



*The human mind plans the way, but the LORD directs the steps.*

- Proverbs 16:9

Dear Friends,

As the proverb I've quoted above reminds us, God has a way of co-opting or upending our plans. Moses had planned to live out his life as a shepherd in exile when God spoke to him from the burning bush and called him to lead the Israelites out of slavery to freedom. Esther expected to live out her days as queen quietly, but Mordecai helped her discern God's providential appointment of her to such a high position for the salvation of her people. Paul set out for Damascus to put the followers of Jesus to death, and God led him to join them instead. The witness of the scriptures shows us that it is foolish to assume human plans and expectations have the final word.

Someone recently asked me, "What does a typical week look like for a stated clerk?" I laughed as I replied, "There is no typical week! It's always different." I can testify that a pastor's life is much the same. You're called to the hospital or the funeral home. A colleague in crisis reaches out for your help. Your carefully prepared sermon is overtaken by world events. If God's surprises did not bring me fulfillment, I don't think I would have lasted in the church!

Nevertheless, much as I welcome this serendipity, I also value creating basic structures to guide and order my work. It is tiresome to feel as though you are always breaking trail, and it is useless to do so when you are repeatedly making the same journey. It is in that spirit that I offer the list below. It is adapted from a guide I developed with the clerk of session at the church I served, and it covers many of the basic tasks that sessions need to attend to each year. You may have to adapt it to your context—for example, if you use a fiscal year other than the calendar year, or if you elect officers at a special meeting, rather than the annual meeting—but it may help you as you plan the agenda for each month.

**January & February:** Approve annual statistical report, elect presbytery commissioners (including alternates), authorize celebration of the Lord's Supper through the following January, schedule annual congregational meeting.

**March & April:** Train, examine, and ordain/install officers elected by the congregation. Confirm completion of financial review for prior calendar year, and document insurance coverage in the minutes.

**May & June:** Organize session roles and responsibilities for the coming program year.

**July & August:** Quieter months. Business as needed, or special gathering for study, planning.

**September & October:** Approve church school curriculum and teachers. Review membership roll and identify those who need to be contacted about their membership status.

**November & December:** Review pastor's terms of call. Approve, document housing allowance. Remove inactive members from the active roll. Adopt budget for the coming year.

I recommend that moderators and clerks may develop their own local guide for the session with these and other tasks, to ensure that they are carried out regularly, and with a rhythm that members of the session come to learn and expect. God inevitably surprises all of us along the way, but we can and should make life easier for ourselves by planning for the routine guideposts we pass year in and year out.

Grace and Peace,  
Rev. David Baer, Stated Clerk