in the Holy Spirit to what they had seen and heard, heralding the gospel to the world, and grounding the church in the teaching of Christ. Together with the prophets they spoke by revelation, recording in the Scriptures of the New Testament the fullness of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. When their testimony was completed, their calling and office were not continued in the church and the powers and signs that endued and sealed their ministry ceased.

2. Our Lord continues to build his church through the ministry of men whom he calls and endues with special gifts for teaching, ruling, and serving. Some of these special gifts can be most profitably exercised only when those who possess them have been publicly recognized as called of Christ to minister with authority. It is proper to speak of such a publicly recognized function as an office, and to designate men by such scriptural titles of office and calling as evangelist, pastor, teacher, bishop, elder, or deacon. There are diversities of ministry within any office, for every man is called to be a steward of his own gifts. At the same time, a general designation of office may be applied to a group of functions within which separate offices could be distinguished.

3. The ordinary and perpetual offices in the church are those given for the ministry of the Word of God, of rule, and of mercy. Those who share in the rule of the church may be called elders (presbyters), bishops, or church governors. Those who minister in mercy and service are called deacons. Those elders who have been endued and called of Christ to labor also in the Word and teaching are called ministers.

Chapter VI

Ministers or Teaching Elders

1. The ministry of the Word is a calling of God to stewardship in the gospel. In this ministry there is a diversity of gifts that are essential to the discharge of evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching functions.

2. Every minister of the Word, or teaching elder, must manifest his gifts and calling in these various aspects of the ministry of the gospel and seek by full exercise of his ministry the spiritual profit of those with whom he labors. As a minister or servant of Christ it is his duty to feed the flock of God, to be an example to them, to have oversight of them, to bear the glad tidings of salvation to the ignorant and perishing and beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, to exhort and convince the gainsayer by sound doctrine, and to dispense the sacraments instituted by Christ. Among those who minister the Word the Scripture distinguishes the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher.

3. He who fills this office shall be sound in the faith, possess competency in human learning, and be able to teach and rule others. He should exhibit holiness of life becoming to the gospel. He should be a man of wisdom and discretion. He should rule his own house well. He should have a good report of them that are outside the church.

4. Every minister shall be a member of a regional church and has communicant fellowship in any local congregation of that regional church. The presbytery, with the concurrence of a ministerial member, may request a session within its bounds to exercise pastoral care over him in its behalf. A session, with the concurrence of the presbytery, may grant the right to vote in the congregation to any ministerial member of the regional church.

Chapter VII

Evangelists

1. Jesus Christ, to whom is given all power in heaven and in earth, has commanded his church to make disciples of all the nations. From the throne of his glory he sent forth the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, to empower the witness of the church to the gospel. While it is the calling of every believer to confess Christ before men, and while God gives particular gifts and calling to some to minister the Word, and while every minister of the Word must evangelize in the fulfillment of his calling, there are some who are particularly called by Christ and his church as evangelists. Ordinarily such men shall preach the Word free of pastoral charge in a particular flock in order that they may labor to bring in other sheep. And to those sheep whom Christ has brought in, evangelists shall administer the sacraments until a congregation shall have been regularly organized. Since the gifts and functions of evangelists are necessary until the end of the age, this ministry is permanent and not confined to the apostolic period.

2. The evangelist, in common with other ministers, is ordained to perform all the functions that belong to the sacred office of the minister. Yet distinctive to the function of the evangelist in his ministry of the gospel are the labors of (a) a missionary in a home or foreign mission field; (b) a stated supply or special preacher in churches to which he does not sustain a pastoral relation; (c) a chaplain in institutions or in military forces; (d) an administrator of an agency for preaching the gospel; and (e) an editor or similar ministry through the press and other means of communication.

