

for appeal, if a presbytery appointed assessors simply because there was a difference of opinion between the two courts outside the laws of the church .

3. How should the 'resident' members of session regard an assessor appointed to the session by a presbytery? What should be the attitude of an assessor elder?

Why does a session meet in private?

Normally a session meets in private but can open its meetings on carrying a simple motion to that effect. This is because much of the business of the session involves confidential matters that may even involve the good name of members.

What role does the Session Clerk perform in the church?

The Session Clerk has a number of formal duties. Minutes of Session and congregational meetings must be faithfully recorded. All church records must be maintained and kept in safe custody. Correspondence must be written and received. Extract minutes must be supplied when requested. Meeting agendas must be drawn up.

Some business conducted by a Session is very sensitive. This relates to the good name of members of the congregation. Session business is normally conducted in closed court and matters considered in closed court are strictly confined to members of that court. However the Session has the right to maintain a record of proceedings considered extremely sensitive separate from the normal records of the Session. It is the duty of the Session Clerk to seal them and to keep these in a safe place until they are to be destroyed.

The Session Clerk occupies a key position in the affairs of the congregation, formally linking the Minister with the Session and the congregation with the Session. He or she is frequently the Minister's confidante and chief advisor in the affairs of the parish. They

should expect support and encouragement from each other. Loyalty and discretion is important. Private discussions must remain strictly that.

However the Clerk owes a duty of loyalty and service to the congregation and as a result should be a channel by which matters of concern are brought discreetly before the Minister or the Session. The Clerk should be the first to give constructive criticism if such becomes necessary.

In conclusion, the Session Clerk is neither an authority figure nor merely the secretary of the elder's meeting. That office should be seen as a link between the church's leadership and its people and organizations. He or she must be respected by all parties as a person of initiative, high integrity, sound judgement and spiritual maturity.

4. To what extent is the Session Clerk simply the secretary of the Session?

**Elders
Association**



The Role of the Elder in the Session

In this Study:

- What is the Session?
- What are the powers of a session? (Code II 4.02)
- What is an interim Session?
- What happens when an elder comes into conflict with the views of the minister?
- What happens when a session has to act on a matter of moral delinquency?
- What happens when assessors are appointed to a session?
- Why does a session meet in private?
- What role does the Session Clerk perform in the church?

What is the Session?

The church court governing all the affairs and welfare of the local congregation is called the *Session*, and consists of the minister and a body of elected elders.

The Session promotes the spiritual life of the congregation, including worship, pastoral care, Christian education, evangelism and discipline. It has oversight of all the organizations that operate within the congregation.

Members of Session are also ex officio members of the *Committee of Management*, which is the body elected to handle the property and financial aspects of the congregation's activities.

The minister of the congregation acts as the moderator or chairperson of the Session.

Although it is the Presbytery that establishes a Session, its elders are elected to office by their congregations and are ordained for life. However they cannot transfer their membership of a Session to another congregation. In a process similar to the ministers' call, they must wait until their new congregation recognizes their gifts and agrees to their induction.

What are the powers of Session?

According to the Code Part II, 4.02 ...

To the Session belongs the promotion and supervision of the spiritual life of the parish or congregation in regard to worship, pastoral care, education and evangelism and the oversight of all the agencies within the parish or congregation. Among its responsibilities the session shall:

- (a) appoint the times for public worship and the celebration of the sacraments,*
- (b) appoint and direct choir leaders and organists,*
- (c) admit to membership of the congregation,*
- (d) exercise discipline on erring members and restore to membership after discipline has been exercised.*
- (e) receive and grant certificates of membership.*
- (f) exercise pastoral of missionary candidates and missionaries of the congregation.*
- (g) supervise Sunday schools, fellowship associations, young people's societies and adult education programmes,*

- (h) call meetings of the congregation,*
- (i) ordain and induct elders,*
- (j) examine and judge the qualifications of persons elected to the eldership of the congregation,*
- (k) interview applicants from the congregation offering as candidates for the ministry and report to presbytery indicating their support or otherwise of such applicants.*
- (l) exercise pastoral care of candidates for the ministry working within the parish and report annually to presbytery on the involvement of such candidates in the life of the congregation.*
- (m) receive and judge on petitions from the communicants or adherents of the congregation, and*
- (n) transmit all papers which are to be forwarded to the presbytery.*

What is an interim Session?

When there is no session in a parish, for example, if a session has been dismissed or a new congregation has been established, the Presbytery appoints a temporary session comprising a minister and elders either from that congregation or from other congregations. An interim session has all the rights of a regular session.

A Presbytery is obliged to arrange the appointment of a regular session as soon as possible.

What happens when an elder comes into conflict with the views of the minister?

Elders have the obligation to adhere to the decision of their session. However an elder always has the right of his or her own opinion privately, and this may be expressed and voted on within session or within one of the higher courts of the church.

It is improper for a minister to expect an elder to conform to the views of that minister, to support him or her in the courts of the church or to remain silent when there is a clash of views.

1. How should a Session Clerk, or indeed any other elder, raise a point of constructive criticism with the minister?

What happens when a session has to act on a matter of moral delinquency?

Sometimes sessions must exercise discipline over members or elders over a matter of morals or ethics. These powers of session extend to withdrawal of membership or denial of the sacraments although the purpose of such action is to bring an offender to repentance and to a point where privileges can be restored.

Sessions have the power to record the details of any case of moral delinquency in a non-permanent record (a 'record-apart') so that it will never appear in the congregational archives. These records are sealed and after five years they are destroyed

Sessions should never ignore a situation of moral delinquency. It *must* act and a presbytery can intervene when such a failure comes to its notice. In the first instance this is usually an instruction to act on the matter but continued failure can lead to dismissal of the session.

2. How might an elder approach the subject of immoral behaviour that he or she believes is taking place in the life of a member of the parish?

What happens when assessors are appointed to a session?

The presbytery has the authority to appoint additional elders, called 'assessors', to a session within its jurisdiction. These elders will usually be from other parishes. The reasons vary.

It may be that a session does not have enough elders on it to ensure a quorum at a meeting and one or two additional elders are appointed to make up the numbers, usually until new elders are elected.

But it may also be that a session is consistently breaching the law of the church and the presbytery appoints additional elders to ensure that it conforms to those laws.

Assessors have the same powers and rights as ordinary members..

They may be appointed at the request of the session or on the authority of presbytery.

Note that it would be bad form, and probably a basis