

HANDBOOK
FOR
CHURCH
NOMINATING
COMMITTEES

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1. IMPORTANCE

This committee brings nominations to the congregation for the Session, the Board of Deacons (if the congregation has a board), and the Trustees (if the congregation elects trustees). This committee may also be called upon, by session action, to bring nominations to the congregation for a Pastor Nominating Committee (see Section 3b below).

It has been said that the Church Nominating Committee is the most important committee in the church. This is because the committee, by means of deciding who is nominated, strongly affects the direction and energy of the church. Thus it is not possible to underestimate the importance of the work of this committee. If the committee is really balanced, there should be a variety of people selected to be nominated by the committee. But it is possible that the committee may try to steer the choices to reflect their view of the church's future. That is, the persons chosen to be nominated for elder may be people known to be set in their ways which will result in the church continuing along the same path. Or the opposite may be chosen in order to give new direction to the church. The ideal is for some of each so that true deliberations will take place. The same is true for experienced versus new elders. Those with experience will provide the background necessary for wise decisions.

Because of this importance, the *Book of Order* specifies clearly that the membership of this committee should represent the diversity of the congregation¹ and that the majority of the membership should not come from the ruling bodies (the Session and the Board of Deacons).¹

Note that this committee is different from a Pastor Nominating Committee (commonly called a PNC) which is a congregational committee charged with searching for a new pastor. This handbook, therefore, does not apply to a PNC.

2. ELECTION AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

The Church Nominating Committee is a committee of the congregation, not a committee of the session. It is elected by the congregation, except for representatives designated by the *Book of Order*, and reports to the congregation.¹

The Session designates one of its active members to serve as moderator of the committee. The session also designates an additional elder to serve on the committee. The session can designate more than one additional elder and this or these designated elders do not have to be in active service on the session.

If the church has a Board of Deacons, the Board designates one of its active members to serve on the committee.

The congregation elects persons to the committee in sufficient number to make these

persons a majority of the committee. None of these persons can be an active member of the session or in active service on the board of deacons at the time of election.

The pastor serves as a member of the committee *ex officio* and without vote.

Let's take some examples. If the session designates two persons (the moderator and one other) and a deacon is designated, then the congregation must elect at least 4 persons giving a committee of at least 7 (plus the pastor). If the session designates three persons and a deacon is designated, then the congregation must elect at least 5 persons giving a committee of at least 8 (plus the pastor). If the session designates 2 persons and there is no Board of Deacons, then the congregation must elect at least 3 persons giving a committee of at least 5 persons (plus the pastor).

The Church Nominating Committee is chosen annually with a term of one year. No one person may serve more than three years consecutively. That is, a person may serve no more than three consecutive terms. The committee work does not necessarily end with the annual election because vacancies may develop during the year or the congregation may need to elect a PNC.

Each church should have its own procedures, if not already in place, for ensuring that the Church Nominating Committee is representative of the congregation as specified in the *Book of Order*.¹ If there is no prior thought given to the election and all nominations are made from the floor, there is no guarantee that the committee will fulfill the diversity requirement. One way some churches work to fulfill the requirement is to ask various church groups, such as the choir or the senior citizens group or the church school officers/teachers, suggest to the committee nominees from within their groups.

This requires a little more discussion here. Someone need to organize the process. That is, someone must contact these groups to ask for their suggestions. Since the chair of the committee (as appointed by the Session) and the Clerk of Session who is also Secretary of the Congregation are a part of both the Session and the Congregation it would seem logical that one or both of these people would be suitable. The process of asking groups for suggestions removes the possible perception that might arise that one or both of these people are trying to rig the election. Groups are sometimes small and/or many in number. If small, the request might be made to two or three groups together to make a nomination. If large and many in number, choices must be made. Those choices could be to rotate among the groups over the years, and, in any one year, to choose the groups to give a diversity. That is, don't choose all senior citizen groups in any one year. What if there are not enough groups to provide the required number of nominees? Then there need to be nominations "from the congregation at large". This presents more of a problem. If the chair and the Clerk wait until the groups have chosen their suggestions, then they can see what is needed in terms of diversity and in terms of talents. They can then seek out persons that meet these criteria. Remember, these are only nominations and the congregation at the election has the final say.

The election of the Church Nominating Committee will proceed in the best manner

and with the least congregation grumbling if the Session and the Board of Deacons have chosen their selections in advance of the election and announced them to the congregation.

3. COMMITTEE PROCEDURES

a. Confidentiality

The discussions held by the committee must be considered confidential. It is only in an atmosphere of trust that the committee can work effectively. This confidentiality should extend to who is being considered, how they meet the criteria for office, whether or not they were asked to be nominated, and whether or not they accepted.

Anything less than this degree of confidentiality can breed bad feelings in the congregation and in persons being considered as well as distrust in the work of the committee.

b. Duties/Characteristics of Church Officers

The *Book of Order* has a list of characteristics for elders and for deacons.