Chapter VIII

Pastors

Christ's undershepherd in a local congregation of God's people, who joins with the ruling elders in governing the congregation, is called a pastor. It is his charge to feed and tend the flock as Christ's minister and with the other elders to lead them in all the service of Christ. It is his task to conduct the public worship of God; to pray for and with Christ's flock as the mouth of the people unto God; to feed the flock by the public reading and preaching of the Word of God, according to which he is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, comfort, and evangelize, expounding and applying the truth of Scripture with ministerial authority, as a diligent workman approved by God; to administer the sacraments; to bless the people from God; to shepherd the flock and minister the Word according to the particular needs of groups, families, and individuals in the congregation, catechizing by teaching plainly the first principles of the oracles of God to the baptized youth and to adults who are yet babes in Christ, visiting in the homes of the people, instructing and counseling individuals, and training them to be faithful servants of Christ; to minister to the poor, the sick, the afflicted, and the dying; and to make known the gospel to the lost.

Chapter IX

Teachers

1. A teacher is a minister of the Word who has received particular gifts from Christ for expounding the Scripture, teaching sound doctrine, and convincing gainsayers, and is called to this ministry.

2. A minister may serve a local congregation as a teacher if there is at least one other minister serving as pastor. The teacher may also give instruction in a theological seminary; or teach the Word in a school, college, or university; or discharge this ministry in some other specific way, such as writing or editing in the field of Christian religious education. He shall take a pastoral oversight of those committed to his charge as teacher, and be diligent in sowing the seed of the Word and gathering the harvest, as one who watches for souls.

Chapter X

Ruling Elders

1. Christ who has instituted government in his church has furnished some men, beside the ministers of the Word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereto. Such officers, chosen by the people from among their number, are to join with the ministers in the government of the church, and are properly called ruling elders.

2. Those who fill this office should be sound in the faith and of exemplary Christian life, men of wisdom and discretion, worthy of the esteem of the congregation as spiritual fathers.

3. Ruling elders, individually and jointly with the pastor in the session, are to lead the church in the service of Christ. They are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals. Evils which they cannot correct by private admonition they should bring to the notice of the session. They should visit the people, especially the sick, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant. They should pray with and for the people. They should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors.

Chapter XI

Deacons

1. The Scriptures designate the office of deacon as distinct and perpetual in the church. Deacons are called to show forth the compassion of Christ in a manifold ministry of mercy toward the saints and strangers on behalf of the church. To this end they exercise, in the fellowship of the church, a recognized stewardship of care and of gifts for those in need or distress. This service is distinct from that of rule in the church.

2. Those chosen to this office should be of great faith, exemplary lives, honest repute, brotherly love, warm sympathies, and sound judgment.

3. In order to facilitate the performance of the duties of their office the deacons of each particular church shall be constituted a board of deacons. The board shall choose its own officers from its membership.

4. The board shall oversee the ministry of mercy in the church and shall collect and disburse funds for the relief of the needy. Other forms of service for the church may also be committed to the deacons.

5. In the discharge of their duties the deacons shall be under the supervision and authority of the session. Accordingly, the board shall keep a record of its proceedings and of all funds and their distribution, and shall submit its records to the session once every three months, and at other times upon request of the session. If it seems to be for the best interest of the church, the session may require the board of deacons to reconsider any action, or may, if necessary, overrule it.

6. It is desirable that the session and the board of deacons meet

together at regular intervals to confer on matters of common responsibility.

7. In a church in which there are no deacons, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the session.

Chapter XII

Governing Assemblies

1. All governing assemblies have the same kinds of rights and powers. These are to be used to maintain truth and righteousness and to oppose erroneous opinions and sinful practices that threaten the purity, peace, or progress of the church. All assemblies have the right to resolve questions of doctrine and discipline reasonably proposed and the power to obtain evidence and inflict censures. A person charged with an offense may be required to appear only before the assembly having jurisdiction over him, but any member of the church may be called by any assembly to give testimony.

2. Each governing assembly exercises exclusive original jurisdiction over all matters belonging to it. The session exercises jurisdiction over the local church; the presbytery over what is common to the ministers, sessions, and the church within a prescribed region; and the general assembly over such matters as concern the whole church. Disputed matters of doctrine and discipline may be referred to a higher governing assembly. The lower assemblies are subject to the review and control of higher assemblies, in regular graduation. These assemblies are not separate and independent, but they have a mutual relation and every act of jurisdiction is the act of the whole church performed by it through the appropriate body.

