

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NASHVILLE  
OFFICER TRAINING

**F-3.01 HISTORIC PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH ORDER**

In setting forth this *Book of Order*, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reaffirms the historic principles of church order, which have been a part of our common heritage and which are basic to our Presbyterian concept and system of church government, namely:

*F-3.0101 God Is Lord of the Conscience*

a. That “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.”

b. Therefore we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: We do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and at the same time, be equal and common to all others.

*F-3.0102 Corporate Judgment*

That, in perfect consistency with the above principle of common right, every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ hath appointed; that in the exercise of this right they may, notwithstanding, err, in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet, even in this case, they do not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only make an improper use of their own.

*F-3.0103 Officers*

That our blessed Savior, for the edification of the visible Church, which is his body, hath appointed officers, not only to preach the gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline, for the preservation of both truth and duty; and that it is incumbent upon these officers, and upon the whole Church, in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing, in all cases, the rules contained in the Word of God.

*F-3.0104 Truth and Goodness*

That truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness, according to our Savior’s rule, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” And that no opinion can either be more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man’s opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it.

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*F-3.0105 Mutual Forbearance*

That, while under the conviction of the above principle we think it necessary to make effectual provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith, we also believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.

*F-3.0106 Election by the People*

That though the character, qualifications, and authority of Church officers are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, as well as the proper method of their investiture and institution, yet the election of the persons to the exercise of this authority, in any particular society, is in that society.

*F-3.0107 Church Power*

That all Church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no Church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God. Now though it will easily be admitted that all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity, yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws than from the right of judging upon laws already made, and common to all who profess the gospel, although this right, as necessity requires in the present state, be lodged with fallible men.

*F-3.0108 The Value of Ecclesiastical Discipline*

Lastly, that if the preceding scriptural and rational principles be steadfastly adhered to, the vigor and strictness of its discipline will contribute to the glory and happiness of any church. Since ecclesiastical discipline must be purely moral or spiritual in its object, and not attended with any civil effects, it can derive no force whatever but from its own justice, the approbation of an impartial public, and the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the Church universal.

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**Mission Statement**

To know Christ, to make him known, and to exhibit his love through worship, education and service.

**Vision Statement**

First Presbyterian Church is a church family where all generations exhibit Christ's love through lives marked by *gratitude, hospitality* and *generosity*.

*Gratitude* – Living in a way that continually expresses our thankfulness for God's grace and love.

*Hospitality* – Welcoming all people into our community through acts of kindness and care.

*Generosity* – Recognizing the goodness and graciousness of God through the giving of our time, talents and treasure.

**The Great Ends of the Church**

*(Book of Order, F-1.0304)*

The great ends of the Church are

the proclamation of the Gospel for the salvation of humankind;  
the shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;  
the maintenance of divine worship;  
the preservation of the truth;  
the promotion of social righteousness; and  
the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

## ***The Officer's Calling***

by Charles D. Elliott

It is said that someone once asked Woodrow Wilson to name the greatest honor ever bestowed upon him.

The reporter who asked the question expected Wilson to name his election to the presidency of Princeton University in 1902; his election to the governorship of New Jersey in 1911; his election to the presidency of the United States – in which he served two terms, from 1913 to 1921 – or perhaps his winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919. The reporter was surprised, therefore, when Wilson thought for a moment, then said, “The greatest honor ever bestowed upon me was my election to be an officer in the Presbyterian Church.”

It is a great honor to be an officer in the Presbyterian Church for it speaks well of you and your abilities and it testifies to the high regard in which you are held by your fellow church members who elected you. But if you regard your election to office in the church to be an honor and nothing more, then you ought to think again.

*First and foremost*, the call of God to an office in the church is a call to service. It is not a call to glory. It is a call to responsibility. It is not a reward for your faithful attendance at church functions or for your generous financial support of the church's program. It is not a commendation for being a good Sunday School teacher or a recognition of your work with the United Way, the Rotary Club or the Volunteer Fire Department. It is a summons to duty, an appointment to hard work.

Far from being a license to sit back and take it easy, to rest on your laurels, it is a command to move ahead, to get busy with the work which is committed into your hands. We are called to be the servant disciples of a Servant Lord.

Then once you are ordained to an office in the church, you must remember that you are no longer a layman, as we commonly understand that term. You are elected, trained, examined and set apart by a duly constituted governing body of the church to fulfill an important function. You take vows similar to those taken by your minister. You are called out, set apart, authorized and empowered to get a job done.

From that time forward, your relationship to the church, to its work and its life, is not a matter of choice or convenience. It is a matter of covenant. You have entered into a covenant with God, with the Presbyterian Church (USA), with your congregation and with your fellow officers.

Because you are men and women of your word, people of integrity, people who say what you mean and mean what you say, you are forever bound in that covenant and you are obligated to do what you say you will do when you assume your ordination vows.

You must remember also that, as an officer in the church, you represent the Church of Jesus Christ to your congregation and to the rest of the world. The way you conduct yourself in business, at home, in the church, in every area of life, is part of your service and witness to the One whom you are chosen to serve.

