

# Presbytery of Nevada Handbook for New Commissioners and Committee Moderators



Presbytery of Nevada  
Stated Clerk: Rev. J. Christy Ramsey  
2613 Empire Ranch Rd #22076  
Carson City, NV 89706  
(office) 775-237-8733 (Zoom)

[nevadapresbytery.org](http://nevadapresbytery.org)

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# Presbytery of Nevada Commissioners Handbook

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## **WARM WELCOME FROM A STATED CLERK**

By Joan Jeffers

Welcome you to the Presbytery of Nevada! You are becoming a member of a unique Presbytery. We are made up of 21 churches and a Worshiping Community.

We were incorporated on July 13, 1909, but have churches that have existed since 1861. Our Presbytery covers an extremely large geographical area that includes all of the State of Nevada (109,781.18 square miles) and the Eastern edge of California, which includes four churches: Lake Tahoe Community Presbyterian Church; Lee Vining Presbyterian church near Yosemite; Truckee Lutheran/Presbyterian Church; and Valley Presbyterian Church located next to the lands of the Sovereign Tribal Nation, the Paiute Tribe, near Bishop, CA. We are desert people, and frontier independence is in our DNA. We represent cowboy, tribal, urban, and mining people and bring our unique perspectives to the Presbytery. The beauty of the Presbytery of Nevada is that however we may disagree, we always aspire to return to Unity, recognizing we are all God's children made in His image and blessed by His love.

We have a long history in Nevada and are very pleased you will now be contributing to that history. Being an Elder Commissioner is a unique position laden with responsibilities. You have a responsibility to stay informed and always yield to the voice of the Holy Spirit. You are in a position to affect the future of the congregations in our Presbytery and the direction the national organization will take. I hope you will not take this responsibility lightly.

We believe this handbook will assist you in becoming familiar with our wonderful and unique (and yes, sometimes quirky) Presbytery. We are proud of our Christian and cultural heritage and wholeheartedly agree with one of our many mottos, "**Kind, Tenderhearted, Forgiving**".

We appreciate the commitment you have made to serve our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Written by former stated clerk, *Joan Jeffers*

### **1 Peter 5:14 (ESV)**

*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

## Welcome to the Presbytery of Nevada

This handbook aims to familiarize you with the basic operation of the Presbytery and its committees and how they interact with synods and the General Assembly.

The officers of the Presbytery are volunteers, which include the following:

- a Moderator who conducts the meetings.
- a Vice-moderator, who becomes moderator the following year, and
- the Chair of the Presbytery Council, who is normally the immediate Past Presbytery Moderator. The moderator and vice-moderator are elected each year.

The chief ecclesiastical officer is the Stated Clerk, Christy Ramsey. He runs the office, prepares for meetings, and answers questions about the Presbytery's people and policies. He serves a renewable term of up to 3 years.

The Presbytery Pastor, Rev. Kate Freeman, cares for the relationship needs of the Presbytery, especially the ministers and commissioned ruling elders.

The Director of Finance, Vern Manke, oversees the finances of the Presbytery. He produces budgets and reports, keeps our accounts, and deals with all other financial matters.

The Presbytery meets twice a year, once in the spring, usually in the Las Vegas area, and once in the fall, usually in the Reno area. Officers are elected and installed each year at the September meeting from a slate prepared by the Nominating Committee and from the floor of the Presbytery. Moderators of committees are also elected and installed at the September meeting, after which they begin their respective duties.

Most of the work of the Presbytery is done by committees before Presbytery meetings, often the day before.

It is common for the semi-annual Presbytery meeting to start on a Tuesday at noon, with lunch provided by the host church. The business meeting is convened at 1:00 p.m. and concludes for the day at 5:00 p.m. Dinner is served around 6:00 p.m. After dinner, a Moderator's Reception is hosted in order to encourage members to become acquainted with those from other churches. The meeting resumes on Wednesday at 9:00 a.m. until noon. Sometimes a simple lunch is provided after Presbytery. Rarely a meeting will continue Wednesday afternoon.

