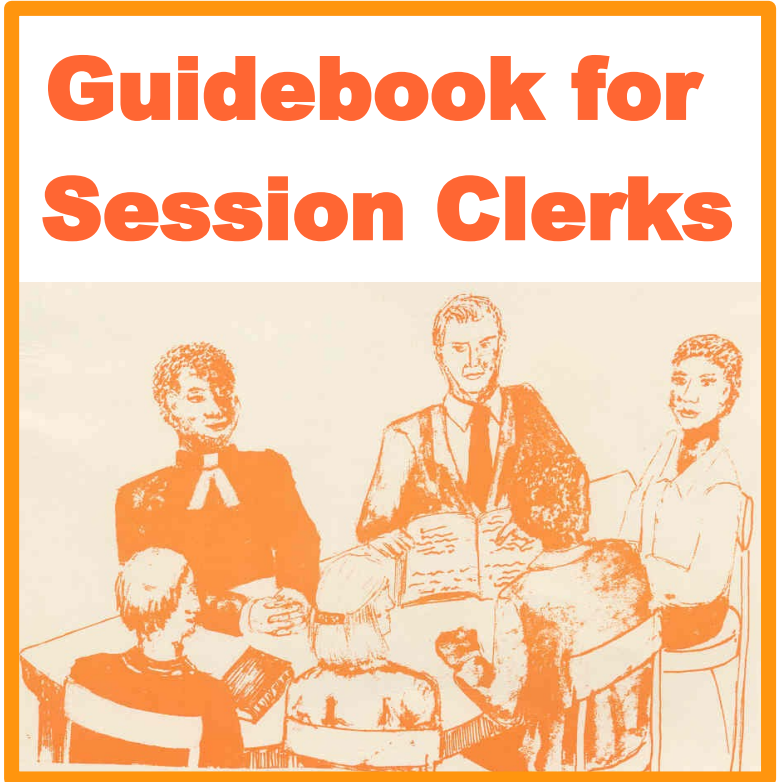


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**GUIDEBOOK FOR SESSION CLERKS,
ELDERS AND OTHER LAY LEADERS**

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**For a copy of the MANUAL OF FAITH AND ORDER –
see www.upcsa.org**

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[*** NOTE: Manual of Faith and Order references are common.

The latest Manual version is available at www.upcsa.org.

Updated Manual references herein were inserted by RD Adamson.]

INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP SEMINAR

It is suggested that each Lay Leader's Seminar Course offered should include an initial 'INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP SEMINAR'.

The following are some essential pointers for inclusion:

1. Registration of participants, mutual introduction of participants and ice breaker. If course leaders have not already distributed the Manual material to participants before this first session, then the Manual material should be distributed at this point.
2. Outline of the workshop seminar format of the course, emphasising the need for participants to be ready for specialist input, discussion and activity groups, report backs, think tanks - AND Yes! Assignments or homework if needed. Obviously no kind of testing/marking/grading is offered, since it is expected that participants have already been elected as either Elders or Board members, or been accepted as other gifted Lay Leaders.
3. **An Introduction to the Word, Work and Witness of the Gospel:**
This first section of a Lay Leader Course should always have included a review of the proactive gospel in the initial introductory workshop seminar - being rooted in Jesus Christ, delimited by apostolic authority according to the Scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit, claiming the legacy of the Protestant Reformation and being active in global evangelical ecumenical inculturated mission according to the Great Commission, humbly yet in unity and resolve, the Christian keeps to this service of its Lord.

On their own, have all the participants review the "Introduction to the Work of the Presbyterian Church" by Danie Van Zyl, or a specialised brief history overview of the work of their particular denomination and congregation.
4. Have participants divide into discussion groups (if the group is large). According to which course is being offered, have participants discuss how they perceive their gift of ministry as they enter into the seminar course. Let them record their opinions and give feedback in a plenary report back.
5. Assignment in preparation for the first Seminar: Ask the participants to take some time at home (or private time at a retreat) and read the material for the first seminar that they will be participating in.

**Local Congregations, Ethos of Church Councils,
Session Clerks, and the Sacraments**

[**Optional Introductory Seminar:**

For participants in a course on “Local Congregations, Ethos of Church Courts, Session Clerks and the Sacraments”, it is recommended that the ‘**INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP SEMINAR**’ makes up the initial seminar of a 5 - part workshop format. See after the Main Index page at the beginning of the Manual for details on the Introductory Workshop Session.]

SEMINAR 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION...

1. Ask the participants to write down their brief responses (2-3 sentences only) to the following questions:
 - a. Why have you come to a Local Congregation, Church Courts, Session Clerks and Sacraments course?
 - b. What do you expect to gain from the course?
 - c. What expectation does the Bible place on you in regard to local leadership?In group discussion, invite the participants to read their answers, then discuss the various expectations within the group.
2. **Input/Input invite** (Guest Speaker)
Input based on material of
Seminar 1: The Importance of the Local Congregation...
emphasising the role of local congregation governance and status in the UPCSA.
3. Have participants write down how they explain membership to a new member of the congregation that they are visiting, including reference to any brochure/literature that their congregation uses in promoting itself. Let the participants bring copies of their congregation’s brochures/literature to the next **Seminar 2**.
4. From the Introductory Seminar, participants will have been asked to read the material for **Seminar 1: The Importance of the Local Congregation**. In discussion, ask the participants to explain “church”, “Church”, “denomination” and “local congregation”, and the significant differences between them in Presbyterian usage.
5. Invite the participants to explain how they value membership in a congregation of the UPCSA, as against membership in a congregation of another denomination.
6. **Assignment in preparation for the next session:** Set the participants the task of reading **Seminar 2: Ethos, Discipline and Councils of the UPCSA** at home or in their own time. Invite them also to find scriptures which show church ‘council’ type practice being used by Jesus and the apostles.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION AND ONE'S INVOLVEMENT IN ITS LIFE AND WORK (M S Hlongwane)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

