



Nominating Church Officers

*Presbyterian and Reformed
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THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Decision makers bear major responsibility for what is done in any organization. How they are chosen is crucially important. This is as true for the church as it is for any other organization.

A good way to select candidates for leadership positions is through a representative nominating committee. All congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are required by the Constitution to have such a committee to make nominations for the offices of elder, deacon, and trustees. (See G-14.0223-0226) Simply electing such a committee, however, is not all that is necessary to assure a church of capable leaders. How such a committee is constituted, how it conceives its task, how it goes about its work – all have considerable influence on the quality of leadership that governs the congregation.

WHY A NOMINATING COMMITTEE?

A basic principle of Presbyterian government provides church members with the right to choose those who rule over them (G-6.0107).

One way to do this is to have a representative nominating committee. Such a committee can:

- Study the total situation and bring a unified approach to a congregation's search for officers.
- Widen the possibility of finding new candidates for leadership.
- Take the time necessary to explore the nature of each office and a candidate's qualifications to fill it.
- Provide a necessary forum for thorough, open, and confidential discussion of these matters.

The effectiveness of such a committee depends on this:

- the interest and competence of its members
- their understanding of the nature, ministry, and mission of the church
- their awareness of the spiritual nature of office in the church
- their knowledge of the problems and possibilities of their own congregation
- their awareness of the personnel within the congregation
- the counsel they are given
- the support they receive
- the procedure they follow.

SETTING UP A NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Since the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) requires such a committee, care has been given to how it should be constituted. The provisions are as follows:

- Nominations shall be made by a representative nominating committee of active members of the church, which shall include both women and men, giving fair representation to persons of all age groups and of all racial ethnic members of that congregation. At least two members of this committee shall be designated by the session, one of whom shall be currently on the session and serve as moderator of the committee. At least one member of this committee shall be designated by and from the board of deacons, if the church has deacons. Other members of the committee, in sufficient number to constitute a majority thereof (exclusive of the pastor), shall be chosen by the congregation or by such organizations within the church as the congregation may designate, none of whom may be in active service in the session or in active service on the board of deacons. The pastor shall be a member of this committee, serving ex officio and without vote. **The nominating committee shall be chosen annually and no member of the committee shall serve more than three years consecutively.**
- Any congregation of fewer than seventy members may choose, at a regular congregational meeting, to elect a small church nominating committee, which shall consist of one member of the session appointed by the session to be the moderator; and at least two members of the congregation not in active service on the session. The provisions of G-14.0221, regarding fair representation, length of service on the committee, and membership of the pastor, shall apply.
- All nominating procedures shall be subject to the principles of participation and representation as stated in G-4.0403 and G-9.0104.

These procedures ensure that the nominating committee includes:

- Experienced persons who are familiar with what is going on – provided for above by representatives from the boards, including the chairperson, who is a member of the session
- A majority of the committee elected by the congregation at large, or by organizations within the church as the congregation may designate (G-14.0221), as a safeguard of its right to choose its officers.
- The pastor as ex officio member without vote – making her or his counsel available while preserving the committee's freedom to act.

The committee is reconstituted annually, preventing the possible development of a self-perpetuation power bloc in the congregation.

HOW A NOMINATING COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS

The *Book of Order* prescribes only how the committee shall be constituted. It says nothing about how it shall function. Each committee, therefore, is free to chart its own course. There are perils that must be avoided in this freedom.

- *Don't wait until fall to begin!*
- *Don't take your responsibilities too casually!*
- *Don't assume that your task is merely to fill slots with live bodies!*
- *Don't let someone else do the deciding!*

Hasty and haphazard work results in mediocre leadership at the centers where policy and program are determined. To function responsibly, the nominating committee should deem at least these six steps necessary. It must:

1. Prepare itself for its task
2. Consider criteria for the offices to be filled
3. Decide how it will learn of potential candidates and their qualifications
4. Choose a slate of nominees
5. Consider how to approach possible nominees
6. Prepare a final report

The development of the church officers is not the responsibility of the nominating committee, but preparation is obviously related to the task of selection. The nominating committee has a large and significant work to do. *Begin early. Stay with it throughout the year.*

THE COMMITTEE PREPARES ITSELF

1. What is the nature and mission of the Christian church for which leadership is being sought?

Committee members will have different backgrounds and, of course, varied perceptions of the mission of the church and the kinds of leaders it needs. Here are some selected biblical texts for individual and committee study:

Exodus 3:1-12

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Isaiah 6:1-8

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

Matthew 20:20-28

1 Timothy 3:1-13;

Acts 6

5:17-22

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Titus 1:5-9

2. What are some of the distinctive features of Presbyterianism?

- What do elders, deacons, and trustees do?
- What is the meaning of ordination?
- Why are trustees not ordained?
- What are the features of Presbyterian polity within which church officers are asked to serve?

