

January 2017 Quarterly note to Clerks of Session

Dear Clerks of Sessions,

Happy New Year! I know it has already “been a minute,” and I know this is a busy time of year. Some of you do not really want to hear from me right now, but also I sense some have been wondering when I would finally reach out and provide some needed information and clarification. I’ll keep this note from me on behalf of the Sessional Records Review Team (SRRT) short.

As we have reported in the last couple of stated meetings of Metro New York Presbytery (MNP), sessional **records are due at the end of this month** (January). Since nobody turned in hard copies at the 98th stated meeting of Presbytery, we are expecting that you will be sending in electronic copies. You can email them directly to me (stephen@ascensionforesthills.org) or upload them via <http://bit.ly/clerkupload>.

The **shorter**, revised clerk’s **self-evaluation** is **available** at the SRRT web page of the MNP web site: <http://metronypres.com/srрт/>. But, to make things even easier, you can **download it here - from my google documents**. (Please download and do not edit directly in my folder. I’m trusting your downloads won’t tie up the folder.)

For our presbytery’s **guidelines** for keeping sessional records, you can find them here: <http://bit.ly/srрт-guidelines>. I honestly do recognize the labor of love involved with getting the records rounded up and in shape to send them in. (Back when I was a ruling elder and clerk working with our session’s moderator to translate our minutes into English and ensure that they met our presbytery’s guidelines, it was concentrated work for several weeks.)

Since it came up on the floor of Presbytery during the SRRT’s report at the last (98th) stated meeting, let me share this with you. If there is a need or desire to re-examine some of the guidelines and how they interpret the requirements of the denomination’s Book of Church Order (BCO), as expressed or implied in some of your responses to exceptions of substance, the SRRT will discuss both proposing changes to them to Presbytery as well as agree on how to modulate our identification of certain exceptions. As we have moved to be more formal and uniform in our evaluation of records, we may discover that with certain requirements the pendulum has swung too far in the other direction, and some interpretations may need to be broadened.

We want to let you know of some other developments that you may find helpful (not so much in turning in last year’s records) but for the coming year. **1)** We are making available some **templates** from clerks of session who have done very well in the past, particularly in their recording of minutes. These will also be available the the SRRT web page of the MNP web site: <http://metronypres.com/srрт/>. You will also find at this location past copies of **SRRT reports** to Presbytery and these **quarterly notes**. **2)** We now have an **email list/discussion group** for Clerks of Session. Your membership is optional. I will send you an invite, but you can also go to [the group’s page](#) to join. For now membership is either by request or invitation. The goal of the group is to provide an interactive forum where you can raise questions, identify issues, offer suggestions, contribute solutions, and share insights and resources. And **3)** we now have **new**

members of the SRRT, with others possibly joining us for the year. **Joao “John” Soares** of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church and **Wilson Wai** of Covenant of Grace Presbyterian Church are either present or recent Clerks of Session. They can identify with you. Please welcome them!

In case you missed it, I am going to repeat a few recommendations from the SRRT that you might want to consider for your first minutes of this new year (and future years): (a) the name of all current session members (especially active Ruling Elders); (b) the name of the Moderator and the name of the Clerk of the Session; (c) that, unless otherwise stated, all meetings are held at a **regular location** (if you have one); (d) if you have **stated delegates** to Presbytery (and even General Assembly), elect and record their names; and (e) the **stated dates or intervals** for the **Lord’s Supper** for the year (e.g., every Sunday, the first Sunday of every month, etc.) - this efficiently meets the (implied) requirement of BCO 58-1 for the stated times to be determined by the Session.

I want to finish by also reiterating the following from my last note. We appreciate how quickly some of you have been in responding to the exceptions of substance cited in the approved SRRT report for the 97th stated meeting of MNP. Approved at the 97th stated meeting was **the deadline for responses being** the second stated meeting of Presbytery after that meeting - i.e., **the March 2017 meeting**.

- **Exceptions of substance require an official response from the Session to Presbytery as soon as possible** before Presbytery can finally dispose of the matter. This means the committee should see a record in the future of the session adopting an official response to any **exceptions of substance**. Official replies should be **addressed to the [Stated Clerk of Presbytery](#)**.
- Express your Session’s agreement or disagreement with Presbytery’s finding in one of the following forms:
 - Session agrees with the exception and corrects its record (if possible), corrects its actions (if possible) and promises to be more careful in the future. Or,
 - Session respectfully disagrees with Presbytery, states its grounds, and refers the exception back to Presbytery

Please feel free to let us know what other resources might be helpful to you as a Clerk of Session, and any other ways we can be of help.

Coram Deo,
TE Stephen Leung
Chairman, SRRT