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Nominating Church Officers



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Revised August 2005 by Sandra Albritton Moak

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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 names 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 form in a sealed envelope marked
ATTENTION: CHURCH NOMINATING COMMITTEE

to the church by _____
(date)

your signature: _____

A COMMITTEE IS NOT ALL

Decision makers bear major responsibility for what is done in any organization. Choosing them is crucial. This is as true for the church as for any other organization.

All congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are required by the Constitution to have a representative committee to make nominations for the officers of elder, deacon, and trustees (see G-14.0201b and G-7.0401). Simply electing a committee, however, will not assure a church of capable leaders.

How a nominating 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 polity provides church members with the right to choose those who rule over them (G-6.0107).

A representative nominating committee can:

- study the congregation's leadership needs and bring a unified approach to the 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 committee's effectiveness depends on:

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

SETTING UP A NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) requires that:

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 (*The Book of Order*, G-14.0201b).

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-14.0201b, regarding fair representation, length of service on the committee, and membership of the pastor, shall apply (*The Book of Order*, G-14.0201b).

All nominating procedures shall be subject to the principles of participation and representation as stated in G-4.0403 and G-9.0104 (The *Book of Order*, G-14.0201d).

(Note: Exceptions to certain portions of this requirement may be found in G-14.0202.)

The procedures ensure that the nominating committee includes:

- Experienced persons who are familiar with values and issues important to the congregation.
- A majority of the committee elected by the congregation at large, or by organizations within the church as the congregation may designate (G-14.0201b). This safeguards the right of the congregation 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-perpetuating power bloc in the congregation.

HOW A NOMINATING COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS

The *Book of Order* prescribes only how the committee shall be constituted. Each committee, therefore, is free to develop its own process. Avoid these pitfalls:

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!

It is important to select committed leaders for the congregation's policy and programs. To ensure this, the committee should:

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

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?

Begin with Bible study and prayer. 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 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; 5:17–22

Acts 6

Titus 1:5–9

1 Corinthians 12:1–11

The *Book of Order*, G-6.0100; G-3.0000

Consider Your Ministry: A Study Manual for New Officers, 5th rev. ed., edited by Marvin Simmers (Louisville: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1993), chapters 1, 2, 3.

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?

Answers: The *Book of Order* Chapters I–VI, VII, IX, X, XIV.

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

Elders and deacons as well as the pastor on your committee can help here. Any person in the church or community who has knowledge of the committee can request any person to serve as a resource to the committee.

Setting Criteria for Nominees

1. Don't choose nominees:
 - 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 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
- Expression of ideas
- Readiness to listen

5. Consider these particular qualifications for a specific office:
- occupational background and experience
 - service in other organizations
 - interest 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 form 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 consider young people, women, and racial-ethnic minority membership persons.
 - 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.

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 do stand out as examples of the gifts, experience, and qualifications you seek. Make a list of the more promising candidates. Consider not only individual qualifications, but the slate as a whole by addressing the following questions:

- Are all of the nominees approximately the same age?
- Is there balance between men and women?
- Are minority groups 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 according to the following criteria:

- 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

Invite with prayer. Your committee represents the whole church of Jesus Christ in the process of selecting those who will order its life and work. Do not rely solely on your own wisdom, but seeks God's guidance in prayer.

Approaching possible nominees. To make those decisions, the following seven suggestions may be helpful:

1. *Visit each potential nominee personally.* Make an appointment and call on 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 a challenge to serve.
3. *Present the call fully and honestly.* The invitation to serve should never be presented apologetically; nor 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 the 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

In case your first choice declines you must schedule your work 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 (G-14.0204b).

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.

Nominating 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-14.0201d). 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. They do not constitute a repudiation of the work of the committee or the rejection of its nominees.