Here are passages from the Book of Order where answers may be found: Chapters I-IV, VII, IX, X, XIV

Other Resources:

The Book of Order, G-6.0100; G-3.000

[Selected to Serve: A guide for Church Officers](#) ISBN 0-664-50165-6 by Earl S. Johnson, Jr.

[The Presbyterian Deacon: an essential guide](#) ISBN 0-664-50237-7 by Earl S. Johnson, Jr.

[The Presbyterian Trustee: an essential guide](#) ISBN 0-664-50255-5 by Earl S. Johnson, Jr.

<http://www.pcusa.org/today/believe/2008/elders.htm> What Presbyterians Believe about Elders

<http://www.pcusa.org/today/archive/believe/wpb0105.htm> What Presbyterians Believe about Ordination

3. What are some of the particular problems, possibilities, and priorities of your own congregation?

Members on your committee from the boards can help here. The counsel of the pastor will be valuable.

Any person in the church or community who has knowledge the committee needs can serve as a resource to the committee. This kind of preparation is most important; however, the committee must

not spend all its time getting ready for its work. Basic study of problems and priorities can be pursued in the ongoing lay education program of the congregation.

SETTING CRITERIA FOR NOMINEES

1. Don't choose nominees solely

- As a reward for loyalty to the church or because they expect to be chosen.
- On the basis of their status in the church or community.
- To convert them and cultivate their interest in the church.

2. Nomination is the result of a process of selection. Judgments have to be made. At best, they will be made on partial knowledge and subjective preference.

3. Try to be as objective as possible. Survey all possibilities. Gather data carefully.

4. Consider these general qualifications for any church officer:

Church Involvement

- † regular attendance at public worship
- † active participation in other church activities
- † office held and services rendered
- † evidence of commitment to the church and its mission
- † understanding of and commitment to Presbyterian polity.

Christian Living

- † evidence of grace and compassion in common life
- † evidence of maturity and effectiveness of ministry in the world.

Personal Qualifications

- † cooperativeness
- † willingness to learn
- † ability to follow through on assignments
- † openness to new ideas
- † maturity of judgment
- † feels free to express own ideas
- † readiness to listen

5. Consider these particular qualifications for a specific office:

- *Occupational background and experience*
- *Service in other organizations*
- *Interest or passion in particular causes*
- *Offices held and quality of performance in them*
- *Education and training in the duties and responsibilities of the office*

Because the duties of a trustee are quite different from those of an elder (although elders may act as trustees), a person who is qualified for one office may not be ideal for the other. Moreover, particular qualifications needed in an office may vary from time to time according to the circumstances in which a congregation finds itself. Therefore, the nominating committee must set its own criteria for office after carefully reviewing its own particular situation.

LEARNING ABOUT POTENTIAL CANDIDATES

Most congregations have a willing leadership: those willing to work – and those *willing to let them!* The great majority of members – by default more often than by design – do not share in the decision – making process. The nominating committee can widen the circle of involvement. Each member will propose names others will not have thought to suggest. Yet the committee will explore only the familiar unless the circle is widened still more. Here are two ways to widen the circle:

- Solicit nominations from the congregation at large.
 - Prepare a nominating blank to be mailed to the entire membership. Design it to gather additional information the committee will need. (See Appendix A for a sample.)
 - Invite nominations through the church bulletin or newsletter.
 - Ask each organization in the church to propose potential candidates.
- Study the membership roll of the congregation.
 - Give attention to the previous experience of new members
 - Discover and challenge potential new leaders.
 - Do not omit the young because they are young, or women because they are women, or minority membership persons because they are of a different racial-ethnic group.
 - Do not abandon your criteria or fail to apply them where they do apply.

CHOOSING A SLATE OF NOMINEES

Gathering names and information is the primary task for a time. The search should be open and unrestricted, yet it cannot go on indefinitely. Your committee's responsibility is to make nominations. From a wide range of potential candidates, you must select a slate of nominees. It is easy to set standards so high that no one qualifies. How many of the twelve disciples would your committee have chosen? Nominations must be made not from some hypothetical list, but from the members of your own congregation, who like all of us, are flawed and fallible.