When one commits one's life to Christ, that is a big step with tremendous rewards in present life and in the hereafter. God showed His love towards mankind by sending His Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour if we believe in him. (John 3:16,17) The Hebrew says about Jesus:

"He purifies people from their sins, and both he and those who are made pure all have the same father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers." (Heb. 2:11,12 G NB)

Paul emphasises that Jesus died for people no longer to live for themselves but for God, if they believe in Jesus (2 Cor 5:15 -17; Gal 2:20). Therefore, it is very important that those who have committed their lives to God, should meet together from time to time to worship God, to encourage one another and help one another in Christ, as God's congregation. (Acts 2:43-47; Heb 10:24,25)

In this article, we shall elaborate briefly on the following: The meaning of the Church; Some biblical significance of the Church; The importance of a local congregation even in the twenty-first century; The value of one's membership in the congregation of the UPCSA; Conclusion and bibliography.

1.2 THE MEANING OF THE CHURCH

The English word "Church", is derived from the Greek adjective "Kyriakos", which means "the Lord's house", (i.e. Christian place of worship). "Church" in the New Testament, however, renders Greek "ekklesia", which mostly means a local congregation of Christians and never a building. "Ekklesia" was also used among the Jews (LXX) for the "Congregation of Israel" which was constituted at Mt. Sinai and assembled before the Lord at the annual feasts in the persons of its male representatives. (Acts 7:38). Ekklesia certainly implied meeting rather than "organisation" or "society". Locality was essential to its character. (Douglas, The New Bible Dictionary, 1977:228-229).

The word "Church" in our days, is used interchangeably with a particular denomination or a universal Church which includes all denominations or even a "Church building" where people meet for worship. Sometimes, this term would mean a group of Christians worshipping together in a particular specific place at local level. Some other terms used for a local church are: local congregation; parish church or congregation; local worshipping community or local Christian fellowship. In this article, we shall be using "local congregation" or "local church".

1.3 SOME BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHURCH

The New Testament Church was created out of the band of disciples associated with Jesus during His earthly ministry, who on the day of Pentecost received His Spirit

poured out upon them, empowering them to witness to Him as the risen Christ (Acts 1:8). It is the same Spirit who is operating in the church even today. This “new humanity” (Eph 2:15) takes the outward form of congregations of believers meeting in various places regularly for worship (Acts 20:7, Hebrews 10:25) and governed by elders, after the analogy of the synagogue, who are chosen from their own numbers (Acts 14:23).

In its spiritual essence the Church, i.e. its members, enjoy the invisible grace of the indwelling Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4) who animates them as a body and unites them to Christ, the head of the Church (Eph.4: 15, 16). United thus in Christ and to one another, the church is the “communion of saints” and though sin yet clings to them, its members are sanctified by the Word and Sacraments. The Church is one, holy and catholic because it is built upon the foundation which the apostles laid in their teachings (Eph 2:20; 4:4; 5:27 and Acts 10:13). The guiding force is the fellowship of faith and love. The fellowship is visibly present wherever the Word is truly preached and the sacraments rightly administered. In the Reformed tradition (following Calvin), discipline, by which the integrity of Word and Sacraments is endured, has also been made a mark of the church as visible.

(Douglas, Dictionary of the New Christian Church, 1981: 226-227).

1.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF A LOCAL CONGREGATION - EVEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The congregation or the local church has been the dominant institutional expression of the Christian Church for nearly two thousand years, and it will continue to be so until the Lord comes again.

In his book, “The Local Church Looks to the Future,” Lyle Schaller numerates four important assumptions which demonstrate that the local congregation plays a very important part in God’s ministry. I agree with Schaller’s points even for the local congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa. Let us look at them briefly.

1.4.1 That the Local Church is neither obsolete nor irrelevant.

The historical evidence clearly indicates that the congregation is the most effective channel for carrying out the great missionary commandment in Matthew 28:19, 20. It is in and through the local congregation that individuals come to know Christ, to grow in the faith, to have their lives changed, and to go forth into the world to witness to their faith. It is the congregation which mostly supplies the money to pay the salaries of church workers and other related affairs to the Church. There is no substitute for corporate worship and for the community of believers in which the Word is preached and the Sacraments are duly administered than in a local congregation. So long as the family remains the basic social unity of our society, there will be a place and a need for the local church which ministers to the family as a family and to the members of the family as individuals.

1.4.2 That all the basic purposes of the congregation are compatible with one another.

The congregation is theologically inherent to be engaged in all facets of

congregational care, such as being effective vehicle for evangelism; mission work in the world; Christian education for all age-groups; ministry of justice and social responsibility etc.

1.4.3 That Institutionalism is a fact of life in the congregation, as in denominational and ecumenical agencies.

Whilst the local congregation is institutional like other secular organisations, it is different in terms of its purpose, goals, organisation, its reason for being, its motivation, and its relationship to God. The congregation is there because of Jesus who bought it with his precious blood, and thus, it is his, to serve God, one another and God's creation to the glory of God alone.

