

Guidelines for Session Minutes—Palo Duro Presbytery

"Each council shall review annually or biennially, based on the body's meeting frequency, the proceedings and actions of all entities related to the body, all officers able to act on behalf of the body, and lower councils within its jurisdiction. In reviewing procedures of the lower council, the higher body shall determine whether the proceedings have been correctly recorded, have been in accordance with this Constitution, have been prudent and equitable, and have been faithful to the mission of the whole church. It shall also determine whether lawful injunctions of a higher body have been obeyed" (*Book of Order 2011/2013, G-3.0108a*).

A. Essential Parts

Every set of minutes should contain the following information:

- The name of the church
- The date, time, and place of the meeting
- Whether the meeting is called or stated
- The names of the moderator, elders, and others who are present
- The opening with prayer
- Attesting that a quorum is present
- Approval of minutes of previous meetings
- All main motions, except those withdrawn, and whether the motions pass or fail
- Significant portions of reports
- The time of the meeting's closing
- Closing with prayer
- Attesting by the moderator and the clerk by their signatures

The place of the meeting should be specific such as "The sanctuary" or "Room A of the church." When motions are passed unanimously, it is not necessary to state the unanimity. When motions have dissenting votes, the vote could be recorded by terms such as "by majority" or "with exception." Persons casting dissenting votes may request that their vote be recorded by name. It is neither necessary nor advisable to record the whole discussion prior to a vote; the record should be a very brief summary of any important aspects of the issues brought forward.

The reports presented can be recorded as "received" which indicates the report has been read or heard but does not necessarily indicate agreement with all aspects of the report. The minutes should contain, in addition to any actions taken, only those aspects that might be important to future readers of the minutes.

After the minutes have been approved by the session, they should be placed in the official *Minute Book* and signed by the moderator and the clerk. In this electronic age it is not necessary that minutes actually be typed into the *Minute Book*. Previously printed pages can be photocopied onto the *Minute Book* pages. Electronic storage, in place of paper storage, might not be acceptable because there is no way to attest by signature to the accuracy and correctness of the documents and due to long term storage problems. The *Minute Book* needs to be kept in a secure fireproof environment.

Motions from a committee do not require a second. The minutes should record who makes a motion (when made by an individual) but not who seconds the motion.

B. As Needed

There are some session actions and reports that should be included in the minutes that may or may not occur every month. Those actions or reports that normally occur every month that are to be recorded in the minutes include the following:

- The celebration of the Lord's Supper. The dates and occurrences should be recorded in the minutes subsequent to the celebration.
- Attendance at worship. The number of persons attending each worship service should be recorded. This will permit calculation of average attendance per week for the Session Annual Statistical Report. The attendance at Sunday School could also be included.
- Financial report. Session should receive the financial report. A summary of the report could be included, if desired.

Those actions or reports that normally occur less frequently than every month that are to be recorded in the minutes include the following:

- Authorization to celebrate the Lord's Supper at times other than normal. Session normally has a continuing approval for authorization at regular times such as the first Sunday of every month. The celebration of the Lord's Supper at other times, such as at a church retreat, needs special approval. Session action in receiving and dismissing members. The record should include the full name of the persons and family relationships where appropriate. For those transferring, the name, city, and state of the transferring church should be included. The method of reception (transfer, affirmation of faith, or reaffirmation of faith) should be recorded.
- Session action in transferring members from the active roll to the inactive roll or in removing inactive members from the roll. Active members should not be transferred to the inactive roll until the inactivity has been for a period of at least one year. Inactive members should not be removed from the roll until inactivity has been for a period of at least two years.

- Approval of guest ministers or others to conduct the worship service. At times when the pastor is not present for a worship service, such as during vacation time, the person to conduct the worship service and to preach the Word should be approved by session.
- Authorization and recording of baptisms. The authorization of session is needed for all baptisms. After the baptism, the occurrence should be recorded. The full name, birthdate, and place of birth of the person being baptized and the name(s) of parents(s) for infant baptisms should be recorded.
- Deaths. The death of any member should be recorded.
- Weddings. Any wedding taking place in the church and weddings performed by the pastor either at the church or elsewhere should be recorded.
- Commissioners to presbytery. The election of commissioners to presbytery and the receiving of the commissioners' report to the session after the presbytery meeting should be in the minutes.

C. Annually

Once each year the following items should be approved by session and included in the minutes:

- Annual Statistical Report. This report must be approved by session and included in the minutes.
- Annual budget. Session is responsible for the budget and expenditures of the church. The budget requires approval by session and should be included, at least in summary form, in the minutes.
- Election of the church treasurer.
- Church Nominating Committee. Session needs to appoint its representatives to this committee, one of whom is moderator, and to set the date for the congregational meeting for the election. In many churches this election is held at the annual congregational meeting.
- Annual congregational meeting. Session needs to set the date and time for an annual congregational meeting. If the church is incorporated, this meeting is required by law. Annual reports should be presented at this meeting of the corporation.
- Newly elected elders. Session needs to arrange for the instruction, examination, ordination (where required), and installation of newly elected elders. This also applies to deacons for churches not under the unicameral system.
- Composition of session and congregation with respect to racial ethnic members, women, men, and age groups. These data are to be in the minutes. Since this information is in the Annual Statistical report, including that report in the minutes will fulfill this requirement.

- Pastor's Call. Session needs to call a congregational meeting or include in the agenda of another meeting a review by the congregation of the pastor's call. The pastor's call includes salary, other financial benefits, vacation (minimum of 4 weeks required), and study leave (minimum of 2 weeks required).

D. Other

Each person needs to work out the best ways for handling the preparation of the minutes. One suggestion is to prepare a template for use in taking the minutes during the meeting. This template would include the list of elders' names (to aid in taking the roll) and major category headings with blank spaces for writing in the information. If the meetings do not follow a regular format, the use of a template is limited. Using a template to take minutes may cause some difficulties since it may be difficult to predict how much space to leave. An alternative is to use a checklist. Some people use a template file and a laptop computer and take notes on the computer during the meeting. A good, rather complete agenda makes this approach more feasible.

Either the template or the checklist has an additional benefit in that it will help you and the moderator to remember what needs to be done. This can be carried further by the clerk and the pastor meeting in advance of the session meeting with the purpose of including more details in the template or check list.

When typing the minutes using a computer word processor, it is suggested, again, that a template be established and the information be typed into the appropriate places. This avoids retyping some information such as the list of elders present, and helps ensure that items are not missed.