

**HANDBOOK**

**FOR**

**SESSION COMMITTEE**

**MODERATORS**

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# I. Introduction

To some people within a church, it may seem that the church performs its functions without much guidance or planning. The church seasons come and go, worship takes place every Sunday, the pastor is on call, baptisms are performed occasionally, new members are received, and so on. Regularity and dependability are important. One's faith is enhanced and upheld by this regularity and dependability.

Consider one event as an example. On Christmas eve, the members of the church expect a worship service. It would be nice if that service happened automatically but any chair of the Music and Worship Committee will tell you what goes into that one service. The details must be planned: times, ushers, greeters, elders-in-charge, communion elements prepared, elders to serve, decorations, bulletins, and so forth. The event must be publicized: in the church newsletter, in the Sunday bulletin, in the newspaper. Then people must carry out their assigned duties. This illustrates, on a small scale, three of the ingredients that go into a successful event as well as a successful church: Planning, Publicity, and Performance.

This *Handbook* is intended to help you as chair (or moderator) of a Session committee. It will serve as reminders of jobs that need to be done and will give some suggestions on how to do those jobs.

## II. Planning

### A. Long Range Planning

#### When Session Terms Begin in Midyear

When the Session's year runs from May/June through the following May/June, budget and program years do not follow the same pattern. Many program plans run from September through August but some follow the budget year. This means that you begin your term as a committee chair with a budget for your first 6 months and a plan that continues for at least 2 months and possibly for 6 months.

The first order of business for your committee is to plan for the next year. You will be asked, probably in August, to recommend a budget for the next calendar year at the annual planning meeting. Your plan will be limited through the end of this calendar year by the current budget; you have the opportunity to recommend changes in that budget beginning with the next calendar year. Every committee should try to establish goals and determine how to meet those goals. Also, every committee should list the specific events (as best as can be determined) for which the committee will be responsible during the next 12 to 14 months.

In your personal life, you may not need to decide the restaurant to which you are going on Saturday night until you are ready to leave the house. In the church, plans must be completed 2 months (or more) in advance so that publicity can be sent out - no publicity, no event! (How can people come if they don't know about it?)

Consider an example of goal setting. It might be tempting for the Membership Committee to say that a

goal is to take in 50 new members. While that is a good goal, it is necessary to think about it in a different way in order to relate the goal to specific plans. To accomplish that goal a plan might be devised to improve the church's publicity to those outside the church during the time of year when a significant number of new residents move into the area. Goals stated in these terms focus effort and make specific plans easier to formulate.

Your church should have a list of events for the coming year. If not, one should be prepared. Such lists help you with your planning. They also help prevent conflicts when the specific dates and times are filled in.

Remember, Session approval is required for your long range plans.

In summary, begin your term as a committee chair by thinking about the next year or two. Make decisions initially in broad terms, then fill in the specifics.

Eventually, your long range plans should be put into writing for presentation to the Session and for the next chair of your committee (since that chair will be taking over in the middle of the plans).

### **When Session Terms Begin in January**

When the Session's year begins in January the budget year usually is the same. Program plans should be in place from the previous year's committee since that committee was responsible for setting a budget. Some church programs, such as Christian Education, follow the school year and begin in September. Thus your committee's programs may have been underway for three months. Your first job is to determine what plans have been made, review those plans, and recommend any changes that you and your committee feel are necessary. Remember that you are under budget constraints so any proposed changes need to fit within the existing budget.

Soon after getting the current year under way, your committee should begin planning for the next calendar year. It would be good if there were an annual planning meeting in late summer or early fall for all committee moderators to present their plans and to establish budget guidelines. Such planning also helps minimize conflicts.

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Let's take an example of goal setting. It might be tempting for the Membership Committee to say that a goal is to take in 50 new members. While that is a good goal, it is necessary to think about it in a different way in order to relate the goal to specific plans. To accomplish that goal a plan might be devised to improve the church's publicity to those outside the church during the time of year when a significant number of new residents move into the area. Goals stated in these terms focus effort and make specific plans easier to formulate.