1.4.4 That the quality of decision-making process in the congregation can be improved

The decision-makers in the local congregation can benefit by developing a systematic statement of purpose, by carefully formulating relevant set of goals and objectives, by drawing realisable master-budgets, by involving ordinary members of the congregation to be part of the process of decision-making, and by considering the experiences of other local churches and adapt what is good for them to the benefit of God's Church locally and denominationally, even universally, if possible. The local Church leaders need to change from the behaviour of being always directive but rather to be pro-active in their planning. (Schaller, 1968 9-19).

1.5 THE VALUE OF ONE'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE CONGREGATION OF THE UPCSA

The Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA), believes that the Church in general, exists through God's will, and its purpose and function is:

- to bear witness to the saving Gospel of Christ to all who do not yet believe in him (evangelism);
- to build-up in faith, hope and love those who already believe (christian education or discipleship);
- to proclaim his sovereignty over the world so that his rule may be extended in it (justice and social responsibility).

(Manual, 1992:1. See current Vision Statements of the General Assembly).

This denomination, encourages and urges its congregations and its individual members to pursue these objectives through its courts (i.e. Session, Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly) to the glory of God. The congregants, need to know, understand and adhere to the church's view of the value of one's membership in the local congregation in carrying out or pursuing the following objectives:

1.5.1 Membership of a congregation

That the membership of the congregation consists of all those who have been baptised, confess the Lordship of Christ in their lives, and have been enrolled in the local congregation (Manual Chapter 6.12)

1.5.2 Rights of a Member

An individual member of this Church has the following constituted rights to enjoy:

- * the right to vote at officially constituted congregational meetings (Manual Chapter 6.14);
- * the right to present to the Session a petition regarding any matter which in one's opinion affects one's spiritual interest or the congregational or the interest of the Church at large and even to make an appeal to the Session against any decision taken by the Session or body responsible for temporal affairs, if one is not happy with it. An appeal could even be lodged with the Presbytery. (Manual Chapter 6.19)
- * a right to be ministered to by one's parish minister and members of the Session and for belonging in one of the elders' districts under an elder.

1.5.3 Responsibilities of a Member of a Congregation

It is very important to note and accept that rights of a member in the congregation go hand-in-hand with member's responsibilities, which each one of us as Christians is expected to adhere to. Some of the responsibilities include:

- * ones active involvement in the life and work of one's congregation in terms of goals agreed-upon, or joining any other recognised church organisation to fulfil its objectives too
- * the use of one's spiritual gift or gifts, as one might have been blessed by the Lord (I Cor. 12:1-11, 27-31; Rom 12:4-12), and one's professional expertise or trade, to contribute meaningfully in the upliftment of God's work locally or even communally and through the courts of the Church;
- * regularly attending public worship services, partaking in the Lord's supper, and to other Church programmes; faithful financial contributions for the extension of God's Kingdom here on earth, starting with one's local church; (Mal 3:6-12; Matt 22:15-22; 2 Cor. 9:6-15) and
- * keeping the unity and the peace of the congregation under the authority of the Session.

1.5.4 Termination of One's Membership in the Congregation

One may terminate his/her membership from the congregation, or ask for a transfer certificate from the Session, and join another congregation of this denomination or any other branch of the church, for that matter. There are two most important paragraphs from the Manual which I want to draw your attention to:

- * that if the Session decides to terminate a member's membership, that it should communicate with him/her first with the aim of not excommunicating (Manual Chapter 6.16); and
- the conditions which allows the Session to erase one's name (Manual Chapter 7.12).

1.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is of vital importance for any person who wishes to join any of the congregations of the UPCSA to enquire from the minister or leader concerned about

the congregation's Mission Statement, objectives, goals, budget, elders, other church organisation and any other matters one feels are important to know about, prior to joining that particular congregation. This should be done on behalf of the Session for one's pastoral care. (Manual Par 3.12 & 3.13:17). The aim is to make an informed decision. God has called us to serve Him and one another. We are called to keep the unity and peace of God's Church and to be in good relationships with one another. "Charity begins at home". We are to be actively involved in the life and work of our congregation even financially. How are we to be actively involved if we do not know in advance what is going on in that particular congregation regarding the ministry?

Good luck! The UPCSА welcomes you with warm hearts. Join us, and journey together with us to where God leads us to His Glory. Thanks.

1.7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Good News Bible. The British and Foreign Bible Society Division. Cambridge: University Press.

Manual of Faith and Order (2014), download from website www.upcsa.org.za of the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, or contact the General Assembly Office, Johannesburg for details or for a copy.

