

These standards were adopted by the presbytery at its Fall Stated Meeting on November 11, 2025.

Ad hoc Committee on Officer Training

At its spring stated meeting on May 13, 2025, Charleston Atlantic Presbytery established a committee to study the methods, quality, and quantity of training provided to officers by sessions. The moderator appointed the following people to serve on the committee: Jim Deavor (chair), Pie Mikell, Isaac Moore, Cassandra Roper, Daniel Smoak, and Henry Meeuwse.

Attached is our report.

In consultation with the General Presbyter and Stated Clerk, means of assisting sessions in providing training will be explored in 2026, which may include neighborhood one-day classes, multiple synchronous evening classes via Zoom, recorded classes that may be accessed asynchronously, or other possibilities.

RECOMMENDATION

The committee moves that the report be received and that the outline of topics listed in Section 3, Preparation for Service, be adopted as the minimum standard of topics to be covered in officer training.

Officer Training for the Churches of Charleston Atlantic Presbytery

1. Introduction.

Shared leadership is foundational to the mission and ministry of the church. Electing, preparing, equipping, and examining leaders for ministry is mandated by the Book of Order and faithful practice for healthy churches. In Triennial Visits, the Commission on Ministry reviews each church's practices for officer training, and this document describes the basic standards for preparation for ordered ministry in the churches of Charleston Atlantic Presbytery.

2. Officer Elections.

Elections shall follow the procedures outlined in the Book of Order.

Ruling elders and deacons are men and women elected by the congregation from among its members. The nomination and election of ruling elders and deacons shall express the rich diversity of the congregation's membership and shall guarantee participation and inclusiveness (F-1.0403). Ruling elders and deacons shall be nominated by a committee elected by the congregation, drawn from and representative of its membership. Congregations may provide by their own rule for a congregational nominating committee. The rule shall meet the following criteria: (1) the minimum size of the committee as specified in the rule shall be at least three persons; (2) at least one member of the committee shall be an elder currently serving on session; and (3) a majority of those persons on the committee who are eligible to vote shall consist of persons not currently serving on session. The pastor shall serve ex officio and without vote. When elections are held, full opportunity shall always be given to the congregation for nomination from the floor of the congregational meeting by any active member of the congregation. A majority of all the active members present and voting shall be required to elect. G-2.0401

3. Preparation for Service

The Book of Order mandates a period of training. This training is essential in familiarizing candidates with the expectations of service in the office to which they have been called.

When persons have been elected to the ordered ministry of ruling elder or deacon, the session shall provide a period of study and preparation... G-2.0402

The following is a non-exhaustive list of topics (with references where applicable) that should be covered in officer training.

- I. Personal Faith and Calling
- II. The place and understanding of Scripture in the Reformed Tradition
- III. The PCUSA Constitution
 - A. The Book of Order
 1. Foundations of Presbyterian Polity
 - a. Mission of the Church
 - i. Christ is Head of the Church [F-1.0201]
 - ii. The Notes of the Reformed Church [F-1.0303]
 - iii. The Great Ends of the Church [F-1.0304]
 - b. Historic Principles of Church Order
 - i. God alone is Lord of the conscience [F-3.0101a]
 - ii. Mutual forbearance [F-3.0105]
 - iii. Governed by presbyters [F-3.0202]
 - iv. Gathered in councils [F-3.0203]
 - v. Seek and represent the will of Christ [F-3.0204]
 - vi. Decision by majority vote [F-3.0205]
 2. Form of Government
 - a. The Congregation
 - i. Entry into membership [G-1.0303]
 - ii. The ministry of members [G-1.0304]
 - iii. Categories of membership [G-1.04]
 - iv. Meetings of the congregation
 - (1). Annual and special [G-1.0502]
 - (2). Who can vote [G-1.0502]
 - (3). Business that can be considered [G-1.0504]
 - (4). Moderator [G-1.0505]
 - (5). Secretary [G-1.0506]
 - b. Ordered Ministries
 - i. Freedom of conscience [G-2.0105 and footnote]
 - ii. Nominating committee [G-2.0401]
 - iii. Preparation for officers-elect [G-2.0402]
 - iv. Terms of service [G-2.0404]

c. Councils of the Church

- i. Four councils [G-3.0101]
- ii. Officers: moderator, clerk [G-3.0104]
- iii. Committees and commissions [G-3.0109]
- iv. Composition of the session – moderator can vote [G-3.0201]
 - (1) Installed pastor and associates [G-3.0201]
 - (2) Pastor as moderator or assigned by presbytery [G-3.0104]
- v. The session has governing responsibility for the congregation [G-3.0201]
- vi. Responsibilities of the Session
 - (1). Relations with other councils [G-3.0202]
 - (2). Elect commissioners to presbytery
 - (3). Submission of statistical report
- vii. Meet at least quarterly [G-3.0203]
- viii. Calling special meetings and limitations of business [G-3.0203]
- ix. Maintenance of membership rolls [G-3.0204]
- x. Financial responsibilities [G-3.0205]
 - (1) Approval of budget and distribution of benevolences
 - (2) Election of a treasurer
- xi. Serve as trustees unless provided otherwise [G-4.0102]