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## **B. Short Range Planning**

In contrast to long range planning, plans need to be made for specific events. For example, a specific event for the Worship Committee could be the decoration of the church for Christmas (OHPC calls it "Hanging of the Greens") and the subsequent removing of the decorations (OHPC calls it "Removing of the Greens").

Many of the details need to be in place 2 months before an event. This includes date, time, place, food or not, speaker or not, target audience (youth, women, men, retired, single, everyone, etc.), and so forth. If you are going to have a speaker, have that decision confirmed in time to have it approved by Session and to include it in the publicity. Once this phase is complete and publicity is in place (see Section III), get specific plans on paper. Write down in detail *everything* you are going to need including people to help. Then, parcel out the tasks to your volunteers.

In an ideal world, that should take care of it. However, we are all human (except committee chairs and pastors are expected to be superhuman - the Clerk is only human) and your job is now to follow up on your volunteers to see that they come through. You don't have to do all the work but you are responsible for seeing that the work is done. There is more on this in Section IV.

# **III. Publicity**

## **Introduction**

There are three rules that need to be applied consistently.

1. We have only one chance to make a good first impression.
2. People will come and participate only if they know about it.
3. The nonregulars are likely to come and participate if they know what it is about.

Rule number 1 may seem obvious when thinking of how visitors who are church shopping on Sunday morning (obvious or not, we sometimes forget). How well the choir sings, how inspiring the sermon is, how friendly the greetings are - all these contribute to that first impression. Publicity is an additional "first impression" ingredient. If the church newsletter and the bulletin do not have thorough, clear, and timely

announcements, events and programs will be less effective and attendance will suffer.

Rule number 2 is obvious. Included in this is the understanding that announcements need to be timely. A Sunday announcement will not reach everyone (see III. C.).

There are some people who will go to Event X regardless. There are others who will go to Event X only if they feel it worth their time. To attract this second group of people you must "sell" your event.

## **B. To the Session**

The first group you should inform is the Session. The Session needs to coordinate events to prevent conflicts and to ensure that all activities are within the mission of the church. If the event has been previously approved (such as in the annual planning meeting), the Session still needs to be informed of specifically what is planned. In the Presbyterian church, things go well when the Session is informed, enthusiastic, and supportive.

Session permission may be granted for many events all at once during the annual planning meeting that occurs each year. The purpose of this meeting is to help coordinate events, prevent conflicts, and give an overview of the church's activities.

## **C. To the Congregation**

Publicity to the congregation is through the church newsletter and the Sunday bulletin. Plan ahead because the deadline for the newsletter will be 3 to 7 weeks before your event, depending on when in the month it is. Don't assume that if it is in newsletter that it will be in the bulletin (or vice versa) - these are two different publications. The bulletin reaches fewer people because, on a given Sunday, there will be some regulars who will be absent.

Your announcement must include the following.

- Informative headline
- Date
- Day
- Time
- Location
- Sponsoring church group
- What to expect
- Name and telephone number of contact person

In addition, the following should be included as appropriate.

- Speaker name, affiliation, talk title
- Deadline for reservations and how to make them
- Cost, if any
- If a fund raiser, what the funds are to be used for

Take the hypothetical announcement shown below and put yourself in the shoes of a visitor or new member.

The Deacons' annual spaghetti dinner will be held on Sunday, March 17. Even though we won't be serving green spaghetti, all should enjoy a fine and filling meal. Sign up in the narthex or call the church office.

How does this announcement shape up? The date and day are there but there is no time or place. The sponsoring group is given but there is no indication of other activities (maybe there are no other activities which would make the announcement OK in that regard). It asks for people to sign up but no deadline is given. Is there a cost or is the meal free? If there is a cost, what is to be done with the money raised?

A better announcement would be something like this.