The Presbytery pays for travel to the Presbytery within the Presbytery and lodging expenses (with some restrictions outlined in the policy manual) for minister members, commissioned ruling elders, committee members and commissioners elected by session to Presbytery. Receipts must be attached to a voucher form provided by the Presbytery.

It is typical for the Commissioners' church to pay for meals provided by the host church. (You may indicate which meals you want on your registration form). Meals during committee meeting time are covered by the committee's budget.

Information for meetings is exclusively available on the website [nevadapresbytery.org](http://nevadapresbytery.org). Documents such as the docket, financial reports, and minutes are posted on a page for each meeting.

## What is a Presbytery?

The Presbytery of Nevada is formed by 21 congregations and all active and retired teaching elders (also called ministers of Word and Sacrament, MOWAS) in PC(USA) churches in Nevada and the Eastern Sierras of California. Ruling elders are elected by sessions. The annual parity report determines how many commissioners each congregation is allowed. We are one of the 172 presbyteries for the more than 10,000 congregations in the PC(USA). Some ruling elders are also commissioned. They are members of the Presbytery regardless of whether a church selects them as a commissioner.

Only the Presbytery (not a congregation, session, synod, or General Assembly) has the responsibility and authority to ordain church members to the ministry of teaching elder (also called ministers of Word and Sacrament). It is the Presbytery that installs or removes teaching elders from congregations. A teaching elder is a member of a Presbytery. A teaching elder cannot be a member of the congregation he or she serves as pastor because his or her primary ecclesiastical accountability lies with the Presbytery. The congregation (not the session) generally chooses an installed pastor with the assistance and support of the Presbytery. The Presbytery must approve the choice and officially install the pastor at the congregation. Additionally, the Presbytery must approve if either the congregation or the pastor wishes to dissolve that pastoral relationship. Interim, temporary supply, transitional, and commissioned ruling elders serve under contract with the session and guidance of the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery.

Only the Presbytery can approve congregations' establishment, dissolution, or merger. All property is held in trust for the PC(USA), so the Presbytery, through its trustees, must approve any sale or encumbrance of a property (a mortgage or lease for example) The Presbytery also maintains a Permanent Judicial Commission, which acts as a court of appeals from sessions and exercises original jurisdiction in disciplinary cases against minister members of the Presbytery.

Presbytery officers are a Moderator, Vice-Moderator, and Stated Clerk. The moderator of the Presbytery is elected annually and is either a minister member or an elder commissioner from one of the Presbytery's congregations. The moderator presides at all Presbytery assemblies and is the chief overseer at the ordination and installation of ministers in that Presbytery.

The Stated Clerk/General Presbyter is the chief ecclesial officer and serves as the Presbytery's executive secretary and parliamentarian in accordance with the Book of Order and Robert's Rules of Order. The Stated Clerk/General Presbyter is the Presbytery's contact with the wider church and serves on several committees, including the Presbytery council. While the Moderator of a Presbytery typically serves one year, the Stated Clerk serves a term of up to three years and may be re-elected indefinitely by the Presbytery. Presbyteries must meet at least twice a year, but they have the discretion to meet more often.

# Presbytery Committees

*The official description is in the Manual of Administrative Operations.*

## **COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY/COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY**

This committee combines two committees merged into one on the recommendation of a committee reorganization task force. It comprises a combination of women and men, Elders and Teaching Elders from all areas of Nevada and parts of California, who provide a shepherding function for the Presbytery of Nevada.

One task is to meet with incoming Teaching Elders and ensure they meet the appropriate criteria. We also offer resources to local congregations: guiding Pastor Nominating Committees, facilitating communication between churches and pastors in times of conflict, and helping find qualified transitional ministers when pulpits are vacant.

Because some local churches do not have a large enough congregation to support a full or part-time Teaching Elder, they are served by Commissioned Ruling Elders (CRE). The Committee on Ministry facilitates the education of these leaders and helps them in their roles as lay pastors. The Committee on Ministry meets with each Commissioned Ruling Elder every two years. The Committee on Ministry also meets with Teaching Elders in validated ministries (not serving a local church but doing God's work in another capacity). The Committee on Ministry affirms their ministry work and encourages their participation in Presbytery.