3. Directory for Worship

- a. Session responsibilities
 - i. Time, place, arrangement of space, etc. [W-2.0303]
 - ii. Authorizing baptisms [W-3.0403]
 - iii. Authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper [W-3.0410]
 - iv. Authorizing weddings on the church property [W-4.0604]
- b. Responsibilities of the pastor [W-2.0304]
- c. Shared responsibilities [W-2.0305]

4. Church Discipline

- a. Power vested in Christ's Church [D-1.01]
- b. Church discipline defined [D-1.0201]
- c. Purpose [D-1.0301]

- d. Role of councils in discipline [D-2.0102]
- e. Remedial Process [D-2.0201 and D-2.0202]
- f. Disciplinary Process [D-2.0301 and D-2.0302]
- g. Anytime any disciplinary action might come into play, contact the stated clerk of CAP!!!!

B. The Book of Confessions

- 1. Particularly described in chapter 2 in the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity section of the Book of Order.
 - a. The Purpose of the Confessions [F-2.01]
 - b. *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda...* [F-2.02]
 - c. Protestant watchwords [F-2.04]
 - d. Great themes of the Reformation tradition [F-2.05]
- 2. Familiarization with the contents of the Book of Confessions and how to use the Book of Confessions for study.

IV. The duties of officers as outlined in the Book of Order.

A. Deacons - ministry of compassion, witness, and service [G-2.0201]

B. Ruling Elders [G-2.0301]

- 1. Measure fidelity to the Word of God
- 2. Exercise leadership, government, and spiritual discernment
- 3. Responsible for the life of the congregation, the whole church, and ecumenical relationships
- 4. Serve as commissioners to higher councils

V. The organization of ministry in a particular congregation

A. Manual of Administrative Operation

B. Congregational By-laws

VI. The questions for ordination [W-4.0404]

4. Examination by the Session.

Training culminates in an examination, by Session, to discern calling and fitness for service. *Examinations should be thorough and may take place in various forms and formats.*

Two places (G-2.0104b and G-2.0402) in the Book of Order give guidelines for the examinations:

Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306)

shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.0404), the Historic Principles of Church Order (F-3.01), and in the principles of participation and representation found in F-1.0403. Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates. G-2.0104b

...after which the session shall examine them as to their personal faith; knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church; and the duties of the ministry. The session shall also confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the ministry appropriate to the order. If the examination is approved, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation. G-2.0402

5. Ordination and Installation.

The Book of Order describes the service of ordination and installation.

The service of ordination and installation shall focus upon Christ and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church, and shall include a sermon appropriate to the occasion. The moderator of session or person authorized to preside shall state briefly the nature of the ministry of ruling elder and deacon. The act of ordination and installation takes place in the context of worship. The order for that service of worship in the Directory for Worship (W-4.04) shall be followed. G-2.0403

6. Invitation.

The Commission on Ministry invites dialogue with churches in developing a local plan for faithful and effective officer training. Being a connectional church, we are delighted to share resources, plan multi-church training events, and identify training facilitators.

7. Appendix.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of resources recommended for officer training.

**Theocademy: Preparation for Ordered Ministry.* What is ordered ministry and why is it important to the Presbyterian Church? What does one need to know to be

an effective leader in the Presbyterian church? These videos will explore and answer these and other questions about ordained leadership in the Presbyterian tradition. <http://www.theoacademy.com>

**Ruling Elders: Workbook One- Formation*

This study guides nominated leaders through the discernment process and helps readers come to terms with the process: election to office, preparation for ordered ministry, ordination, and installation as a ruling elder on the session. This insightful resource may be used in different ways: as a self-guided study, as a group study, and as a ready reference for session reflection. Session members also can use this resource to inform their ongoing ministry.

Section 1: The Call to Service

Section 2: Election to Ordered Ministry

Section 3: Preparation for Ordered Ministry- Personal Faith

Section 4: Preparation for Ordered Ministry- Constitution

Section 5: Preparation for Ordered Ministry- Duties of the Elder

Section 6: Preparation for Session Examination

Section 7: Ordered Ministry

**Coming Alive in Christ: Training for PCUSA Ruling Elders and Deacons Based on the Constitutional Questions-* This is downloadable (<https://equip.pcusa.org/mod/book/view.php?id=13633>) There are 10 sessions

**Selected to Serve: A Guide for Church Officers* by Earl Johnson- This book is an accessible, popularly written 'textbook' for Presbyterian Churches, which covers all aspects of officer training---call, duties, ethics, the Presbyterian Constitution, and much more.