

maintenance of the Biblical form of church government hinges on retaining this important distinction.

11. Find out in advance the main issues that will come up in your committee and in the Assembly as a whole. Notice the matters that arise in presbytery. Ask other ruling and teaching elders for their understanding of the matters. Read the various journals and newsletters that are available. A handbook of Assembly business will be mailed to you before the meeting. Although it will look large, you can pick out the major issues. Also, the minutes of the permanent committee that corresponds to your "Committee of Commissioners" should be mailed to you.

12. If you are not chosen by your presbytery to serve on a "Committee of Commissioners," you still should go to the pre-Assembly committee meetings if possible. As an observer, you can sit in on any of the committees and enter into the discussion until the committee goes into executive session for its formal voting. Attend the meetings of more than one committee if you like.

13. From all the various issues that are to come before the Assembly, pick one or two that seem most important to you. Prepare yourself to speak on those issues. It is most important that ruling elders *speak out* on matters that concern them.

14. When you speak, be brief and to the point. Respond to the various views that have been expressed, or add your own insight.

15. Sit in on every session of the General Assembly. Plan your schedule so that you can stay until the end. Vote on every issue as your means of discharging your responsibility to the Lord.

16. Take a full report back to your Session, giving them a sense of the tenor and actions of the Assembly.

17. Watch for the matters that have arisen in the General Assembly as they return to the presbytery. At that time, provide the information you have gotten from attending the Assembly.

18. Continue to pray that the Lord will bless our church with increasing commitment to Him, and will enable us to offer more effective service to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.



The task is great, though it often may seem mundane. But the Lord has promised that He will bless every effort done in His name. "Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

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A Handbook for Ruling Elder Involvement in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America

O. Palmer Robertson



"He who rules, let him do it with diligence."
Romans 12:8

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The ruling elder gave birth to the Presbyterian Church in America. Not the preachers but the ruling elders. When the ministers were too cautious to take decisive action, the ruling elders took the lead. They formed the organizations and called the meetings that eventually led to the formation of the PCA.

Now the ruling elder must devote himself to diligence in maintaining this great church. If the PCA is to realize fully its unique opportunities in the needy world today, ruling elders must show their commitment and concern by consistent involvement at every level of the church's life. Particularly at the General Assembly, the ruling elder must be present, and he must be heard. He who rules must do so with diligence. The only thing necessary for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing.

When the ruling elder cares enough to get involved, he will keep the church aware of the real world and the desperate need it has for the good news about Jesus Christ. At the same time, he will exercise a restraint on tendencies to depart from the faith.

This handbook is designed to encourage the ruling elder to stay involved in the Lord's church. It is hoped that the trend toward a smaller and smaller percentage of ruling elder participation at the General Assembly will be reversed. The well-being of the church depends on it.

Take the following steps to get involved in the General Assembly of the church:

1. Begin by praying for your church. Thank God for its commitment to the Scriptures, the great commission, and a mature Biblical faith. Ask the Lord to continue to bless it with peace, purity and zeal for serving Him by reaching out to the world.

2. Make a commitment to be personally involved as a ruling elder in the General Assembly. Four times it is stated that the "apostles and elders" made the decisions of the first Assembly in Jerusalem (Acts 15:2,4,6,22). Elders must continue to exercise this responsibility. It will cost you time, money—even vacation. It will require a reshuffling of your priorities. But the cause is worth the commitment.

3. Talk about this matter in your Session. Raise the subject. Commitment to be involved must be a joint decision.

4. Plan who should be your Session's representative early in the year. In a larger church, consider relieving this elder of other responsibilities so he can devote himself to the preparation necessary for this important task. Because ruling elder involvement in the General Assembly is serious business, give it your best.

5. Encourage your representative from Session to attend at least two years in succession. To really become comfortable with the procedures of the Assembly, a person needs to go more than once. If your church is entitled to send more than one delegate, stagger your representatives so that at least one will have had the experience gained from attending the previous year.

6. Once you have been selected as a delegate, keep current with the registration procedures so you will be included in all the mailings.

7. Make yourself available to your presbytery to serve on a "Committee of Commissioners." These committees generally meet at the site of the Assembly during the weekend prior to the formal opening of the Assembly. They are critical in their importance, since they set the agenda and formulate the motions to be presented to the Assembly.

8. Choose the "Committee of Commissioners" that looks most interesting to you. The principal duties of the various "Committees of Commissioners" are as follows: (1) *Administration*—considers matters affecting the policies and procedures of the General Assembly and the church at large; (2) *Bills and Overtures*—reviews proposals of all sorts coming from sessions, presbyteries, and individuals; (3) *Christian Education*—reviews the work and recommendations of the permanent committee; (4) *Covenant College*—reviews the work of

the Board and Administration of the Assembly's college; (5) *Covenant Seminary*—review the work of the Assembly's seminary as it prepares men for the ministry; (6) *Insurance Annuities and Relief*—cares for the well-being of ministers and employees in the church; (7) *Interchurch Relations*—considers the relation of the PCA to other churches; (8) *Judicial Business*—recommends viewpoints on theology and the government of the church where questions or disputes arise; (9) *Mission to North America*—analyzes our efforts to establish new churches and minister Christ to this continent; (10) *Mission to the World*—reviews the efforts we are making to reach the world for Christ, including an analysis of principles, practices and strategies; (11) *PCA foundation*—considers the investment program of the church; (12) *Review and Control*—examines and evaluates the records and actions of presbyteries; (13) *Ridge Haven*—oversees the work of the church's conference center.

9. Be aware of the importance of these "Committees of Commissioners," and understand how they work. These committees are made up of commissioners to the Assembly chosen by the various presbyteries. They have the responsibility of reviewing the work of the permanent committees of the Assembly. They have a major role to play in seeing that the church does not become too centralized. They also provide a framework of accountability for the coordinators of the various General Assembly permanent committees.

In order to fulfill their responsibility properly, the "Committees of Commissioners" must maintain their own independence and integrity. While the staff and the members of the permanent committees can be helpful as resources, it is the responsibility of the "Committees of Commissioners" to reach their own decisions and formulate their own recommendations to the Assembly.

10. In reviewing the work of the permanent committees, it should be remembered that the permanent committees are not to establish policy, but to carry out policy already determined by the General Assembly [BCO 14-1(7)]. The permanent committees are to function as servants carrying out decisions made by the church, not to formulate policies for the church. Nothing less than the