Yet some persons embody more clearly than others the gifts, the experience, and the qualifications you seek. Make a list of the more promising candidates. Consider not only individual qualifications, but the state as a whole:

- Should all of them be approximately the same age?
- Will you achieve some balance between men and women?
- Should minority groups, if any, be represented?
- Will you examine your criteria, if necessary, to make this possible?
- Will you pass over a known critic of the pastor or of the local or national church program?
- If there are divergent views within the church, will you want them represented on the official boards?
- Is it important to try to make the board representative of the congregation – either geographically, or socially, or economically? (see also G-14.0100, and following.)

Select several tentative candidates for each office:

- Agree on an order of priority among them – it is unlikely that you will get your first choice in every case.
- All discussions within the committee must remain strictly confidential. All that should be announced is your final report. How you arrive at it is solely the committee's concern.

APPROACHING POSSIBLE NOMINEES

The way the invitation is given will have much to do with the response you are likely to get. Your committee represents the whole church of Jesus Christ in the highly strategic work of selecting those who will order its life and work. Do not rely solely on your own wisdom, but seek God's guidance at this point in your work.

How you will approach possible nominees is a part of the procedure the committee must work out for itself. To make those decisions, the following seven suggestions may be helpful:

1. *Visit each potential nominee personally.* Make an appointment and call upon each potential nominee at home.
2. *Let two members of the committee make the call together.* Two can better represent the thinking of the committee and can more adequately present its challenge to serve.
3. *Present the call fully and honestly.* The invitation to serve should never be presented apologetically; now should the demands of the office or the amount of time it will require be played down to get an acceptance. Explain what the office requires, what opportunities it offers, and why the committee chose this particular person.
4. *Describe what help will be given in order to do the job well.* Tell about the training program for officers, how and when the training will be offered, and what resources and counsel will be made available.
5. *Give sensitive attention to the candidate's reactions.* Some degree of uncertainty and hesitancy may be expected. What reservations does the candidate raise? What additional questions need to be answered? Offer to find answers for questions with which you are unable to deal at the moment.
6. *Seek an unhurried, voluntary response to your challenge.* Give the candidate time to think it over. Are there factors unknown to the committee that must be considered? Arrange to call back at a definite time for a decision.
7. *Make clear the limitations of the committee's power.* It can only nominate. The candidate's willingness to be nominated is not assurance of election.

PREPARING THE FINAL REPORT

Blessed is the committee that gets acceptance on all its first choices! You must schedule your work, however, so that there is time to approach others. Usually second, or even third, calls will be necessary.

Will you make only one, or more than one, nomination for each office? Selecting several candidates gives the electorate greater choice. The congregation must decide how this will be done and must approve election procedures.

What more will you present than the names of the candidates? So that the congregation is able to vote more intelligently, it would be helpful to prepare a summary of each candidate's qualifications. Keep it balanced, factual, and fair, and send it as a newsletter to all members. Some churches post this information, along with a picture of each candidate, on a bulletin board.

NOMINATIONS FROM THE FLOOR

If the nominating committee does its work carefully, its report will usually be received with appreciation. Yet the freedom to choose those who will rule is so important that Presbyterian polity requires that opportunity be given for nominations from the floor (G – 14.0232). Any member may nominate anyone he or she chooses if there is assurance that the person will serve if elected.

Nominations from the floor are an expression of the freedom we have in the Christian community to choose anyone for office whom we believe to be qualified, and they do not constitute a repudiation of the work of the committee or a rejection of its nominees.

NOMINATION FOR CHURCH OFFICER

I suggest the name of _____ for nomination to the office of

Elder
Deacon
Trustee

The committee needs additional information to help decide, among the name suggested, whom to nominate. To help them consider this person's qualifications, please comment on the candidate in such areas as the following (*use another sheet of paper, if necessary*):

- ❖ Church Involvement
 - ◆ Attendance at public worship
 - ◆ Participation in church activities
 - ◆ Offices held
 - ◆ Services rendered
- ❖ Christian Living in Daily Life
 - ◆ Within the family
 - ◆ At work
 - ◆ In the community
- ❖ Personal Characteristics and Skills
 - ◆ Cooperativeness
 - ◆ Willingness to learn
 - ◆ Ability to follow through on assignments
 - ◆ Openness to new ideas
 - ◆ Maturity of judgment
- ❖ Particular Qualifications for this Office

Return this in a sealed envelope marked
ATTENTION: CHURCH NOMINATING COMMITTEE,

To the church by _____
(date)

Your signature: _____

SAMPLE DOCUMENT

This document is read at the first meeting of the nominating committee:

Why have you been chosen to sit on the nominating Committee:

Every year we choose special people representing different aspects of our congregation to determine those who will be nominated for the office of Elder. In the Presbyterian Church the office of Elder is ordained for life. Those who are elected sit on the governing body that we call the session. The session is the representative body of our local church that makes most of the decisions of governing the worship, the property and the spiritual development and growth of our congregation. Therefore it is critical that the people that you nominate for this position are called by God, because they serve a three-year term in which they are to provide spiritual leadership for our congregation. Yours is an important Job! Your job is to discern the will of God in calling just the right people to be the ruling elders for the class of 2005. Carefully read over the qualifications and the requirements and come prayerfully prepared to select these people who will serve on our session.