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SEMINAR 2. ETHOS, DISCIPLINE AND COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH

1. In discussion group; from **Seminar 1, question 3**, participants were asked to bring copies of the brochures/literature that their local congregation uses to promote itself. Have the participants present their literature, explaining it's purpose and use.
2. Invite the participants to read the scriptures they found which show church 'court' type practice being used by Jesus and the apostles, allowing time for all to participate, and for discussion.
3. **Input/Input invite** (Guest Speaker)
Input on material of
Seminar 2: Ethos, Discipline and Councils of the UPCSA, emphasising the role of scriptural good order in the UPCSA. Presbyterians have always been known for good order in polity, worship, doctrine and discipline.
4. Have one participant read **1 Cor 14.40**. Have a few copies of Presbyterian Service Books and Ordinals available. Invite participants to scrutinise these and to share how they would use these, and what they think of Presbyterian ethos and order in worship - is it of the old style "frozen chosen, dour Scots", or "true Ubuntu" or "needs more Ubuntu", or "lively contemporary" variety?
5. Have another participant read **1 Cor 14.40** again. Have copies of the Presbyterian Manual of Faith and Order available. Invite participants to scrutinise these and discuss how the Manual doesn't burden us, but rather gives us the framework to do successful church leadership, management and administration.
6. **Assignment in preparation for the next session:**
Set the participants the task of reading **Seminar 3: Appointment, Duties and Responsibilities of Session Clerks within the UPCSA...** at home or in their own time. Participants should also bookmark or download, buy or borrow a copy of the Manual of Faith and Procedure (www.upcsa.org) to have on hand for use in the this next **Seminar 3**.

2. ETHOS, DISCIPLINE AND COUNCILS OF THE UPCSA

(R McN Samson – with update for UPCSA Council-Court development)

2.1. ETHOS

The word “Ethos” is defined in the dictionary as “the characteristic spirit or attitudes of a community...” When we speak about the ethos of Presbyterianism in general, or of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa in particular, what we are concerned with, then, is an attempt to describe those characteristics which may be said to be distinctive of this Church. A description of the ethos of the Church attempts to answer the question,

“How do you know this is a Presbyterian, and not some other, Church?”

Since all Christian denominations have some form of polity (style of government), worship, doctrine and discipline it may be best to look at the particular attitudes of Presbyterianism towards these things to discover what may be called the Presbyterian Ethos.

2.2 POLITY

The word “polity” is used simply to speak about the form of government in the Church. There are three basic forms of Church government: Episcopal, Presbyterian and Congregational. The episcopal form of government gives authority for important decision-making in the Church to specific individuals (usually bishops). The congregational form of government gives this authority to the meeting of the members of the local congregation.

In the Presbyterian form of government the people are invited to choose elders and ministers to whom they give the authority to rule or govern the Church. These elders and ministers, though, have little, if any, personal authority and are required to work together in the Councils of the Church (Session, Presbytery and General Assembly - see Manual Chapter 1.8-12). All ministers and elders have the same status when together in a meeting of any one of the councils, i.e. nobody has more authority in the meeting than anybody else, except the Moderator, who has the usual authority granted to a chairperson. No-one has any authority over anybody else outside the meetings.

The details of how this polity works in practice are set out in the Uniting Church’s Manual of Faith and Order. The intention of this form of government is that there should be a chosen and set apart (ordained) leadership in the Church which is exercised in a corporate (shared) way. (See Manual Chapter 16 – Explanatory note).

In the Session the elders share responsibility for the pastoral oversight (care and discipline) of the congregation. This has been a particularly distinctive feature of Presbyterianism since the Reformation. (See Manual Chapter 7 – Explanatory note).

2.3 WORSHIP

All Christian communities gather for worship, and at times the order of service or style of worship has been sufficiently distinctive in each denomination to make clear whether you are attending a service in a Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian or other

Church. Catholic and Anglican worship has tended to follow set forms prescribed by the Church. The worship in Pentecostal and some other Churches has tended to be spontaneous (unplanned).

Presbyterian worship has normally followed a planned order of service chosen by the minister (but in keeping with the forms of worship approved by the General Assembly). The form of the service is meant to be such that everything is “done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40). A disordered Church service would be totally out of keeping with the Presbyterian ethos.

Dominant feature in Presbyterian worship would be the reading of the Bible and the preaching of the Gospel. For this reason the ministers of the Church are required to be well-trained academically.

2.4 DOCTRINE

The Uniting Presbyterian Church acknowledges the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the supreme rule of faith and life. It accepts the major creeds of the Church (Apostles’ and Nicene). In this it is no different generally from most other Churches. But Presbyterianism has also recognized various subordinate standards through which it has sought to express its understanding of the faith. The Church gives liberty of opinion on these subordinate standards to its ministers and elders but also retains the authority to guard against any abuse of this liberty.

Formulations of accepted doctrine have played a large part in Presbyterian (as in all Reformed) Church history. These formulations of doctrine have been designed to maintain the “witness, unity and peace” of the Church. (Please see Manual Chapter 2 – Preamble/Declaration of Standards, “The Confession of Faith of the UPCSA” and “The Declaration of Faith for the Church in Southern Africa” in the Manual of Faith and Order of the UPCSA).

2.5 DISCIPLINE

“Discipline is necessary to maintain the unity and peace of the Church, to help those who go astray to repent and be restored, and to discourage others from being tempted by bad examples.” (Manual Chapter 18 11.01). In these words the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa describes the purpose and intention of its practice of discipline. The Church holds, as one of its characteristic features, that the people of God who err in teaching and practice ought to be disciplined for the good of the whole Church. Wrong teaching or bad behaviour should not simply be tolerated but as far as possible removed from the life of the Church because it is not good witness to Christ. This discipline is exercised by the Councils, or Council elected Courts of the Church only.

The characteristic spirit, or ethos, of the Presbyterian Church, then, is expressed through shared responsibility in government, orderly and informed worship, controlled liberty of opinion on doctrine, and disciplined membership.

