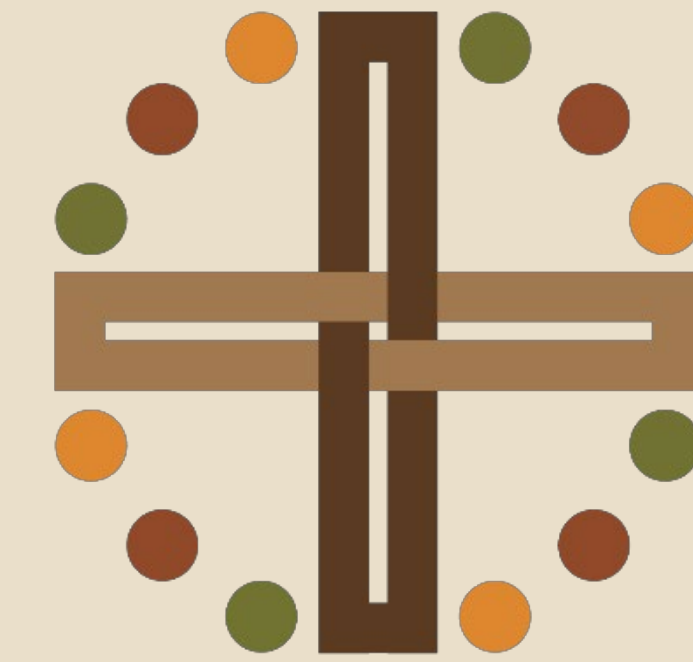


How do you spell Presbyterian?



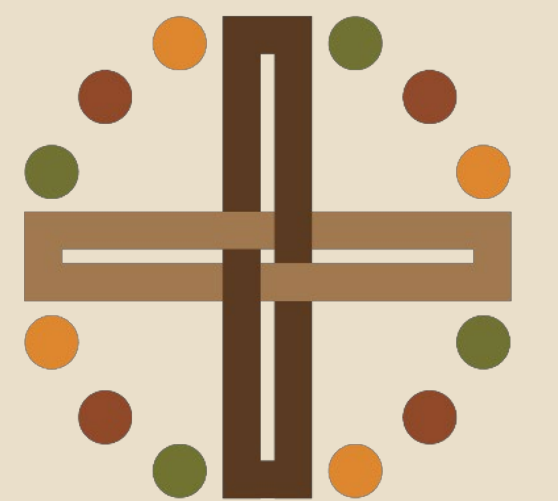
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February 22, 2025

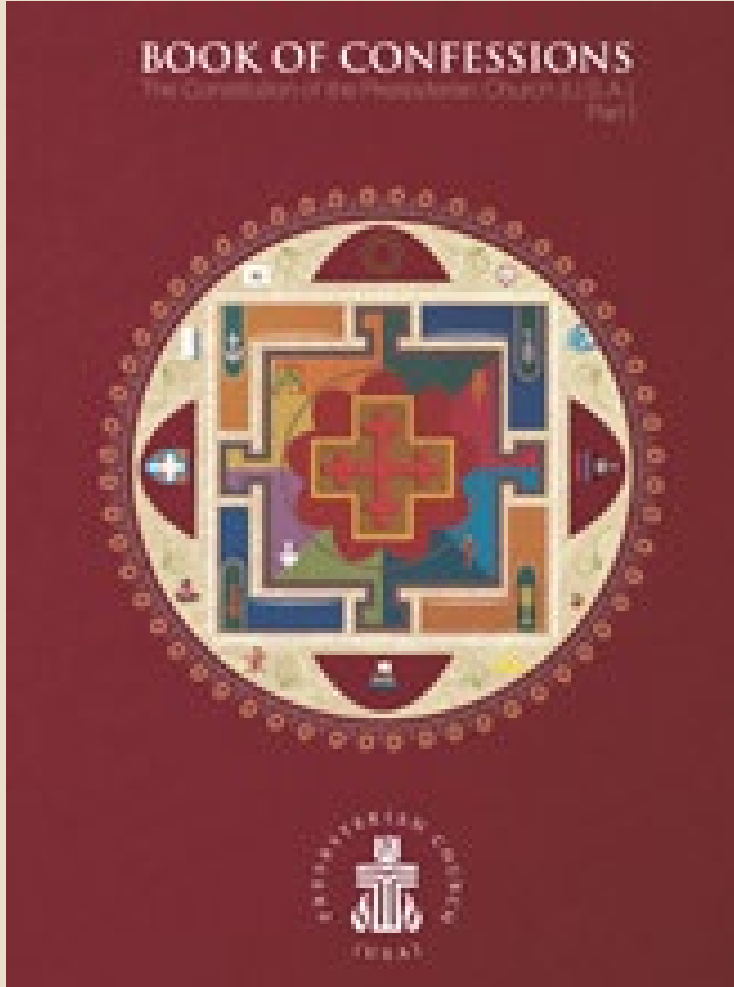
How do you spell “Presbyterian”?

