

## November 2016 Quarterly note to Clerks of Session

Dear Clerks of Sessions,

Greetings in the Lord. This represents the first of what may wind up being quarterly communiques from me on behalf of the Sessional Records Review Team (SRRT) to you as clerks in our Metro New York Presbytery (MNP). Some of these should be shorter than others. This one will be a little lengthy given where we are in our annual cycle of records review. Please bear with me.

I will take up three matters grouped in bundles of bullet points extracted from the SRRT report that MNP approved at its last meeting (97th stated meeting in November). They are 1) Submission of 2016 sessional records coming up in January; 2) Responses to exceptions of substance found in the 2015 sessional records due in March; and 3) our hope to have several of you join the SRRT for 2017.

Regarding preparation of your 2016 records for review, please view this as an opportunity to concisely and legally chronicle what the Lord has been doing in your midst this past year. Yes, these are official documents for which our denomination puts forth certain stipulations and which your members are supposed to be able to access as they desire, but they are also a way in which your story, including the good, the bad, and the complicated, is being preserved. We on the SRRT view our responsibility to review your records not only as a required check for accuracy, integrity and accountability, but also as an opportunity to catch a glimpse of what God is doing in your local context. This past year, where we had time, we endeavored to highlight items of thanksgiving from your records (and not just identify exceptions of substance or form to rectify).

In addition to the following bullets, let me offer a few recommendations from the SRRT that you might want to consider before wrapping up your year. Your session likely still has one more meeting for 2016. As a session: (1) examine for accuracy the record of baptisms, members, deaths, and dismissions (including covenant children); (2) review your (the clerk's) **statistical report** and approve its submittal to the Stated Clerk of General Assembly; (3) examine this year's **minutes of the board of deacons**, or state that there is no board of deacons meeting separately - strategically locating this at the end of the year (or at the beginning of the new year for the prior year's minutes of the board) helps our reviewers not to miss your accomplishing this; and (4) even if it was/is done at another time of the year, record for information (the date of) the meeting that your Session **approved** your **budget** for the current year - this also helps reviews not miss it. While I'm at it, I may as well suggest that you record, for information, in your first minutes of the following 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.

- **Sessional records for the year 2016 must be submitted to the SRRT no later than January 31, 2017** to TE Stephen Leung by email at [stephen@ascensionforesthills.org](mailto:stephen@ascensionforesthills.org) or by uploading them via <http://bit.ly/clerkupload>.
- If electronic submission is impractical, three printed and bound copies may be brought to the January meeting of Presbytery for distribution to reviewers.
- The submission of records should include all of the following:
  - Complete sessional **minutes** for the year 2016 for all particular churches and mission churches with temporary sessions commissioned by the Presbytery
  - Clerk of Session's **self-evaluation** of minutes (Based on your feedback, the SRRT is trying to get a **shorter**, more user-friendly **form** out by January.)
  - The annual **budget** approved by the Session
  - The annual **statistical report** approved by the Session
  - Scans or images showing that the minutes are printed, bound, signed by the clerk of Session with printed pages consecutively numbered, and with no blank pages in or between the minutes. If it is impractical to show this as scans or images, a clear affirmation by the clerk, accompanying the submission of records, that all minutes for the year are printed, bound, signed, and consecutively numbered with no blank pages in or between the minutes will be accepted by the SRRT
- The SRRT's guidelines for keeping, submitting, examining, and reporting on sessional records are available at <http://bit.ly/srrt-guidelines> to help Sessions and clerks in their recordkeeping.

We appreciate how efficiently some of you are in getting your responses to the exceptions of substance cited in the approved SRRT report for the 97th stated meeting of MNP. Please note that approved in the SRRT report was that **the deadline for responses will be** 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

The efficiency and accuracy of the SRRT's work would benefit from your experience and participation. For some of you this is a way to pass on your expertise. For others, this would be an opportunity to augment your expertise. (Even if you are truly unable to give us a few hours working on your own time over the next year, you might be able to help simply by sending in "templates" from your minutes, posting pointers to a forthcoming clerks of session message board, or joining in on a webinar or two - as some of you have already agreed to do.) We are big on improving the process for all parties - to the glory of God.

- **We are appealing to clerks of sessions**, to consider joining the Sessional Records Review Team (SRRT) to aid in records review, clerk training, and development of tools and templates.

Soli Deo Gloria,  
TE Stephen Leung  
Chairman, SRRT