The structural authority in the courts of the Church is set out in the Manual and Appendices .

**SEMINAR 3: APPOINTMENT, DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF
SESSION CLERKS within the UPCS A and
Guidelines for the Exercise of their Functions**

1. In **Seminar 2, question 6**, participants were asked to read the material for **Seminar 3**, and gain copies of the Manual of Faith and Order. Have participants indicate whether they have downloads or bookmarks, or copies, and make sure extra copies are available for group use. Have on hand a Congregational Roll, Baptismal Roll Book, Session Minute Book (with ACM minutes pasted in) and some example copies of Minutes, ACM minutes, Session and ACM agendas, and an example of a completed form of call.
2. **Input/Invitation** (Guest Speaker)
Input on material of **Seminar 3: Appointment, Duties and Responsibilities of Session Clerks**. Let the key role of the Session Clerk in administration and communication be emphasized; focus one part of the input on the priority of the Session Clerk being alongside the minister.
3. In **discussion groups**, with leader:
 - (a) Invite participants to read Appendices D(4),D(5),D(6) of the Manual, and the example copies of Session Minutes, then discuss how their Session Minutes are kept, and possible improvements. (Would a Roll clerk/Minute Clerk help?)
 - (b) Invite participants to read Appendix D(6), review Appendix D(4) and the example copies of the Annual Congregational Meeting (ACM) minutes, then discuss how their ACM minutes are kept, and possible improvements. Review Appendices A, A(2), C(3) of the Manual.
4. It has been said “The elders are eyes and ears for the congregation” but the Session Clerk is “another set of eyes and ears for the minister.” Still in discussion groups, have participants give their input on this.
5. In **plenary session**: Invite feedback from the leaders on their groups’ responses to questions 3, then 4, then 5, giving participants themselves chance for feedback, question and response as well.
6. **Assignment in preparation for the next seminar**: Set the participants the task of reading **Seminar 4: Importance and Meaning of the Sacraments in the UPCS A** at home or in their own time. Participants should also read these verses of scripture:
Communion - **Mark 14.22-26, 1 Corinthians 10.14-17 and 11.17-34**;
Baptism - **Mark 1.9-11, Matthew 28.19-20, Acts 2.38-39 and 16.30-34, Romans 6.3-4**

3. APPOINTMENT, DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SESSION CLERKS WITHIN THE UPCSA AND GUIDELINES FOR THE EXERCISE OF THEIR FUNCTIONS *(‘Bill’ Stewart, Gordon Munro, Mandla S Hlongwane)*

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 The guidelines set forth in this document have been formulated from the provisions of the Manual of Faith and Order of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (hereinafter referred to as the ‘Manual’) and from the input of experienced ministers and elders of the UPCSA.

3.1.2 The original Leadership Development and Stewardship Committee does not claim that these guide lines will cover all eventualities but issues them with prayer that they will prove informative for ministers and a useful reference for Sessions and those appointed to the office of Session Clerk in congregations of the UPCSA. Additionally, it is hoped that they may also be of some assistance to those elected/appointed as Secretaries of United Congregations.

3.1.3 It is vital to note that the Bible does say something about the importance of elders in the Church. Some Scripture passages on eldership (Ex 18:13-27, Acts 14:23, 15:1-23; Tit 1:5; 1 Tim 3:1-7).

3.2 APPOINTMENT/RE-APPOINTMENT TO & RELINQUISHMENT OF OFFICE

3.2.1 The Session appoints a Clerk from among its members. Such appointment is for three years in the first instance, after which the Clerk may be re-appointed at three-year intervals.

Manual Reference: Chap 7.66,67

Note: While no specific provision is made in the Manual for the appointment of an acting Session Clerk, there is no objection to a Session making such an appointment if circumstances to indicate. However, such an acting appointment for a single period in excess of six months is considered by the authors of this document to be inadvisable. In the interest of good order the Presbytery of the bounds should be informed when such an appointment is made and the reasons for making it. (Further please note the possible use of a Minute Clerk or Roll Clerk)

3.2.2 The Session Clerk relinquishes office at the next scheduled meeting of the Session after attaining the age of 68 years. In case of difficulty in finding a replacement, the Session may seek the approval of the Presbytery of the bounds for the Clerk to continue in office on an annual basis after attaining the age of 68 years.

Manual Reference: Chap 7.46,48-49

3.2.2.1 The Session Clerk may, of course, resign his/her office at any time by giving due notice to the Session. It should also be noted that he/she may be suspended or removed from office for disciplinary reasons in terms of Chapter 18 of the Manual.

3.2.2.2 Moreover, acceptance of the appointment of Clerk implies a commitment, inter alia, to attend services of worship and meetings of the Session faithfully, except when away temporarily or indisposed.

3.2.2.3 Lack of diligence in these respects, manifest incompetence/unsuitability, or neglect of his/her appointed duties would be in a serious light. In such circumstances, the Session - after due enquiry and deliberation - would be bound to consider requesting the resignation of the Clerk. If refused, it would be advisable for the Session to take the necessary administrative step to terminate his/her appointment and seek a competent replacement even before the term of office has expired. The principle set forth in Paragraph 7.46 of the Manual should apply.

3.3 DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.3.1 The Session Clerk keeps a roll of members of the Session and of the congregation. If the Session so desires, it may appoint a Roll Clerk to assist the Session Clerk in carrying out this task.