- From the Greek *presbuteros*, meaning “elder”
- OT: Seventy elders (Heb. *zāqēn*) helped govern the Israelite people with Moses (Ex. 24:9-11; Num. 11:24-25)
- Elders governed the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15)
- Individual elders responsible for churches in different cities (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5)
- Elder vs. bishop: We believe NT uses “elder” and “bishop” (Greek *episkopos*, lit. “overseer”) as different words for the same thing.

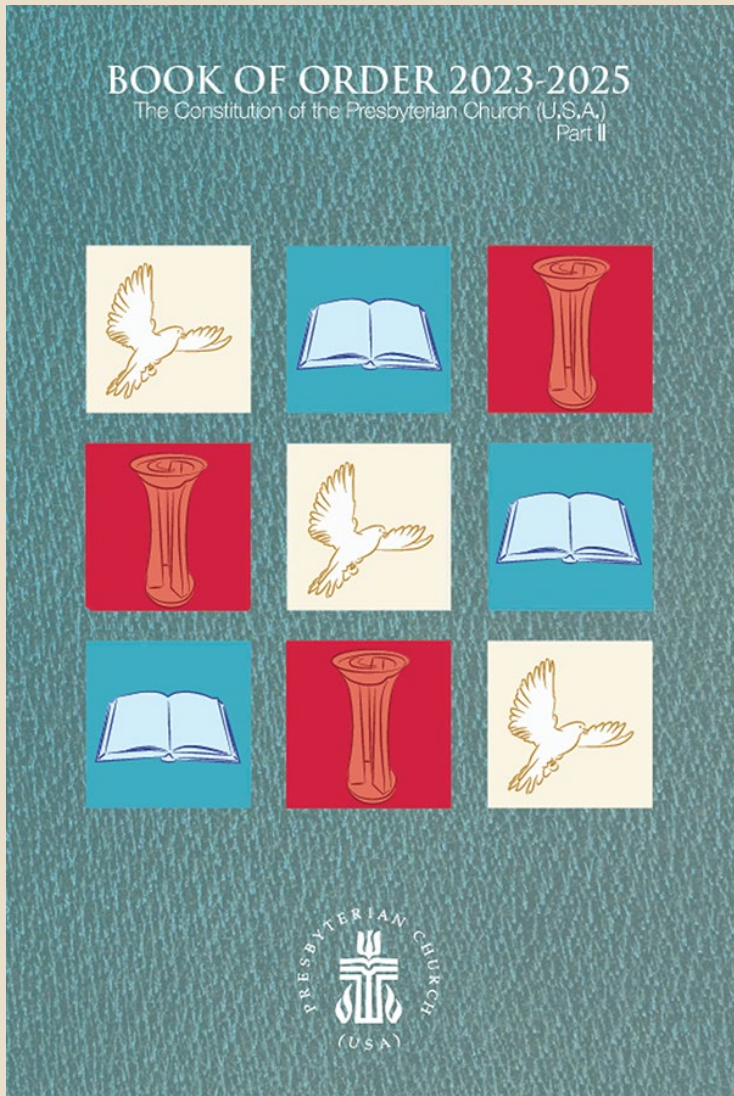


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Constitution of the PCUSA



- What we believe: *Book of Confessions* (based on how we read the Bible)

