

CHAPTER 12

The Church Session

12-1. The church Session consists of the pastor, associate pastor(s), if there be any, and the ruling elders of a church. If there are four or more ruling elders, the pastor and two ruling elders shall constitute a quorum. If there are fewer than four ruling elders, the pastor and one ruling elder shall constitute a quorum. Assistant pastors, although not members of the Session, may be invited to attend and participate in discussion without vote. When a church has no pastor and there are five or more ruling elders, three shall constitute a quorum; if there are less than five ruling elders, two shall constitute a quorum; if there is only one ruling elder, he does not constitute a Session, but he should take spiritual oversight of the church, should represent it at Presbytery, should grant letters of dismissal, and should report to the Presbytery any matter needing the action of a Church court.

Any Session, by a majority vote of its members, may fix its own quorum, provided that it is not smaller than the quorum stated in these paragraphs.

12-2. The pastor is, by virtue of his office, the moderator of the Session. In the pastor's absence, if any emergency should arise requiring immediate action, the Session may elect one of its members to preside, the quorum for such emergency meeting being as in the case of a church with no pastor in 12-1. Should prudential reasons at any time make it advisable for a minister other than the pastor to preside, the pastor may, with the concurrence of the Session, invite a minister of the same Presbytery to perform this service.

12-3. When a church is without a pastor, the moderator of the Session may be either a minister appointed for that purpose by the Presbytery, with consent of the Session, or one invited by the Session to preside on a particular occasion, or one of its own members elected to preside. In judicial cases, the moderator shall be a minister of the Presbytery to which the church belongs.

12-4. Associate or assistant pastors may substitute for the pastor as moderator of the Session at the discretion of the pastor and Session.

12-5. The church Session is charged with maintaining the spiritual government of the church, for which purpose it has power:

- a. To inquire into the knowledge, principles and Christian conduct of the church members under its care; to censure those found delinquent; to see that parents do not neglect to present their children for Baptism; to receive members into the communion of the Church; to remove them for just cause; to grant letters of dismissal to other churches, which when given to parents, shall always include the names of their non-communing, baptized children;
- b. To examine, ordain, and install ruling elders and deacons on their election by the church, and to require these officers to devote themselves to their work; to examine the records of the proceedings of the deacons; to approve and adopt the budget;
- c. To approve actions of special importance affecting church property;
- d. To call congregational meetings when necessary; to establish and control Sunday schools and Bible classes with special reference to the children of the church; to establish and control all special groups in the church such as Men in the Church, Women in the Church and special Bible study groups; to promote world missions; to promote obedience to the Great Commission in its totality at home and abroad; to order collections for pious uses;
- e. To exercise, in accordance with the Directory for Worship, authority over the time and place of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, over all other religious services, over the music in the services, and over the uses to which the church building and associated properties may be put; to take the oversight of the singing in the public worship of God; to ensure that the Word of God is preached only by such men as are sufficiently qualified (*BCO* 4-4, 53-2, 1 Timothy 2:11-12); to assemble the people for worship when there is no minister; to determine the best measures for promoting the spiritual interests of the church and congregation;
- f. To observe and carry out the lawful injunctions of the higher courts; and to appoint

representatives to the higher courts, who shall, on their return, make report of their diligence.

12-6. The Session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly. Moreover, the pastor has power to convene the Session when he may judge it requisite; and he shall always convene it when requested to do so by any two of the ruling elders. When there is no pastor, it may be convened by two ruling elders. The Session shall also convene when directed so to do by the Presbytery.