

CHAPTER ONE

Congregations and Their Covenant Partners

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." —Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

In ECO's Constitution, "shall" is used to describe that which is mandatory, "should" is used to express that which is expected to best practices, and "may" is used to express that which is permissible, but not required.

1.06 The Session

1.0601 Purpose and Composition

Every congregation is governed by its session. The session consists of the elders duly elected by and from the covenant partners of the congregation, along with the congregation's installed pastors, associate pastors and in accordance with the congregation's own rule assistant pastors who have been elected by the congregation. Also, by its own rule, the congregation shall determine the number of elders, their length of service, and the ordering of the session. The minimum number shall be three active elders plus the moderator.

1.0602 Meetings of the Session

The pastor shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the session. If it is impractical, the pastor may ask another pastor or an elder to preside, with the session's approval.

Meetings of the session, including its quorum, shall be governed by the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, unless by their own rule, a congregation has adopted other procedures and practices.

The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly, and shall meet at the call of the moderator, at the request of two or more elders, or at the request of the presbytery. Full minutes of the meetings and actions of the session shall be maintained and shall be available to any covenant partner of the congregation or at the request of the presbytery.

1.0603 The Responsibilities of the Session

- a. The session has responsibility and authority for governing the congregation and guiding its mission for Christ in the world. In the Reformed tradition the marks of the church are the proclamation of the Word, the Sacraments rightly celebrated, and the exercise of discipline. Therefore, the session shall: Provide for the worship and educational life of the congregation; provide a place where the congregation may regularly worship; provide for

the regular preaching of the Word by persons properly approved; oversee the planning and the ordering of the worship services of the congregation; lead the congregation in ministries of evangelism, compassion, and justice; and develop and nurture relations with other congregations.

- b. Authorize and provide for the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper; authorize the administration of Baptism; exercise due care and provide sufficient education to the congregation and to new believers that the Sacraments may be rightly received as means of grace.
- c. Plan for and provide an effective disciple-making, ministry-discernment process for the congregation and new believers, equipping them to be missional Christians and being faithful to nurture them into spiritual maturity and significant ministry. Provide for and nurture the common life of the congregation; receive and dismiss covenant partners; exercise oversight of all programs and finances of the congregation; train, examine, ordain and install those men and women chosen to serve as elders and deacons; lead and teach the congregation in matters of stewardship and Christian living; direct the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all other organizations of the congregation; bear witness against error in doctrine and practice; and serve in judicial matters pertaining to the congregation as specified in the *Rules of Discipline*.
- d. Elect elder commissioners to the presbytery and may propose to the presbytery matters of common interest or concern as well as proposals to amend this *Constitution*. The maximum number of elder commissioners which the session may elect shall be equal to the number of pastors with voting authority as set forth in Section 2.0401 serving the congregation. The session is encouraged in its selection of elder commissioners to promote representation in areas of difference recognized as the basis of discrimination and inequality in church and society, namely race, ethnicity, gender, ability/disability, and age.
- e. Maintain a roll of covenant partners and a roll of baptisms. The session may by its own rule grant affiliate status to members of a congregation in another Christian denomination.
- f. The session shall adopt and administer an annual budget and shall publish it to the congregation. The session shall purchase appropriate casualty and liability insurance for the program and property. The session shall arrange for the congregation to participate in the synod's plan of health and welfare benefits and program of assistance and relief covering the congregation's pastors and full-time lay employees, as such plan is described in the membership agreement (unless the congregation and the synod agree to an alternative plan providing comparable coverage).
- g. Arrange for an independent financial review annually, and shall publish the report to the congregation and to the presbytery.
- h. Evaluate the congregation's ministry and mission and report to the presbytery for reasons of mutual accountability and the sharing of best practices.