Whether you like it or not, your congregation and your Lord will be judged by the way you live and by the way you serve. Yes, I know you have rights, privileges and freedoms as a person and as a Christian. But remember the example of Christ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men; and, being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8).

He did not boast of his rights, his freedoms, his privileges; he did not complain that the work to which he had been called was too hard or that it took too much time. He joyfully submitted himself to

the service of his Father in heaven, and he did that which he was commissioned to do. Nothing less is expected of us.

BEING A CHURCH OFFICER, therefore, has many implications for you. By virtue of your office, you are obligated to participate actively in the life of the church, to attend regularly the services of worship, to participate in Sunday School, to attend and to support the programs of fellowship, information and inspiration.

You are expected to support the church with your material gifts and to set the example for the congregation by making regular, proportionate gifts. Of course, you know that the biblical standard is the tithe and that we really do not begin to “give” in the strict sense until we get beyond the tithe.

It is incumbent upon officers in the church to set the example, to lead the way, to provide evidence to the people that giving can be regular, proportionate, generous and joyful. Don’t say it can’t be done until you’ve tried it, because it can be done and you’ll feel good about it.

You are expected, as a church officer, to be willing to teach in Sunday School; to pray with and for the people of the congregation; to assist with the leadership of worship; to visit the sick; to minister to the troubled; to welcome the stranger and the newcomer; and to seek those who have fallen away from the church’s fellowship, that they may be restored and that the community of faith may be whole again.

You are expected to do your committee work faithfully and well. It is not enough simply to attend the regular meetings of the board on which you serve. In most churches, committees are the bodies which plan and carry out the work of mission and service. If you are to be faithful to your call, you must participate responsibly in the work of the committee to which you are appointed.

You should endeavor to keep your pastor informed of situations in the church and in the community that need the pastor’s attention. Remember that you are not the bosses, though you are partners in ministry. Work with your pastor(s) as a partner and protect their time so that it may be used to the best advantage of the church. Make sure the pastor knows what a minister needs to know in order to function effectively.

I believe a good church officer is one who looks for work to do in the church and who does it joyfully, without being prodded or coddled, bribed or threatened. The officer does it because of love for Christ, love for the people of Christ and deep personal concern for the spiritual welfare of those who belong to Christ.

A great church is one that got that way not because it had a good pulpiteer – of course, it doesn’t hurt to have a great preacher, but there aren’t that many of them around – but because it has had great officers, officers whose priorities are right in line with the great ends of the church and whose commitments to the service of Christ are deep and sincere.

IN SUMMARY, to be a church officer is no light responsibility. It demands and deserves the best you have to give in the service of God, in the life of your congregation and through the life of the presbytery. It will require of you time, faithfulness, application, diligence, discretion, wisdom and imagination. Yes, it is hard work. But, as someone once said, when God calls us to labor in his vineyard, he calls us not to eat the grapes, but to use the hoe.

The Presbyterian Church is a great church. It is a great church because, through the years, Christ has used committed officers to make it so. It is great because its form of government, ordained by God and set forth in Scripture, provides a channel through which officers and people can work together under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Our form of government does not burden us with hierarchy; it binds us to God and to each other in a covenant of service.

Within this great church, we are officers who have a high and holy task to accomplish as under-shepherds of the Master. Hard work? Yes, it is, but the goal for which we strive is worthy of our very best effort. May God give us all grace that we may labor as workmen who have no need to be ashamed.

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**Top Ten List of  
What I Expect from Elders & Deacons**

1. Someone who knows he or she is called to be an ambassador for First Presbyterian Church, both within and outside of our church. (“So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” II Corinthians 5:20)
2. Someone who leads by example, and is a vital, regular part of the worshiping community at FPC. (“I was glad when they said unto me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord!’” Psalm 122)
3. Someone who possesses a working knowledge of the Bible, engaged in the regular study of it. (“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4)
4. Someone who is a person of prayer, able to enjoy a quiet relationship with God, and able to pray with and for others. I assume every Elder and Deacon will pray for our church, for our pastors and staff, and for each other. (“Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” I Thessalonians 5:16-18)
5. Someone who is learning of the gifts God has given to them, and knows that they are called to share these gifts in ministry and service. (“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit, to use it for the common good.” I Corinthians 12:4-7)
6. Someone who is intentionally involved in growing in grace, and someone who is also committed to mission and service in and through the church, both inhaling and exhaling God’s grace. (“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1-3)
7. Someone whose family relationships, friendships and relationships at work and in the church are healthy and reflective of Christ’s call. (“No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.” I John 4:12)

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8. Someone who is a flexible, joyful person with a sense of humor, who works positively for health and wholeness in the church. Someone who likes to laugh and is fun to work with in ministry and service. (“The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” II Corinthians 9:6,7)
  
9. Someone who offers public praise and private criticism. A person who is an encourager, who is supportive and can be trusted to do what is best for the church. (“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day is drawing near.” Hebrews 10:24) (“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Philippians 4:8)
  
10. Someone who is a cheerful and generous giver, committed to proportionate giving and striving to become a tither. (“You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God; for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints, but also overflows in thanksgivings to God.” II Corinthians 9:11,12)