3. Assemblies have the authority to erect committees and commissions and to delegate to them specific interim powers. The membership of such committees and commissions need not be limited to the membership of the appointing assembly when the delegated tasks and powers do not require it.

4. Voting by proxy shall not be permitted in these assemblies, nor shall any one be allowed to vote except when the vote is being taken.

Chapter XIII

The Local Church and Its Session

1. The local church consists of a definite membership organized as a distinct congregation with its officers. Two or more local congregations may be associated together under the government of a single session. The membership of a local congregation consists of communicant and noncommunicant members, all of whom have the privilege of pastoral oversight, instruction, and government by the church.

2. Communicant members are those who have been baptized, have made a credible profession of faith in Christ, and have been enrolled and admitted to all the rights of church membership by the session. Noncommunicant members are the baptized children of communicant members.

3. The officers in local congregations are ministers, ruling elders, and deacons. The number of each is to be determined by taking into account the needs of the congregation and the number of those to whom Christ has given the gifts required for such offices.

4. The session, which is the governing body of the local church, consists of its pastor, its other ministers, and its ruling elders. It shall choose its own moderator annually from among its members.

5. The session shall convene at the call of the moderator, the presbytery, any two members of the session, or upon its own adjournment. A quorum of a session is two ruling elders, if there are three or more, or one ruling elder if there are fewer than three, together with the pastor or one of the pastors of the local congregation. In no case may the session conduct its business with fewer than two present who are entitled to vote.

6. When the pastor is unable to be present, or when for other

reasons it seems advisable, another minister, normally of the same presbytery, acceptable to the session and the pastor, may be invited to be present for counsel; he shall be without vote, but may be elected to moderate the meeting.

When a church is without a pastor, the session shall request the presbytery to appoint a minister, normally of the same presbytery, to meet with them, or shall itself invite such a minister; he shall have the right to vote, and to be elected to moderate the meeting.

When it is impractical without great inconvenience for a minister to attend, those present may conduct business, but the grounds for the call of such a meeting shall be reviewed at the next meeting at which a minister is present.

7. The session is charged with maintaining the government of the congregation. It shall oversee all matters concerning the conduct of public worship; it shall concert the best measures for promoting the spiritual growth and evangelistic witness of the congregation. It shall receive, dismiss, and exercise discipline over the members of the church, supervise the activities of the diaconate, the board of trustees and all other organizations of the congregation, and have final authority over the use of the church property. The session also shall appoint ruling elder commissioners to higher assemblies.

8. The session shall keep the following records: (1) minutes of its meetings, including a record of the administration of the sacraments and changes in the membership of the congregation; (2) minutes of the meetings of the congregation; and (3) rolls of the members of the congregation, both of communicant members and of their baptized children, with the dates of their reception. Such rolls shall designate those members worshipping with a mission work. Births, baptisms, censures, restorations, deaths, and removals shall be noted on these rolls. The session shall submit its minutes and the minutes of the congregation to the presbytery for review at least once every year.

9. The names of members shall be placed upon or removed

from the rolls of the church only by order of the session, and according to the provisions of the Book of Discipline.

When upon the request of a member the session dismisses him to another congregation the clerk shall send a letter commending him to its care, and the clerk of the receiving church shall notify the dismissing church of the date of his reception. When notification is received the clerk shall remove his name from the roll and record the fact in the minutes.

Whenever a member desires dismissal to a church of which the session cannot approve, and he cannot be dissuaded, it shall grant him a certificate of standing, unless the session institutes disciplinary action against him; upon being informed that he has joined such a church the clerk shall erase his name from the roll.

10. If a session shall cease to exist or become so small as to prevent it from working effectively, the presbytery shall provide for an election and ordination of elders from within the congregation; or the presbytery, with the consent of the congregation, may appoint ruling elders or ministers, or both, normally from within the same presbytery, to be an acting session or to augment the existing session temporarily.

Chapter XIV

The Regional Church and Its Presbytery

1. A regional church consists of all the members of the local congregations and the ministers within a certain district. The general assembly may organize a regional church when there are at least four congregations, two ministers, and two ruling elders, within a region.

2. The presbytery is the governing body of a regional church. It consists of all the ministers and all the ruling elders of the congregations of the regional church.