When someone is considering a call to become a Teaching Elder, the Committee on Ministry functions as the Committee on Preparation for Ministry. The Committee shepherds candidates and inquirers through the process until they either: 1. pursue the qualifications for ministry and receive a call and are ordained, or 2. withdraw from the program.

Ordinarily, the committee shall consist of ten (10) members with an equal number of Elders and Teaching Elders. A quorum shall be fifty percent with parity of laypersons and ministers. Membership shall be for a term of three (3) years. Replacement of a member whose term has not expired shall be for the remainder of that term. Members shall be ineligible to serve more than two (2) full consecutive terms. Three (3) members shall also serve as members of the Committee on the Preparation for Ministry (CPM) whether or not there are any candidates. If there are no candidates, this should be included in the report to the Presbytery and the Stated Clerk.

From our By-Laws:

5.0201        One of the CPM members shall be the liaison for the Office of the General Assembly.

- 5.0202 Duties for both COM and CPM are those consistent with the Book of Order, Presbytery Policy and the committee job description on file and approved by the Personnel Committee.
- 5.0203 Between Stated Meetings, presbytery has authorized the Committee to review Calls issued by churches, approve and present Calls for service of Teaching Elders, approve the examination of ministers transferring from other presbyteries, dissolve pastoral relationships in cases where the congregation and the Pastor concur, to grant permission to labor within or outside the bounds of the Presbytery and to dismiss ministers to other presbyteries with the provision that all such actions be reported to the next Stated Meeting of Presbytery.
- 5.0204 The committee shall choose its own chairperson from among the committee members. The chairperson shall be a member of the Presbytery Council.

### **COMMITTEE ON REPRESENTATION**

Shall be composed of a Chair, one (1) Teaching Elder, and two (2) Elders, a Council member who shall have voice and vote, and a Nominating Committee representative who shall have voice only. The Stated Clerk shall serve as Ex-officio. The term of office for members shall be three (3) years with an optional renewal for an additional three (3) years, except for the Nominating representation, which shall be chosen annually by the Nominating Committee.

The Committee on Representation strives to promote fair and effective representation from all racial ethnic groups within the Presbytery as much as possible.

Serves as an advocate for the representation of both women and men of persons of all ages and racial and ethnic groups, persons from all states in the presbytery's geographical areas, and of persons with any handicapping or disabling conditions in this presbytery.

Reports annually to the fall presbytery any extent to which the membership of the presbytery and its bodies falls short of the inclusiveness and participation requirements set forth in the Book of Order (G-3.0103).

Recommends to the sessions through the stated clerk changes in their commissioners to presbytery that would help the presbytery membership better comply with the requirements of the Book of Order (G-3.0103).

Consults with the nominating committee in order that the presbytery's committees might, as nearly as possible, fulfill the requirements of the Book of Order (G-3.0103).

Reminds the council of the principles of participation and representation set forth in the Book of Order (F-1.0403).

## **MISSION OUTREACH COMMITTEE**

The Mission Outreach Committee of the Presbytery of Nevada manages the resources of the Presbytery that are used to further our mission for Jesus Christ in local congregations, in Nevada and Eastern California communities, and throughout the Kingdom of God.

The committee is composed of nine (9) members, with four (4) Teaching Elders and five (5) Elders, each serving a term of three years. Three new members are elected each year, and three members' terms expire. A second term is allowed with the approval of the Nominating Committee.

Specifically, the Mission Outreach Committee of the Nevada Presbytery oversees the Presbytery's new church development program and works to support ethnic fellowships within our communities. The Mission Outreach Committee also supports the work of mission groups within the Presbytery, such as Amazing Grace ministry in Las Vegas, food banks in local congregations, and other mission endeavors in Nevada and Eastern California.

The Mission Outreach Committee works with the Presbytery of Nevada to develop mission priorities and policies that guide the Presbytery in its ongoing work.

Some of the specific tasks performed by the Mission Outreach Committee in the development of new churches are as follows:

- Assist each NCD in the preparation of grant applications and progress reports.
- Evaluate and support the progress of each NCD and provide instruction in Presbyterian polity.
- Identify and evaluate any potential NCD and evaluate worshipping communities
- Provide assistance to an NCD during leadership transitions and throughout the chartering process.
- Encourage each NCD through prayer and financial assistance.
- Meet bi-annually with the leadership team from each NCD.