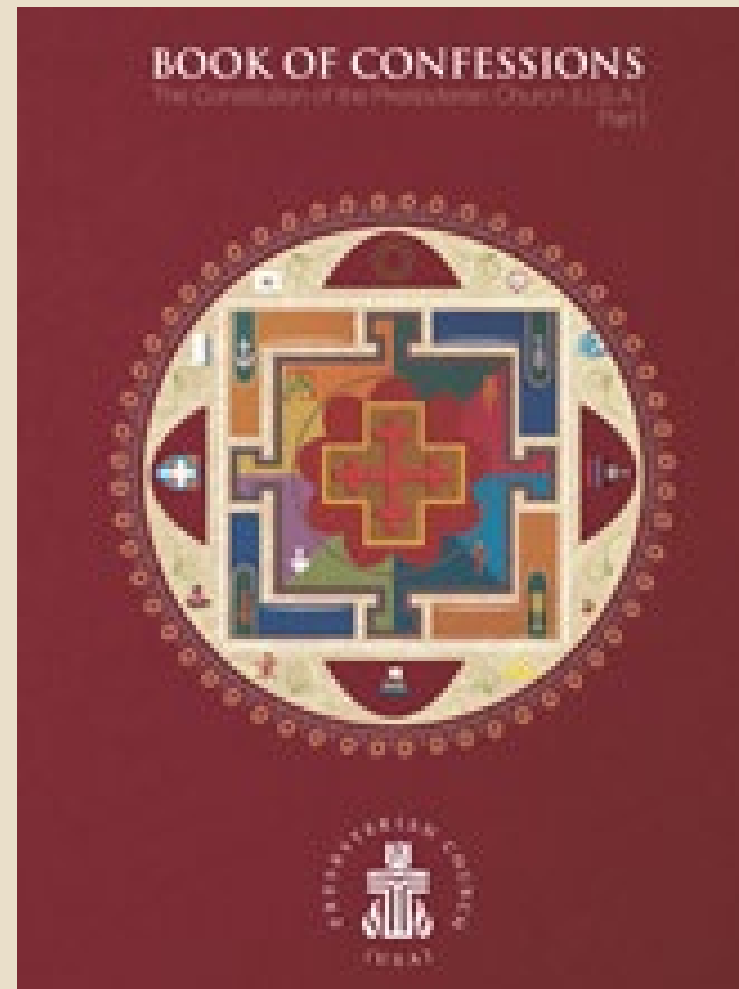


- How we organize ourselves and make decisions: *The Book of Order*



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Book of Confessions



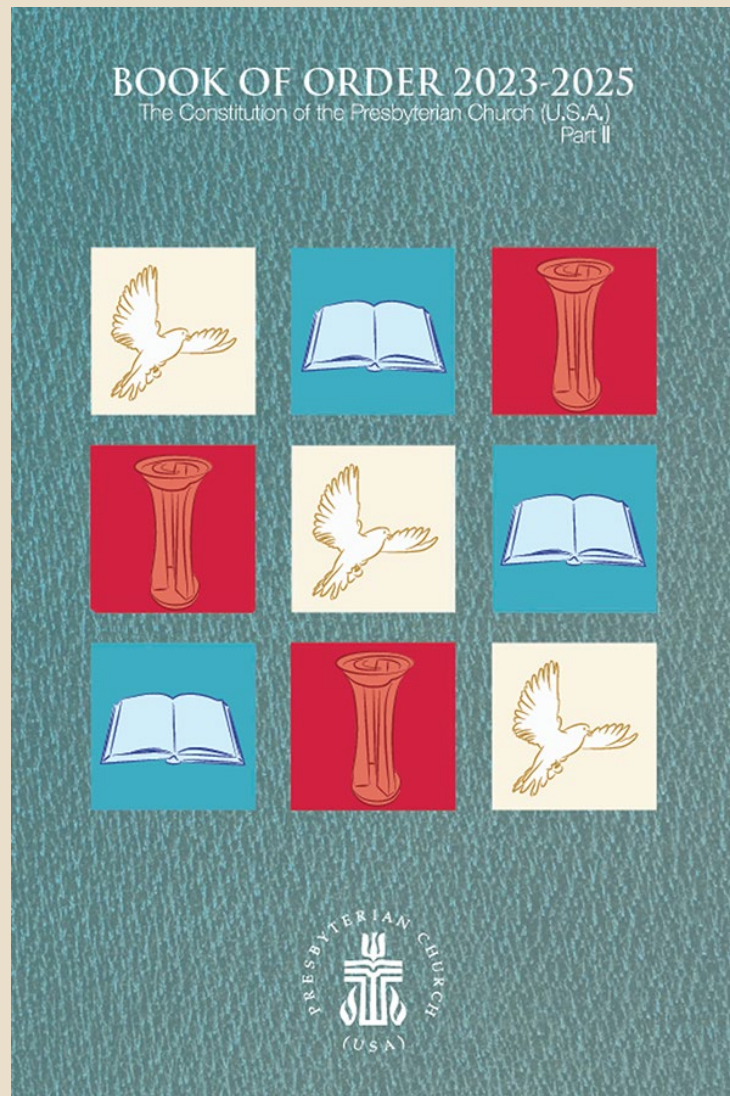
“In these statements the church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do” (F-2.01).

- **Ecumenical:** Nicene & Apostles Creeds
- **Reformation:** Scots Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Second Helvetic Confession, Westminster Confession & Catechisms
- **Modern:** Barmen Declaration, Confession of 1967, Confession of Belhar, A Brief Statement of Faith



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Book of Order



Four sections:

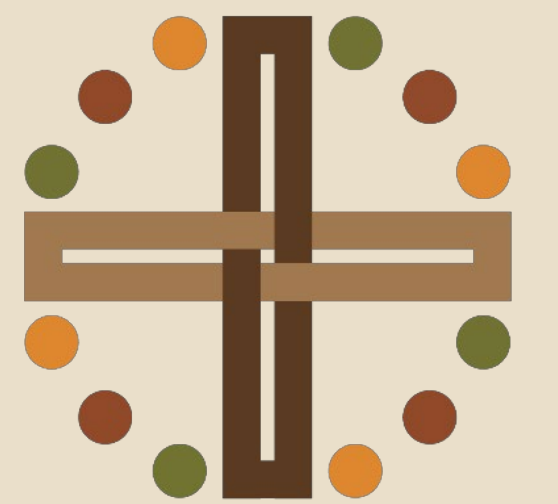
1. Foundations: nature and purpose of the church and presbyterian governance
2. Form of Government: system of organization and procedures for governing the church
3. Directory for Worship: framework for conducting worship
4. Church Discipline: how we hold one another accountable



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Why are we all here? (F-1.01)

The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people. This one living God, the Scriptures say, liberated the people of Israel from oppression and covenanted to be their God. By the power of the Spirit, this one living God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, who came to live in the world, die for the world, and be raised again to new life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the nearness of God's kingdom, bringing good news to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed, and proclaiming the Lord's favor upon all creation.



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Why are we all here? (continued, F-1.01)

The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God's mission.