For Elders:² "Elders should be persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit."³

- equip and renew the people for their task within the church and for their mission in the world
- visit, comfort, and care for the people
- assist in worship
- cultivate their ability to teach the Bible
- strengthen and nurture the faith of the congregation
- encourage the people in worship and service of God

Since the Session is responsible for many duties in the church,⁴ elders should have some of those abilities to assist in carrying out those duties.

For Deacons:⁵ "Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, of exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion, and sound judgment should be chosen for this office." The duties of deacons are listed.⁶

- to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith.
- other duties as assigned by the Session

For Trustees: The trustees, for a congregation that is incorporated, must be active

members of the congregation in order to meet the laws of the state.⁷ Some churches elect a separate Board of Trustees and in such cases the Church Nominating Committee is responsible for bringing nominations to the congregation. The responsibilities of the trustees are related to the holding, encumbering, and managing of the church's real property subject to the authority of the Session and to other provisions of the *Book of Order*.⁸ If trustees are not elected by the congregation, then the bylaws of the congregation must specify who the trustees are and how the president of the corporation is chosen. In the absence of any directive, the session acts as the trustees. The pastor is not a member of the congregation and thus is not a member of the corporation.

For Pastor Nominating Committees: The whole process of choosing a new pastor, associate pastor, or designated pastor must be done in consultation with the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry. The congregation elects a pastor nominating committee (PNC) which is to be representative of the entire congregation.⁹ The manner in which this committee is to be elected and the number of persons on the committee are not specified. If the election is held at an open meeting with no prior preparation, making certain the committee is representative of the whole congregation may be difficult. It is permitted for the Session to specify that the Church Nominating Committee is to bring before the congregation a certain number of nominees.¹⁰ At the congregational meeting, the congregation can nominate others from the floor and can change the number to be elected. Starting with a slate of nominees gives some guidance to the proceedings.

c. Vacancies and Eligibility

There will be vacancies in the regular rotation of classes (such as "the class of 2009"). There may be other vacancies due to resignations or deaths. Consult with the Clerk of Session to obtain this information.

Also, there are limitations on terms.¹¹ The *Book of Order* specifies a maximum elected term of 3 years and a maximum of 6 consecutive years on the Session or on the Board of Deacons. Again, the Clerk of Session should be able to determine who is not eligible for reason of term limits. Some congregations specify a maximum length of service as less than 6 years, which is allowed by the *Book of Order*.

Committee members are eligible for nomination to office.

d. Asking for Recommendations

You may solicit suggestions from the congregation for the offices to be filled. This could be done by announcement at worship, through the worship bulletins, through the church newsletter, or by having a prepared suggestion form. Remember that you are asking for suggestions, not nominations. It is not required that suggestions be asked for but it may help the committee in its deliberations.

The congregation will feel a part of the process if they are asked but it runs the

risk of having someone complain, "I suggested Joe Jones. Why wasn't he nominated?" In such a case, there are two possible responses: one is to obfuscate¹² in order to maintain confidentiality – "We appreciate your input and the suggestions we received from many in the congregation. This church has many fine people and Joe is one of them. We recognize the contributions that so many people make to the ministry of this church both as officers, committee members, and outside the formal structure. Please continue to be involved and concerned about our church's ministry. Thank you again for all that you do." Then beat a hasty retreat. The other possible response is to be direct and say something like "We appreciate your input. However, we have been instructed that committee discussions are to remain confidential. Sorry, but I can't say more than that." In any event, you should try to be prepared to answer questions such as that.

e. Review Potential Nominees

If you have Session, Board of Deacons and Board of Trustees, you will have three lists to work on. The qualifications for each type of office are different and those should be kept in mind as the list of potential nominees is drawn up. The Board of Deacons should not be considered a stepping stone to the Session since each requires different talents. Some people are multitalented and can effectively serve on both and for that reason people who have been Deacons should not automatically be rejected. If the church is under the unicameral system (no Deacons) then people with deacon-like skills should be considered.

The number of nominees should equal the number of vacancies, unless your bylaws specify otherwise. The *Book of Order* is silent on this matter but some common sense should apply. If there are more nominees than vacancies, there may be some hurt feelings. *Robert's Rules of Order* is strongly against requiring two nominations for each vacancy. Also, by knowing who is likely to be elected the committee can tailor the slate to those who fill specific needs and to those who meet the diversity requirement.

First decide on a procedure to choose potential nominees. This should have enough structure to ensure that no one is overlooked but should be free-wheeling enough to allow for some flexibility. The initial list may be quite long.

The committee members presumably have a good knowledge of the people of the congregation. The committee should begin to narrow the list based on their personal knowledge. When the list has been reduced in size, prioritize the list.

This portion of the procedure will take up the most time for the committee during its meetings. Don't forget to pray for God's guidance as you work on this list.

Do not make decisions for people. For example, don't say "She's too busy." Let her decide unless that person has a history of saying yes to tasks and then not following through. The person may be willing and able to reprioritize his life.