### **SPAGHETTI DINNER**

Everyone loves spaghetti, especially spaghetti the way the Deacons prepare it. Come on Sunday, March 17 from 5 to 7 PM in the church fellowship hall and enjoy a fine meal. Even though it is the 17th of March, we won't have green spaghetti but there will be background Irish and Italian music played on the piano by Vera. Please sign up in the Narthex by March 10 or call the church office by March 15. If you forget, come to the dinner any way. Cost is \$3 for children 5 through 12 and \$5 for those over 12. Profits will go to the Deacons Fund.

This has all the details and adds some interest and enticement.

#### **D. To the Community**

Some events can be announced in the newspaper or through radio and TV bulletin board services. The Membership Committee can assist with this type of publicity.

#### **E. After**

The emphasis so far has been on planning and publicity before an event. What happens afterward? Reports may be made through the church newsletter. If your event was a fund raiser, let the congregation know how much you raised and how the money will be used. Included in this report should be a "Thank You for your support". When people know you are doing a good job, they will be more inclined to support you the next time.

## **IV. Performance**

### **A. Chair's Responsibility**

Previous sections have been discussing this topic in context with others. In summary, the committee chair's job is to plan, publicize, perform, and evaluate. But this can be expressed in a different way. The most important task is to facilitate and encourage the committee and the Session to seek God's will. This is done through prayer and by seeking to use the skills, abilities, and wisdom of each committee member

## **B. Enlisting Help**

Since the committee chair cannot (and should not) do all the work, enlisting volunteers is a part of the chair's task. Populate your committee with workers. "Advertising" for committee help in the Sunday bulletin or in the church newsletter doesn't usually yield results. The chances of success are greatly increased if you include a very specific description of the job to be done. If it is the type of job that will involve several people, such as visiting members in the hospital, make it clear that the volunteer will not be doing the whole job. If there is a lot of flexibility in doing the job such as when it is to be done or if it is only occasional or if the volunteer can do a little or a lot as their time permits, say so. You might get a better response than if it is felt that the job may never end. At times, recruiting volunteers may seem discouraging. But involving members in God's work is a significant element of the work of faith.

After "advertising", start calling people. If your church maintains a data bank matching people and jobs, check that. If your church doesn't do this, get the session to organize one; a copy of the one used at Oak Hills Presbyterian Church is attached. If there are no or few indications of interest from the data or if there is no data bank, ask for suggested names. People to ask include the pastor, the moderator of the membership committee, the past moderator of the membership committee, the director of Christian education, the clerk, and the past moderator of your committee.

## **V. Evaluation**

You have planned your program, publicized it, carried it out, and written your report. There is still one more thing to do. Evaluate. Was it worthwhile? Were the goals accomplished?

The nature of the evaluation procedure depends on what is being evaluated. Let's take two examples: a specific event and long-range plans.

For a specific event such as a dinner meeting or an XYZ meeting, evaluation can take the form of answers to specific questions such as:

- How many attended? Should attendance have been larger? If so, what could have been done to increase attendance?
- Was the speaker or program well received? How could it have been improved?
- Did the event proceed smoothly? If not, why not?
- Should more events of this type be planned? Why or why not?

For long-range plans such as a goal to add 50 new members, evaluation should be ongoing rather than wait until the end. After plans have been implemented for a few months, check to see if progress is being made toward the goal. If progress seems to be slow, consider what changes need to be made (if any). At the end, look for reasons why the goal was or was not met. Make recommendations for how to proceed toward similar goals in the future.



The evaluation procedure and the communication of the conclusions to the Session will help future committee chairs to plan their activities. Session will also have more information on which to base future decisions.

## **VI. Meetings**

### **A. Session Meetings**

As much as possible, provide Session with written reports preferably placed in the elders' mail boxes before church on the Sunday preceding the stated Session meeting. In the written report, action items should be clearly marked. Written reports help expedite business and give all Session members, those present and those absent, information about what your committee is doing (or not doing).

The Session approves the membership of your committee and the Session approves all additions and deletions.