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Principles of Presbyterian Government

- Connectional: All the congregations of the PCUSA constitute one church (F-3.0201)
- Collaborative: We make decisions in groups
 1. Governed by Presbyters (F-3.0202): ruling elders and teaching elders are equal
 2. Gathered in Councils (F-3.0203)
 - Councils participate in, and accountable to, higher council (F-3.0206)
 - Structure: session→presbytery→synod→General Assembly
 3. Elected by the people (F-3.0106), but to find and represent the will of Christ (F-3.0204)
 4. Majority rules (F-3.0205), but love is foundational (G-1.0102).



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Pause

What is new information?

What is surprising?

What do you want to know more about?



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What does the Congregation decide?

“The congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context” (G-1.0101).

1. Meet at least annually, and at other times as needed.
2. Elects church officers (elders, deacons, trustees).
3. Calls pastor; approves or changes terms of call; may request dissolution of pastoral relationship, or consider whether to concur with a pastor’s request for dissolution.
4. Consents to purchase, sale, or mortgaging of property.



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What is a Session?

“The session shall have responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness.”

Book of Order, G-3.0201



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Who is the Session?

- Elders in active service, elected for a term by the congregation
- Installed pastors (also elected by the congregation, either for a definite or indefinite term)
- Officers: Moderator (usually the pastor) and Clerk



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When does the Session meet?

- Must meet at least quarterly (4x per year)
- Moderator may call a special meeting
- Moderator *must* call a special meeting when requested in writing by any two session members

What is new information for you?



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What does the Session do?

Provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.

1. Place for worship, education, and spiritual nurture
2. Regular preaching of the Word by a minister (or other trained person)
3. Outreach into the community (mission, evangelism)
4. Ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community
5. Ecumenical witness



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What does the Session do?

Provide that the sacraments may be rightly administered and received.

1. Authorize celebration of the Lord's Supper (at least quarterly)
2. Authorize Baptisms
3. Exercise "pastoral care among the congregation in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the congregation may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments."



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What does the Session do?

Nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.

1. Receive and dismiss members; review the roll (annually) and encourage the participation of members.
2. Train, examine, ordain, and install elders and deacons.
3. Promote stewardship.
4. Manage the physical property of the church for the furtherance of its mission.
5. Direct the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation.
6. Lead congregation in the mission of the whole Church.
7. Warn, bear witness against error, immorality.
8. Serve in judicial matters.



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What does the Session do?

Also...

1. Elects commissioners to presbytery (G-3.0202a).
2. Elects the treasurer and sets the budget (G-3.0205).
3. Provides full information to the congregation concerning its decisions related to the expenditure of funds contributed.



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What does the Pastor do?

“Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (also called teaching elders and pastors) shall in all things be committed to teaching the faith in word and deed and equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12)” (G-2.0501)

1. Moderator of the session (presides at meetings, entitled to speak and vote).
2. In worship, responsible for scriptures, sermon, prayers, selection of music (!), bulletin and other media, and use of drama, dance, and other art forms (W-2.0304).
3. Celebrates sacraments (Baptism and Communion) when authorized by the session (W-3.0403, W-3.0410).
4. Pastoral care.
5. Participate in governance beyond the particular church (e.g. attend presbytery meetings, serve on committees).



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What about committees?

“Councils may designate by their own rule such committees and commissions as they deem necessary and helpful for the accomplishment of the mission of the church....”

“A committee shall study and recommend action or carry out decisions already made by a council. It shall make a full report to the council that created it, and its recommendations shall require action by that body” (G-3.0109).



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What about staff?

- Accountable to the session—sometimes through Personnel Committee and/or Head of Staff.
- Procedures set down in session Manual of Administrative Operations.



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What is the Presbytery?

“The presbytery is the council serving as a corporate expression of the church within a certain district and is composed of all the congregations and ministers of the Word and Sacrament within that district” (G-3.0301).

- Oversees pastoral relationships, preparation for ministry process, discipline of ministers.
- Organizes, receives, dismisses, and dissolves congregations.
- Provides resources, guidance, and encouragement to congregations.



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