Should the committee have a policy statement? The congregation certainly has

the right to adopt policies for the committee. However, it is the author's opinion that a congregation should trust the committee it has elected and not put restrictions on the committee's work. Policy statements sometimes are "one size fits all" which results (as when clothes are labeled that way) in "one size fits few". The congregation has final say at the time of the election and can reject nominees in favor of others. The Session cannot adopt a policy for the committee since the committee is not part of the Session but of the congregation. The session certainly can suggest a policy to the congregation, if it wishes, for the congregation to adopt, reject, or modify.

Decide who is going to ask which potential nominee. Don't ask too many people at once or you may end with more nominees than vacancies. As people accept or reject the request, it may be necessary to reprioritize the list. Don't approach people before their names have been considered by the committee and approved by the committee as a potential nominee. If a person is asked "informally" before the committee has decided and that person is willing to serve, there may be hurt feelings if that person is not chosen.

f. Procedure for Approaching Potential Nominees

When asking a person whether or not they would be willing to be nominated to a church office:

- be clear what the office is and what the term of office is
- check to be sure the person knows what duties and time commitment the office requires
- be clear that the question being asked is "Would you be willing to be nominated and to serve if elected?"
- give the person time to think and pray about the decision to answer God's call
- specify a deadline for a yes or not response (one week should suffice)

The potential nominee should be contacted personally. Most recommendations say to use a personal contact (face to face) rather than telephone, email, or whatever. If that is not possible, then the telephone is preferable to the other means since it allows for questions and answers.

4. ARRANGING THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

When the slate of officers, or the slates of officers, are complete, inform the Session and ask them to schedule a congregational meeting if the election is not to be at a meeting already scheduled. As a courtesy, give a copy of the report to Session. This report also informs Session that the committee report is complete and ready for the election to occur. The request to the Session is to schedule a meeting or to include the report in a meeting already scheduled; the actual report should not be part of the motion but could be included along with the motion as information since the committee is a committee of the congregation and answers only to the congregation.

It is recommended that a copy of the report be included with the call of the meeting so the congregation will know of the committee's nominations. This is not required but it is diplomatic to do so.

Ask the nominees to be present at the congregational meeting, if possible.

Check with the Clerk of Session to be sure that ballots will be ready in case there are nominations from the floor. The Clerk will need the list of nominees in order to prepare the ballots.

5. AT THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The committee report should be made by the moderator of the committee. If that is not possible, then the moderator of the committee should designate some other member of the committee to make the report. During the election, each slate of officers must be considered separately. That is, first the elders for the class of 2005, then the vacancy in the elder class of 2003, then the deacons in the class of 2005, etc. The meeting should be run by the Moderator of the Session (i.e., the pastor, usually).

This section of the meeting should go something like this.

Moderator of the Meeting: "Are you now ready to proceed to the election of elders?" (or elders and deacons or elders, deacons and trustees)
If the congregation is ready, the election may proceed.

Moderator of the Meeting: "The Church Nominating Committee Report will be presented by the moderator of the committee, *person's name*."

Moderator of the Committee: "Mr. (or Ms. or Mrs.) Moderator, the Church Nominating Committee places the following persons in nomination for the office of Elder in the Class of 20xx. Will the nominees please stand as the names are read (*read the list of names*)"

Moderator of the Meeting: "You have heard the nominations. Are there any nominations from the floor?"
If there are no nominations from the floor,¹³ the Moderator of the Meeting may declare nominations closed or the moderator may ask for a motion to close nominations. Such a motion requires a second and a 2/3 majority of those present and voting to pass. Nominations can be reopened by a suitable motion and a majority vote.

Moderator of the Meeting: If there have been no additional nominations, the Moderator should ask for a motion to elect the slate by unanimous consent or by acclimation. Such a motion requires a second and a majority vote. Or, the Moderator may declare that the nominees are elected.

If there are more nominees than vacancies, the *Book of Order* requires that the

election be conducted by secret ballot. The Secretary of the Meeting (the Clerk of Session) provides the ballots and the Moderator of the Meeting appoints tellers to count the ballots. Members of the Nominating Committee should not count ballots in order to keep the process honest in the eyes of the congregation.

This procedure is to be repeated (except the portion of asking if the congregation is ready to proceed) for any other slates.

REFERENCES

1. F-1.0503; G-2.0401
2. G-2.0104
3. G-2.0301

4. G-3.02
5. G-2.0201
6. G-2.0201
7. G-4.01
8. G-4.0101
9. G-2.0802
10. See Annotated *Book of Order* for G-14.0502a “Sessions request of existing officer nominating committee to prepare a slate of nominees for PNC for the congregation’s consideration is proper and in order.” From General Assembly Judicial Commission ruling on 1995, Bolton, Jr. v. Alamance Church, Remedial Case 207-1, 11.053.
11. 2.0404
12. To make unclear, to muddle, to obscure
13. *Robert's Rules of Order* allows for these variations on how this may be handled.