Manual References: Chap 7.67 with 7.4-7.12

Notes:

3.3.1.1 The roll of members of the congregation should be revised and attested annually as at 31 December and at any time considered necessary.

Manual References: 7.11 with Appendix D(1)3

3.3.1.2 With regard to associate membership, attention is drawn to the provisions of Chap 6.15; 7.9 and Appendix A.5(d) of the Manual.

3.3.2 The Session Clerk takes minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the congregation and of the Session. If the Session so desires, it may appoint a Minutes Clerk to assist the Session Clerk in carrying out this task.

Manual References: Chap 6.55(b); 7.67

Notes:

3.3.2.1 For further details in respect of the recording of minutes and maintenance of minute books please refer to the paragraphs and appendices of the Manual as shown below.

3.3.2.1.1 In respect of **congregational meetings** the following:
Chapter 6.53-62; 7.84-88; App D(1); D(4); D(6). Chapter 14 with 14.2

3.3.2.1.2 In respect of **Session meetings** the following:
Chapter 6.53-62; 7.84-88; App D(1); D(4); D(5) Chapter 14 with 14.2

3.3.2.2 Copies of the minutes of congregational meetings are to be supplied to the Chapter 8 relevant financial authority in terms of paragraph 6.55(b) of the Manual. The relevant financial authority, in so far as it is affected, is also entitled to certified extracts from the minutes of the Session in terms of Chap 7.87 of the Manual.

3.3.2.3 By implication, the Session Clerk is also responsible for the drawing up of agendas for Congregational and Session Meetings. This should be done in conjunction with the Minister (or Interim Moderator as the case may be).

3.3.2.4 Session/Minutes Clerks are strongly advised to go through the drafts of minutes of meetings with the minister who presided (or Interim Moderator as the case may be) over the previous meeting.

3.3.2.5 To be of optimum value, Session minutes should be circulated to all members of Session as soon as possible after a meeting, and certainly before the next scheduled meeting. It is appreciated that this may be extremely difficult in a few isolated congregations in the rural areas which do not have photocopying facilities, but every effort should nevertheless be made to do so.

3.3.2.6 Minutes should record proposals and decisions accurately and also contain sufficient informative detail for them to be understood by any reader who was not present at the meeting. The minute book is, after all, an ongoing history of the congregation.

3.3.2.7 When the book, in which minutes have been pasted or written, is full, the Session Clerk is strongly advised to keep it safely in the congregation's or Presbytery's strong-room or to be submitted to the Clerk of the General Assembly for safe keeping in the General Assembly Office, to ensure that the history of the congregation is preserved.

3.3.2.8 It is helpful to prepare agendas using a standard model, adding to or subtracting from it, as may be appropriate.

3.3.3 The Session Clerk is responsible for the safe keeping of the books and records of the Session.

Manual References: Chap 7.67(c)

3.3.4 In addition to the duties **specifically** laid down in the Manual and recorded in Chapter 7.67 above, the Session Clerk has a range of responsibilities as an executive office-bearer of the congregation. Such responsibilities include those recorded in the ensuing paragraphs, but the authors do not claim these paragraphs to be exhaustive in content. The Manual generally assigns these responsibilities to the Session, but it is the Clerk who usually carries them out on its behalf.

3.3.5 The Session Clerk keeps a roll of baptized members of the Church whose names are not yet placed on the roll of members of the congregation, or ensures that such a roll is kept.

Manual Reference: Chap 7.4(a)

Note: The Manual draws a distinction between admission to the membership of the Church (Chapter 1 Section 2) and admission to enrolled membership of a congregation (Chapter 6, Section 4).

3.3.6 The Session Clerk takes the necessary executive action to ensure that meetings of the congregation appointed by the Session in terms of paragraph 3.16(e) of the Manual are properly notified to the congregation.

Manual References:Chapter 6.53-62

Notes:

3.3.6.1 The proper forms of due notice are as laid down in the following Appendices A(1); C(1); C(3); C(4); C(5). Such notices are signed by the Session Clerk except where provision is otherwise made.

3.3.6.2 Annual reports from the various organizations within a congregation are customarily presented at Annual Congregational Meetings. The Session Clerk prepares the Session report and is responsible for the co-ordination of all others.

3.3.7 The Session Clerk conducts and records correspondence on behalf of the Session. He/she normally usually this function in conjunction with the Minister.

3.3.8 The Session Clerk is responsible for ensuring that returns of a statutory nature required by the Presbytery of the bounds and/or General Assembly are given accurately and timeously. Examples are given below.

3.3.8.1 The submission of the names of commissioners and those of their alternates to Presbytery - usually required annually by the end of September.

Manual References: Chap 10.3.(i); 10.7-8; App B(1)

3.3.8.2 The submission of annual returns to Presbytery and the General Assembly Office - usually required annually by the end of March.

Manual References: Chap 7.34; 7.67(f); 10.29; App D(3)

3.3.8.3 Remits to General Assembly resolutions.

3.3.9 On behalf of the Session, and whenever possible in consultation with the Minister or Interim Moderator, the Session Clerk is responsible for arranging pulpit supply when the minister is temporarily absent.

Manual Reference: Chap 7.19-22.

Note: In situations where an Interim Moderator has been appointed by the Presbytery of the bound, the responsibility for the oversight of pulpit supply rests with such an Interim Moderator Chap 7.22, who may delegate such responsibility to the Session Clerk in terms of Chap 10.27 (e-f).