Let us Pray For Wisdom and Illumination:

God of prophets and apostles, you have chosen leaders to train your people in the way of Jesus Christ. We thank you that in our day you are still claiming men and women for special work within the church. We pray that you will use us tonight to continue that long and wonderful process of calling out those individuals who will dedicate themselves to you in Christian Ministry. It is our prayer that you will give us the gift of wisdom and illuminates our minds that we might be truly in the center of your divine will for this congregation of Christ. Amen

Let us Hear the Word of God: 1 Timothy 3:1-13

3:1 The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. 2 Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way--5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil. 8 Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; 9 they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons.

WHAT DO ELDERS DO? .The responsibility of being a church officer

Governmental Responsibilities: G-6.0302

1. With the Pastor exercise leadership, government, and discipline and have responsibility for the life of the local and general church.
2. Responsible for ecumenical relationships
3. Serve faithfully as members of the session
4. To make yourself available for higher governing bodies; i.e.. to serve as commissioners to the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly, with equal vote as Ministers of Word and Sacrament.
5. To be eligible for any office or council or committee at higher governing bodies as elected.

Specific Responsibilities: G-6.0304

1. Strengthen & Nurture the faith and life of the congregation
2. Together with the Pastor encourage the people in worship & service of God.
3. Equip and renew the people for their tasks within the church and for their mission in the world.
4. Visit and comfort and care for the people, especially the poor, the sick, the lonely, and those who are oppressed.
5. Inform the pastor and session of those persons or structures, which may need special attention.
6. To cultivate your ability to teach the Bible and be ready to supply such places as authorized and requested they may not have a regular minister of Word and Sacrament.
7. Under specific circumstances and with proper instruction, specific elders may be authorized by the Presbytery to administer the Lord's Supper.
8. To perform all duties which all Christians are bound to perform by the law of love.

LOCAL RESPONSIBILITY: Sample: this is to be determined by the session (OPTIONAL)

1. Must be willing to meet on a monthly basis for our session meetings
2. Must be willing to moderate or co-moderate a committee
3. Must be willing to help the pastor in the morning worship service and do visitation as requested, and set up and clean up for communion when scheduled as monthly responsibility.
4. Must be willing to take their turn in selecting ushers and watching over the nursery and closing up the church following the worship service.
5. Must be willing to attend Presbytery, Synod or GA meetings if called upon.

CRITERIA FOR NOMINEES: Sample: this is to be determined by the session (OPTIONAL)

- ✘ Nominees must be active members of FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
- ✘ Nominees have demonstrated by their words and deeds a commitment to:
 - Spiritual Growth (DISCIPLESHIP)
 - Tithing or regular giving (STEWARDSHIP)
 - The Church and its mission
 - Christ-like living in their daily lives

DON'T CHOOSE NOMINEES SOLELY

- ✘ as a reward for loyalty to the church or because they expect to be chosen
- ✘ on the basis of their status in the church or community
- ✘ to convert them or cultivate their interest in the church

CONSIDER THESE GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS:

- ✘ regular attendance in public worship
- ✘ active participation in church activities
- ✘ office held and service rendered
- ✘ evidence of commitment to the church and its mission
- ✘ evidence of grace and compassion in common life
- ✘ evidence of maturity and effectiveness of ministry in the world
- ✘ a cooperative and loving and accepting spirit
- ✘ a willingness to serve and to learn
- ✘ the ability to follow through on assignments
- ✘ openness to new ideas and a maturity of judgment
- ✘ readiness to listen

*Note: Robert's Rules states that unless the bylaws require it, the nominating committee will determine the number of candidates for the positions that are vacant. **The Bylaws of the FIRST Presbyterian Church specifically state that the nominating committee can nominate candidates for only the number of positions that are vacant, but that nominations can be made from the floor of the congregation.**

*Note: The nominating committee must remember that inclusiveness of the entire congregation and have a full representation on the session. Everyone is to be carefully and prayerfully considered without exception. Youth under the age of 25 may be elected with special congregational approval for a one, two or three year term.