Tasks performed by the Mission Outreach Committee in the support of mission projects are as follows:

- Identify and evaluate worthy programs that align with the values and mission of the Presbytery of Nevada to provide financial support.
- Evaluate one-time requests for mission funds from the denomination to determine eligibility and available resources.
- Review and recommend the Presbytery's annual mission budget.
- In consultation with the Equipping Committee, approve grant funds for mission programs within the Presbytery of Nevada.
- Meet with leaders from the mission programs supported by the Presbytery.



## **EQUIPPING COMMITTEE**

The committee shall consist of nine (9) members with four (4) Teaching Elders and five (5) Elders. Representation of men and women, as well as Northern and Southern churches is desirable. A quorum shall be fifty percent (50%) of its members with parity of Elders and Teaching Elders. Membership shall be for three (3) years, and the replacement of a member whose term has not expired shall be for the remainder of that term. No member shall serve more than two full consecutive terms. However, if a member fills an unexpired term, one (1) additional full term is allowed. Assuming nine (9) members, three (3) should go off and three (3) should be elected every year.

Duties of the committee shall be consistent with the Book of Order, Presbytery Policy, and the committee job description on file with the Stated Clerk and approved by the Personnel Committee.

The committee shall choose its own chairperson from among the committee members. The chairperson shall be a member of the Presbytery Council.

### **Equipping Committee responsibilities:**

Support mandatory Boundary Training, as required by The Book of Order, by distributing the details of the online training approved by the Presbytery to those required to be trained and ensure that training is completed by the required date.

Support Pastor retreats, Council retreats, and other retreats approved by the Council.

Financial and Administrative support for Youth Triennium at Purdue University. A portion of the expenses of each young person who attends is paid out of the Equipping Committee budget. The Equipping Committee shall set aside a portion of its block grant (budget) each year to support the next Triennium.

The committee is responsible for disseminating information on actions from the General Assembly that involve voting on overtures and amendments every two years. The Presbytery of Nevada meets and votes on General Assembly Amendments and Overtures at its spring meeting.

The committee administers and processes grant funds to be used by groups and churches within the Presbytery. Applications are submitted to the stated clerk and forwarded to the appropriate committee.

## **PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**

The Personnel Committee is composed of six members. Three are filled by those who hold the respective positions of Presbytery Vice-Moderator, Moderator, and Immediate Past Moderator. Three other persons are nominated and elected by the Presbytery of Nevada for terms of three years. The committee shall select its own chair from among its members.

## **THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**

- Designs and revises position descriptions as needed and proposes them to the council or presbytery.
- Devises processes for hiring new employees, including updating position descriptions, creating a position announcement, conducting interviews and requesting background checks, and making a hiring recommendation to the council or presbytery.
- Reviews compensation, including Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA), and makes recommendations to the council or presbytery.
- Meets no less than annually with employees for reflection and review related to their work performance.
- Addresses employee work-related concerns as appropriate.
- Recommends to council or presbytery appropriate action should performance or conduct warrant disciplinary or remedial action.
- Encourages the presbytery to express suitable appreciation of the staff.

## **NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

Is formed of six members: Two are Teaching elders (formerly called ministers of the Word and Sacrament), and four are Elders. Members are elected to one three-year term. No member shall be eligible to succeed themselves for re-election. One member of the senior class (elder/minister) is the moderator.

At present time, the chair of the Committee on Representation and the chair of the NomCom are on both Committees. The chair of the NomCom is also on the council during the year they are the chair and the subsequent year.

Unlike other committees, most of the work of the NomCom is completed on the phone or email before a Presbytery meeting. They solicit, receive, and consider recommendations from the Presbytery members and churches. At Presbytery meetings, they submit the nominations of persons to serve as members of Presbytery council, officers of Presbytery, and all committees of Presbytery, and synod commissioners.

All nominating procedures shall be subject to the principles of participation and representation per The Book of Order.