3. Meetings of the presbytery shall be composed, insofar as possible, of all the ministers on the roll and one ruling elder from each congregation commissioned by the respective sessions. Any four presbyters, among whom shall be at least two ministers and one commissioned ruling elder, being met at the time and place appointed, shall be a quorum.

4. The moderator shall be chosen from among its members from year to year, or for some shorter term if the presbytery so determines, and shall serve until his successor is installed.

5. The presbytery has the power to order whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the churches under its care, always respecting the liberties guaranteed to the individual congregations under the constitution. In the exercise of its jurisdiction the presbytery has responsibility for evangelism within the bounds of its region, especially in areas which are not within the sphere of service in any one congregation. Similarly the presbytery shall seek to foster fellowship in worship and nurture in the church as a whole within its region.

The presbytery has the power to organize and receive congregations (cf. Chapter XXIX), to unite and dissolve congregations, at the request of the people and with the advice of the sessions involved, to

visit particular churches for the purpose of inquiring into their state and of taking proper measures to insure that the evils which may have arisen in them shall be redressed. Presbytery shall examine and approve or censure the records of church sessions.

Further, the presbytery has power to receive and issue all appeals, and other matters, that are brought before it from church sessions in a regular manner, subject to the provisions of the Book of Discipline; to resolve questions of doctrine or discipline seriously and reasonably proposed; to condemn erroneous opinions which injure the purity or peace of the church; to take under its care, examine, and license candidates for the holy ministry; and to ordain, install, remove, and judge ministers.

6. It shall be the duty of the presbytery to keep an accurate record of its proceedings and to submit this record to the general assembly for examination at least once each year. The presbytery shall also report to the general assembly each year the licensures, ordinations, the receiving or dismissing of members, the removal of members by death, the organization, reception, union, or dissolution of congregations, or the formation of new ones, and in general, all the important changes which have taken place within its bounds in the course of the year.

7. The presbytery shall meet on its own adjournment; and when any emergency shall require a meeting sooner than the time to which it stands adjourned, the moderator, or, in case of his absence, death, or inability to act, the stated clerk, shall, at the request of any two ministers and two ruling elders, the ruling elders being of different congregations, call a special meeting; the moderator or the stated clerk, as the case may be, if otherwise qualified to do so, may be one of those making the request. For this purpose a circular letter shall be sent, specifying the particular business of the intended meeting, to every minister and the clerk of every session under the jurisdiction of the presbytery, at least ten days prior to the meeting. Nothing shall be transacted at such special meeting besides the particular business for which the judicatory has been convened.

8. Each day's session shall be opened and closed with prayer.

9. Uncommissioned elders of the regional church, and presbyters in good standing in other presbyteries or in churches of like faith and practice, who may be present, may be invited to sit with the presbytery as corresponding members. Such members shall be entitled to deliberate and advise, but not to vote in any decisions of the presbytery.

Chapter XV

The Whole Church and Its General Assembly

1. The whole church consists of all the members of its regional churches.

2. The general assembly, which is the governing body of the whole church, shall consist of not more than one hundred and fifty-five voting commissioners, including the moderator and stated clerk of the previous assembly, the stated clerk of the current assembly, and such ministers and ruling elders as are commissioned by the respective presbyteries in accordance with proportions determined by a previous general assembly. In the event that the general assembly fails to establish such proportions, the next general assembly shall consist of every minister and of one ruling elder from every local church.

3. The general assembly shall meet at least once in every year. On the day appointed for the purpose the moderator of the preceding assembly shall open the meeting and preside until a moderator is chosen. In the event of his absence the member present who was last elected moderator of the general assembly shall preside in his place. Each commissioner shall present his credentials to the clerk of the assembly. Any twenty of these commissioners, of whom at least five shall be ministers and at least five ruling elders, being met on the day and at the place appointed, shall be a quorum for the transaction of business. No commissioner shall have a right to deliberate or vote in the assembly until he has been enrolled.