Each month you should receive budget reports which include a list of transactions charged to your committee's budget. Check to see that those transactions have been charged to the correct line item. The forms for reimbursement contain line items to ensure that items are recorded correctly; your signature is required before the reimbursement is made. Consult with the church bookkeeper if you find errors or if you have questions. Be prepared to answer questions from the Session about how and where you are spending your committee's money.

During Session meetings, do not conduct nitty-gritty committee business. Keep the discussion to the overall subject rather than on how to get the job done. For example, the discussion of having a luncheon should focus on the why and when of the luncheon and not on whether to serve tea or punch or both. If there are specifics that your committee cannot work out, it is appropriate to ask for suggestions.

### **B. Committee Meetings**

For most committees it is desirable to have a regular meeting time. Whether or not your committee has a regular meeting time, you should initially canvass your committee members to see what is the best meeting time. Then at least one week in advance of each meeting, you should notify the members by mail or by telephone. Also notify the church office and the newsletter editor in enough time to get the meeting notice into the bulletin and the newsletter, respectively.

Your committee will be better prepared and more organized if you send an agenda and any written material to be considered to them in advance. Advance preparation will lead to more informed decisions.

In the meeting itself, open and close with prayer. If you are uncomfortable doing this, ask members of your committee (in advance) to participate or have a silent prayer ("Let us pray silently for the work of this committee." concluding after a minute with an "Amen" from you.) Follow your agenda but always have an open time on the agenda for "New Business". Keep the discussion on the issue at hand. Remember, you are the moderator of the meeting and it is up to you to keep the business moving and the discussions pertinent.

Reports of past activity from subcommittees or from committee members with ongoing tasks should be a part of each meeting. This keeps the rest of the committee informed of activities. It also is an encouragement for the members to do their jobs rather than be embarrassed with a "no report".

Write a summary report of each committee meeting to present at the next Session meeting. If the pastor did not attend the committee meeting, this report should be given to him as quickly as possible. The report should list those present, those absent, agenda items acted on, old business, and new business. Remember to mark action items clearly as such.

Action items should be as clear and complete as possible. The Session is usually reluctant to approve open-ended motions. For example, do not ask for approval to "have a youth fund raiser in March". Specify what the nature of the fund raiser will be, where it will be held, what facilities (if any) will be needed, and what the money will be used for. If possible, the exact date and time should be specified so that any conflicts with other church activities can be resolved.

## **VII. Session Members on Your Committee**

Session members who are not committee moderators still have responsibilities both on the committee and off. However, their jobs are not as well defined as committee moderator. In part, they are committee moderators in training although not necessarily for the same committee on which they are serving.

As a committee member, the elder should be given a task or tasks of importance related to his or her skills and interests. Part of the responsibilities for new elders should be aimed at preparing them to become a committee moderator at some time in the future. The elder should be encouraged to participate in the long range planning of the committee.

Every Session member should keep in mind the long range goals and the mission of the church. Committee moderators sometimes get tunnel vision and need to be reminded to think more broadly and help keep the Session's activities, plans, and policies integrated. Often the most effective way to accomplish this is by communication with the other committee moderators rather than during Session meetings.

Session members with interests and expertise in the area of another committee's responsibility can help that committee by carefully reviewing its reports to Session and then communicating ideas to the committee moderator.

There are lots of jobs to be done around the church. If the elder has the time, the volunteer help will be appreciated.

## **VIII. Visibility**

The success of a church fulfilling its mission depends on obedience to the call of Christ and on good relationships between the Session and the congregation. The Session must act responsibly and must communicate its actions and policies clearly. Much of this communication falls on the pastor and the clerk but committee moderators can help. In addition, all Session members need to participate visibly in church activities including Sunday worship. Not all Session members need to participate in all activities (it is OK to be selective) but no Session member should be a complete nonparticipant. Session members are still congregation members and should continue to attend Sunday School and other church groups and

events and to take on other responsibilities such as Sunday School teacher, substitute Sunday School teacher, librarian, assistant to the librarian, assistant to (fill in the blank), office help, greeter, usher, and so forth and so on.