3.3.10 Where the Session has approved the election of an elder/elders it appoints the time and place of ordination and/or induction in terms of Chapter 7.53-65 of the Manual. The Session Clerk signs the relevant Edict and ensures that it is read from the pulpit in the hearing of the congregation on two Sundays and certified accordingly for the Presbytery of the bounds.

Manual Reference: Chapter 7.65 with Appendix C(1).3

Note: The wording of Edict is to be found in Paragraph 3 of Appendix C(1).

3.3.11 When a Minister is being called to a congregation, the Session Clerk is responsible for the transmission to Presbytery of the completed form of call, together with a statement giving the number on the roll as revised by the Session, and a statement setting out in detail the proposed emoluments.

Manual Reference: Chapter 16.25-30 with 16.33-44.

Note: The form of call is set Out in Appendix a(1) of the Manual.

3.3.12 Where the Session has granted a Certificate of Transfer to a member, the Session Clerk signs such certificate and ensures that it is transmitted to the member concerned.

Manual References: Chapter 7.10

3.3.13 In cases of discipline, the Session Clerk has various statutory functions. These will not be dealt with in this set of guidelines, but the relevant paragraphs are:

Manual References: Chapter 7.28-29;
with Chap 18.1-14; 18.40-42; 18.59-126 and related Appendices.

3.4 RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MINISTER, SESSION AND CONGREGATION

3.4.1 In the execution of his/her duties the Session Clerk should meet with the Minister (or Interim Moderator as the case may be) on a regular basis for the purpose of consultation concerning the day-to-day conduct of the affairs of the congregation other than those exercised on behalf of the Board of Management by its Chairperson or Treasurer. In the latter case, consultation with those office-bearers will be necessary from time to time.

3.4.2 The importance of happy working relationships between the Minister and the Session Clerk cannot be over-emphasized. **The latter should be another set of eyes and ears for the minister**, who - by virtue of his/her office - is expected by the congregation to provide caring leadership. Constructive profiles of members will always be helpful. Mutual trust and close co-operation are essential. The Session Clerk is also in a good position to gather information for the Session on the activities of groups and organizations in the congregation.

3.4.3 The Minister will sometimes need brotherly/sisterly counsel. He/she will always need support and encouragement. So will the Session Clerk. Mutual encouragement, support and counsel will cement happy working relationships. The minister's day of rest and reasonable privacy need to be protected from unnecessary interference. The Session Clerk can help in this regard. Good relationships within the Session should also always be nurtured as they are vital to the provision of meaningful spiritual leadership. It is also very important to note that the Session Clerk is accountable to the Session.

A word of caution: all concerned and particularly the Minister and Session Clerk should beware of using their positions, influence and authority to manipulate situations or each other. Abuse of authority injures the unity and peace of the Church. Christians are called to have good and healthy relationships with God and one another.

(John 13:1-20; 2 Cor 5:11-21; Phil 2:1-11; Eph 2:11-22; 1 John 3:11-18)

3.4.4 During temporary absences of the Minister, the Session Clerk is the person mainly responsible for the smooth functioning of the congregation and for the exercise/co-ordination of pastoral care, including the handling of urgent pastoral concerns.

3.4.5 From the above, it will be appreciated that the Session Clerk is the office-bearer of the congregation carrying the major responsibility for its smooth

administration. In order to be able to exercise his/her duties and responsibilities in an orderly and efficient manner, he/she is strongly advised to:

- 3.4.5.1 attend all meetings of the Board of Management or other body administering the temporal affairs of the congregation;
- 3.4.5.2 liaise regularly with the conveners of all other organizations in the congregation;
- 3.4.5.3 acquaint him/herself with the provisions of the Manual which directly affect Sessions and congregations, and acquire reasonable knowledge of those which govern the higher courts of the Church;
- 3.4.5.4 if not him- or herself a commissioner to the Presbytery of the bounds, ensure that he/she keeps abreast with the decisions of the Presbytery and ensures that the congregation is also kept abreast; and
- 3.4.5.5 where practical, seek contacts with the lay leadership of adjacent congregations and with the wider Church to enrich the congregation.

3.5 CONCLUSION

3.5.1 The office of Session Clerk in a congregation is multifaceted. It calls for a person who has the dedication to devote much of his or her time and talents to the service of the Lord. It calls for loyalty, patience, tolerance, tact and understanding. It calls for the development of organizational and administrative skills, co-ordinating ability, example of Christian character and a good working knowledge of the church's polity and regulations. It also calls for humility and a constant awareness that he or she is called to exercise these gifts, talents and skills in the service of the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

3.5.2 It will have been noted that there are many references to the Manual. It follows that it is essential for every Session Clerk to have easy access to the latest edition. Moreover, it is preferable and strongly recommended for him/her to obtain and maintain his/her own copy.

3.5.3 The authors of this document send it out with the prayer that those who are entrusted with the responsibilities of this office will be richly blessed in their endeavours, for the furtherance of the work of the Church, and to the glory of God alone. Shalom!

Session Clerk, we trust these guidelines will help you in carrying out your responsibilities effectively and efficiently in your congregation. We wish you God's blessings. Thank you.

SEMINAR 4: Importance and Meaning of the Sacraments in the UPCSA

[Conduct this **Seminar 4** in the Church, Communion Table unlaied, baptismal font in position; if on retreat/workshop conference, provide a Communion table and font. Have chalice, cups, plates, bread, grape juice/wine ready for preparation of the elements.