4. The moderator of the preceding assembly, or a minister appointed by him in his place, shall preach a sermon at the opening of the general assembly. Each session of the assembly shall be opened with prayer. And the whole business of the assembly being finished, and the vote taken for dissolving the present assembly, the moderator shall say from the chair, "By virtue of the authority delegated to

me by the church, let this general assembly be dissolved, and I do hereby dissolve it, and require another general assembly, chosen in the same manner, to meet at _____ on the ____ day of _____ A.D. _____," after which he shall pray and return thanks, and the apostolic benediction shall be pronounced.

5. When any emergency shall require the calling of a general assembly sooner than the time specified by the previous assembly, the moderator of the previous assembly, or in the case of his absence, death, or inability to act, the stated clerk, at the request of twenty presbyters, including at least five ministers, and ruling elders from at least five congregations, shall call a special general assembly. The moderator or the stated clerk, as the case may be, if otherwise qualified to do so, may be one of those making the request. For this purpose a circular letter shall be sent, specifying the particular business of the intended meeting, to every minister and to the clerk of every session at least twenty days prior to the meeting. Nothing shall be transacted at such special meeting except the particular business for which the assembly has been convened.

6. The general assembly shall seek to advance the worship, edification, and witness of the whole church. It shall seek to resolve all doctrinal and disciplinary questions regularly brought before it from the lower assemblies. It shall seek to promote the unity of the church of Christ through correspondence with other churches.

7. The duties peculiar to the general assembly include organizing regional churches, reviewing the records of the presbyteries, and calling ministers or licentiates to the missionary or other ministries of the whole church directly or through its standing committees.

8. The general assembly is not invested with power, by virtue of its own authority, to make pronouncements which bind the conscience of the members of the church. Yet the deliverances of the general assembly, if declarative of the Word of God, are to be received with deference and submission not only because of their fi-

delity to the Word of God but also because of the nature of the general assembly as the supreme judicatory of the church. Deliverances, resolutions, overtures, and other actions which have the effect of amending or adding to the subordinate standards shall not be binding unless they have been approved by the general assembly and presbyteries in the manner provided in this Form of Government for the amendment of the constitution.

Chapter XVI

Congregational Meetings

1. Meetings of the congregation shall be called by the session. A stated meeting shall be held at least once annually to consider the affairs of the congregation. Other meetings shall be called when the session deems it to be for the best interests of the congregation or when requested in writing to do so by one-fourth of the communicant members of the congregation in good and regular standing. Only those and all those persons who are communicant members of the congregation in good and regular standing shall be entitled to vote. Voting by proxy shall not be permitted, nor shall anyone be allowed to vote except when the vote is being taken.

2. The provisions of Section 1 of this chapter shall apply to a mission work which may hold a congregational meeting in its area when duly called by its session or presbytery. Such a congregational meeting may be held when at least one member of the session is present and when a quorum of communicant members of the mission work as designated by the session is present.

3. Public notice of a meeting of the congregation shall be made at the worship services on the two Lord's Days prior to the meeting or by circular letter at least ten days prior to the meeting. When the meeting is called for the transaction of specific matters of business no business shall be conducted except that which is stated in the notice.

4. The moderator and the clerk of the session shall serve as moderator and clerk respectively in congregational meetings. In the event that it is impracticable or inexpedient for either or both of these to serve, the session shall appoint others from among its number, or request a minister or ruling elder of the presbytery to serve.

5. The clerk shall keep a correct record of all the business trans-

acted at the meeting and preserve it with the records of the session. Minutes of the congregational meeting shall be approved by the congregation before the close of the meeting.

6. When the laws of the state require, the congregation shall transact business as a corporation. All other business shall be conducted in the congregational meeting.

7. A congregation may withdraw from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church only according to the following procedure:

a. Before calling a congregational meeting for the purpose of taking any action contemplating withdrawal from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the session shall inform the presbytery, ordinarily at a stated meeting, of its intention to call such a meeting, and shall provide grounds for its intention. The presbytery, through representatives appointed for the purpose, shall seek, within a period not to exceed three weeks after the presbytery meeting, in writing and in person, to dissuade the session from its intention. If the session is not dissuaded, it may issue a written call for the first meeting of the congregation. The call shall contain the session's recommendation, with its written grounds, together with the presbytery's written argument.

b. If the vote of the congregation favors withdrawal, the session shall call for a second meeting to be held not less than three weeks, nor more than one year, thereafter. If the congregation, at the second meeting, reaffirms a previous action to withdraw, it shall be the duty of the presbytery to prepare a roll of members who desire to continue as members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and to provide for the oversight of these continuing members.

c. The presbytery shall be given the opportunity, at any congregational meeting at which withdrawal is being considered, to dissuade the congregation from withdrawing.