## **PEACE AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

We began with permission to self-nominate members to ensure interest. We began with 5 members. The Nominating Committee added one member this past year. We now have 6 members on our committee: 2 female pastors from the north, 1 female elder from the north, 2 female elders from the south, and 1 male CLP in training from the south.

We meet two or more times a year via Zoom between presbytery meetings. We meet over dinner the Monday of Presbytery to go over programs/guest speakers to be presented at the general meeting.

The Peace and Justice Committee goals are:

- To encourage and support the Nevada Presbytery churches in the awareness of social justice issues and to inspire "hands-on" involvement at the local church level. To encourage and assist our churches in sharing their peace and justice mission work at Nevada Presbytery Meetings.
- To be a conduit for information to the local churches. (Matthew 25 project.)
- To serve as the Presbytery entity for the Self Development of People (SDOP). Currently applying for certification.

### **PRESBYTERY TRUSTEES**

The trustees oversee all financial matters affecting the Presbytery of Nevada. Trustees are able to approve and monitor loans for new church developments, give financial support to congregations in need, and manage all funds from all sources.

### **PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION (PJC)**

The Book of Order states "Church discipline is the church's exercise of authority given by Christ." The PC(USA) maintains a judicial system apart from the secular court system. Every synod elects a Permanent Judicial Commission, which has original jurisdiction in remedial cases brought against its constituent presbyteries, and which also serves as an ecclesiastical court of appeal for decisions rendered by its presbyteries' Permanent Judicial Commissions.

Presbytery of Nevada PJC can exercise authority for its member churches church for the correction of offenses by individual members (referred to as disciplinary cases). Cases such as sexual misconduct, congregations' ministers, or staff member misconduct are handled by the PJC.

### **PRESBYTERY COUNCIL**

The Council of Presbytery of Nevada includes the Presbytery Moderator, Vice-moderator, and Immediate Past Moderator who normally serves as Moderator of the Council, the Stated Clerk, who is the Secretary of the Council, moderators of committees, one synod commissioner, and two elders elected by the Presbytery at large.

The Presbytery of Nevada Council meets prior to each stated meeting of Presbytery and other times as called by the moderator or stated clerk of the Presbytery.

The Council has the authority, as permitted in the Book of Order, to act with full authority of Presbytery between Presbytery Meetings.

Members-at-large shall sit for three (3) years, and the replacement of a member-at-large whose term has not expired shall be for the remainder. Members-at-large shall be ineligible to serve

more than two (2) consecutive terms or a portion of a term. Committee moderators shall serve as members of the Council for the term of their office.



## **Synod**

Presbyteries are organized within a geographical region to form a synod. The Presbytery of Nevada is a member of the Synod of the Pacific. Each synod contains at least three presbyteries, and its elected voting membership is to include both teaching elders and ruling elders in equal numbers. Synods are required to meet at least biennially. Meetings are moderated by an elected Synod Moderator with the support of the Synod's Stated Clerk. Synods have various duties depending on the needs of the presbyteries they serve. In general, their responsibilities might be summarized as: developing and implementing the mission of the church throughout the region, facilitating communication between presbyteries and the General Assembly, and mediating conflicts between the churches and presbyteries.

## **General Assembly**

The office of General Assembly (O.G.A.) is located in Louisville, Kentucky. The General Assembly might be compared to the U.S. Capitol. The Constitution of the United States was patterned after the Presbyterian Book of Order based upon a representative form of government. The Office of General Assembly (O.G.A.), is led by an elected Moderator or Co-Moderators of General Assembly who serves a two-year term and is elected at the biannual General Assembly.

In our United States government, there are elected Senators and Congress members as well as overseeing committees. The PC(USA) elects commissioners to the denomination's General Assembly and hosts a variety of committees at which commissioners from each Presbytery attend to denominational matters to be presented on the floor of G.A. for voting. Just as the US government maintains a Department of Justice, so the O.G.A. maintains a Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC). Synods also maintain a PJC.

The O.G.A. operates its own publishing house to supply presbyteries, synods, and churches with printed material such as hymnals, The Book of Order, The Book of Confessions and other books and printed material. The O.G.A. also hosts an enormous website.