(Course Leaders should have on hand copies of the Service Book and Ordinal of the UPCSA, copies of the Manual, and the Church Unity Commission Booklet Presiding at the Holy Communion - Notes for Ministers of CUC Churches.)]

1. From **Seminar 3, question 6**, participants were to read the material for this **Seminar 4**, and review scriptures concerning the Sacraments. Invite participants to respond, giving each opportunity to respond.
2. **Input/Input invite** (Guest Speaker)
Input on material of
Session 4: Importance and Meaning of the Sacraments, emphasising the faith-based nature of sacrament use, reviewing the need for Presbyterian order, and the leading of congregation members in personal self-examination and unity building.
3. Lead participants through the laying of the Communion Table, the preparing of the Communion elements. Then lead participants through the Communion part of the service, having them practice the distribution of the elements in Presbyterian method - minister first, minister to elders, elders to members. Once completed, explain appropriate disposal of any elements which remain.
4. While still in Communion table group, invite participants to review Chapter 4 - "The Lord's Supper? Holy Communion" in the Manual of Faith and Order and the "**General Directions for Celebrating Holy Communion**" in the UPCSA Service Book and Ordinal, pointing out by practice action if necessary, the various differences in UPCSA use, including the appropriate modes of distribution for United Churches.
5. Invite the participants to review Chapter 3 – "Baptism" in the Manual and the Service Book orders for 'Baptism of Children', 'Baptism of Believers', 'Confirmation', 'Thanksgiving for a Child, Dedication of the Parents and Blessing of the Child'. Have participants give feedback on Infant Baptism or Blessing, Confirmation or Adult Baptism, and UPCSA openness to faith based baptism, not baptismal regeneration.
6. **If this is the participants' last Session**, close the Session by thanking them for their involvement.
Invite comments on the course, like whether they will take back useful practices, ideas and material to their congregations.

4. THE IMPORTANCE AND THE MEANING OF THE SACRAMENTS IN THE U.P.C.S.A. (Eras J Van Zyl)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

To make **fellowship** in the Church possible, God has given us certain marks and symbols by which we may know the visible Church. The **two** outstanding marks of the visible Church are the **Word of God** *sincerely preached and heard*, and the **sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper** *properly administered and received*. (1)

4.2 WHAT IS A SACRAMENT?

The common **definition accepted** by Reformed Churches is that it is an outward and visible sign, ordained by Christ, setting forth and pledging an inward and spiritual blessing. They are outward signs and seals of an inward reality Calvin defines a sacrament as *'an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of His good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward Him in the presence of the Lord and of His angels and before men.'* (2)

4.3 THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF THE TWO SACRAMENTS IN THE U.P.C.S.A.

MEANING

From Calvin's definition two things are clear: God's seal, and man's testimony.

First then

the sacrament is God's seal in order to confirm God's Word and helps to establish us in the faith of God's Word. With every sacrament then there is a promise which is received by faith in Jesus Christ. This promise is the Word proclaimed, preached, so that the people will understand the blessings presented by the sacraments. (3)

Secondly (a definite second)

the sacraments bear witness to our confession before the world. Baptism testifies that we are washed and purified; the Lord's Supper testifies that we are a saved people.

Hence the meaning of each of the two sacraments are:

Baptism: Baptism is the act of faith by which we are brought into the Covenant of Grace and hence experience its benefits. It is a sign and seal of our ingrafting into Christ, of forgiveness of sins by His blood and regeneration by His Spirit. Baptism continues the covenant made with Abraham and his seed (Gen. 17:7) Whole families are included in baptism, just as in the Old Testament families were included in the Covenant (Acts 16:15,33; 18:19). Hence we baptise little children.

The Lord's Supper: It is a commemoration of Christ's death that bestows grace to seal partakers in the love of Christ (I Cor 11:23-26). It is a spiritual feast at which Christ testifies that he is Living Bread, on which our souls feed for a true and blissful immortality. The signs are bread and wine. (4)

As the bread nourishes our body, so the Body of Christ is the only food to keep our souls alive. In a similar way the wine represents that which fosters, refreshes, strengthens and exhilarates the soul. The sacrament seals the promise of what Christ will be to us, and in doing so, it takes us to the cross where that promise was lived out and fulfilled in all its parts. (5)

4.4 IMPORTANCE

The **efficacy** of the sacraments depends on the institution and command of Christ. The **elements** in themselves have no power; it is **their faithful use** that matters. Through them we are brought into communion with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3). The following important **ingredients** of our faith are associated with baptism: forgiveness (Acts 2:38); cleansing (Acts 22:16); and spiritual quickening (Col 2:12) In the Lord's Supper participation in the body and Blood of Christ is realised through Holy Communion. (I Cor. 10:16; 11:27).

The sacraments, when **administered** in accordance with the principles laid down in Holy Scripture, **recall us** continually to the important **ground** of our **salvation**, Christ in His death and resurrection; and **remind** us of the **obligation** we have to walk worthily of the **calling** with which we are called.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Calvin's Institutes, IV.I.1,p.1012
- 2 Ibid., IV.xiv 1, p.1277
- 3 Ibid,IV xiv 4, p. 1279
- 4 bid, IV.xvii.1,pp.1360-1361
- 5 Ibid,IV xvii.4, p. 1363.