Chapter XVII

Congregations without Pastors

1. A congregation without a pastor shall continue to meet on the Lord's Day for the purpose of prayer, the singing of praises, and the hearing of the Word of God. When a minister or licentiate is not available the session shall be responsible for the conducting of services. A sermon or exhortation in accord with the standards of the Church shall be presented by reading, recording, or oral delivery to the congregation.

2. The presbytery may supervise a church that is without a pastor through a ministerial advisor (cf. Chapter XIII, Section 6) or a committee. Such supervision includes cooperation with the session, or with any authorized committee of the particular church, in the supply of the pulpit and in the seeking and securing of a pastor.

3. Under ordinary circumstances only ministers and licentiates of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall be employed as regular supplies in congregations without pastors. However, other ministers or licentiates may be employed as regular supplies upon approval of the presbytery.

Chapter XVIII

Moderators

1. In the judicatories of the church there shall be a moderator chosen from among its members as presiding officer so that business may be conducted with order and dispatch.

2. The moderator is to be considered as possessing, by delegation from the whole body, all authority necessary for the preservation of order, for convening and adjourning the judicatory, and directing its operations according to the rules of the Church. The moderator of the presbytery as provided in Chapter XIV, Section 7, and the moderator of the previous general assembly as provided in Chapter XV, Section 5, of this Form of Government, shall be empowered to convene the judicatory before the ordinary time of meeting.

3. If the moderator is a member of the body over which he presides, he may vote in all decisions of that body.

Chapter XIX

Clerks

Every judicatory shall choose a clerk from among those who are or those eligible to be its members to serve for such a term as the judicatory may determine. It shall be the duty of the clerk to be accountable for the recording of the transactions, to preserve the records carefully, and to grant extracts from them whenever properly required; and such extracts under the hand of the clerk shall be considered as authentic vouchers of the facts which they declare, in any ecclesiastical judicatory and to every part of the Church.

Chapter XX

Ordination and Installation

1. It being manifest by the Word of God that no man ought to take upon himself the office of deacon, ruling elder, or minister, the Scriptures declare that the church shall set men apart by solemn act for its service.

2. Ordination is that act by which men are set apart to the offices of deacon, ruling elder, and minister. It is the church's solemn approval of and public attestation to a man's inward call, his gifts, and his calling by the church.

3. The church shall invest him with the office only when satisfied as to his gifts and only in response to a call to do work appropriate to that office. In the case of deacons and ruling elders their service shall be in the church. In the case of ministers their service normally shall be in the church, though in unusual circumstances it may be, if approved by the presbytery, in nonecclesiastical religious organizations.

4. The ordaining body, before investing a man with office, shall provide, or assure itself that he has received, such training and testing of gifts as may be necessary for the proper performance of the duties required by the office.

5. Ordination shall be performed by the body which examines the candidate. In the case of deacons and ruling elders it shall be by the session, except that when a congregation is without a session the presbytery shall ordain such officers as have been elected by the congregation and approved by the presbytery. In the case of ministers ordination shall be by the presbytery.

6. Installation is the act by which a person who has been chosen to perform official work in the church, having been ordained, is placed in position to do that work. When a man receives his first

call to a service his ordination and installation shall be performed at the same time.

7. The installation of deacons and ruling elders shall be performed by the session except as provided in Section 5, above. The installation of ministers shall be in the charge of the presbytery.

8. When an officer, by reason of advanced age or disability, retires or is retired from a position and is no longer engaged in a service that requires a call in terms of Chapters XXIII or XXV of this Form of Government, the body calling him to that service in which he was last engaged before his retirement may, in recognition of his long and/or meritorious service, designate him “emeritus” with the title of his previous service.