

Book of Church Order

Sandy Springs OPC summer Sunday school class • July 4, 2021

recap of FG XII-XIX

Governing assemblies handle doctrine and discipline, are deliberative, and need a quorum of elders and ministers.

Lower assemblies have an “original jurisdiction,” but are subject to the “review and control” of higher assemblies.

*The local church’s life, worship, discipline, membership, and deacons are governed by a **session**.*

*The regional church’s constituent local churches, missions, and ministers are governed by a **presbytery**.*

*The whole church’s constituent presbyteries, missions, and ecumenicity are governed by a **general assembly**.*

Congregational meetings are called by the session, at least once per year, for limited purposes.

Congregations may withdraw from the OPC, but only after delays, confirmations, and presbytery’s counsel.

Congregations without pastors keep functioning, but with the oversight of presbytery via a ministerial adviser.

Assemblies need a moderator (to convene and streamline meetings) and clerk (for records and correspondence).

FG XX: Ordination and Installation

1. officers are consecrated as such by the church, not themselves
2. ordination: church’s recognition of a man’s spiritual gifts, inward sense of call, and its own actual calling
3. ordination requires a man being “called” to appropriate work (usually within the church)
4. before ordaining a candidate, the church must train him, or verify his training
6. installation: putting an ordained man into a specific job
- 5, 7. elders and deacons are examined, ordained, and installed by the session; ministers by the presbytery
8. retirement: for advanced age or disability; retired officer may be designated “emeritus”

FG XXI: Licensing Candidates to Preach the Gospel

1. why we license probationers: men must be “tried,” and not weak or unworthy; churches must evaluate
2. first, a man comes “under care”: session attests; presbytery examines faith and life, assigns an adviser

REQUIREMENTS FOR LICENSURE

3. bachelor’s degree from a “reputable” college or university, plus 1.5 years of seminary
4. exams in Greek, Hebrew, English Bible, history, theology (must be oral, $\frac{3}{4}$ majority); testimonials
5. sermon, theology paper, exegesis paper
6. presbytery cannot waive any requirements until seeking GA advice, followed by a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote
- 7-8. moderator administers **four vows**, prays, declares him licensed; clerk provides a certificate
- 9-10. his probation can be transferred between presbyteries; needs presbytery permission to move away
11. license can be recalled if he stops studying or seeking a call—or he *does* seek 2+ years, but no one calls

FG XXII: Calling a Minister

1. call: only for ministers or licentiates; only ecclesiastical (congregation, presbytery, GA, or their agencies)
2. no calls without presbytery’s consent; no transfers without minister’s consent

HOW A CONGREGATION CALLS A MINISTER (3-9)

note: the session is not a party to minister’s call, but it still governs the congregation doing the calling

- search committee (session itself, or one specially elected by congregation) chooses a nominee
- congregation meets to vote on a [single] nominee—tring to make it unanimous—and terms of call
- church’s call offers compensation to keep the minister “free from worldly care and employment”

HOW A CALL GETS APPROVED (10, 14-16)

- man decides within 3 weeks whether to accept; his acceptance = a request for presbytery to act
- presbytery ensures call is properly formed, approves its terms, judges “fitness in circumstances”

11. details in special cases

12. calling an OPC minister

- a. minister already serving an OPC congregation, but wants to accept the new call
 - i. his current congregation is asked to concur; if they don’t, they can fight it at presbytery
 - ii. his current presbytery may: dissolve bond + approve new call + declare pulpit vacant
- b. minister already serving a presbytery or GA: same as 12.a.ii.
- c. minister without call: his current presbytery must approve the new call
- d. licentiate: his current presbytery must approve his probation and the new call
- e. minister refusing a call must inform relevant parties
- f. no minister may leave his charge without presbytery permission

13. calling a non-OPC minister
 - a. warn the calling body about this chapter!
 - b. calling body's presbytery approves call contingent on the minister's reception into the OPC...
 - c. he'll have to meet all OPC ordination requirements (including ¾-vote theology exam, and vows)
 - d. he may not start his new ministry, or even move to the field, until b. and c. are complete

FG XXIII: Ordaining and Installing Ministers

1. calling a candidate = requesting his installation (and ordination if still a licentiate)
 2. prerequisites: licentiates must finish probation, and non-OPC ministers must meet OPC requirements
 3. see requirements of XXI.3; must also finish seminary; men lacking languages must promise to study
 - 4-5. presbytery examines a licentiate for ordination, then conducts his actual ordination later
 6. ORDINATION REQUIREMENTS: XXI.2-5, more testimonials, exams in BCO, apologetics, theology, etc.
 7. licentiate called to be a pastor: ordained at the calling church, which observes a day of prayer & fasting
- ORDINATION & INSTALLATION SERVICE
8. a presbytery meeting, conducted by presbytery moderator, including a sermon and explanations
 9. eight vows administered to candidate, four vows to congregation
 10. laying on of hands (kneeling and prayer), declaration, right hand, charges, prayer, benediction
 11. OPC minister called to be a pastor: similar, but installation service has fewer vows
 12. non-OPC minister called to be a pastor: must meet all OPC requirements, some vows precede installation
 - 13-15. licentiate called to be a teacher or evangelist: similar to XXIII.8-10
 16. OPC minister called to be a teacher or evangelist: similar to XXIII.11
 17. non-OPC minister called to be a teacher or evangelist: similar to XXIII.12
 18. non-OPC minister transferring to the OPC without a call: credentials "in suspense," 2-year limit
 19. presbytery must approve changes of function (between pastor, teacher, evangelist)
 20. installation enrolls a presbytery member and receives his credentials, analogous to member transfer
 21. presbytery may receive OPC ministers by transfer without a call and installation
 22. presbytery may receive retired non-OPC ministers by transfer without a call and installation

FG XXIV: Dissolving Ministerial Relationships

1. minister going from one call to another within the OPC: follow XXII.12
2. congregation wants to be relieved of pastor: ask him to resign, but presbytery permission still needed
3. presbytery or GA can dissolve their minister calls unilaterally—but must hear him out, offer severance
4. minister wants to do different kind of work: presbytery permits (or not), decides if "work of ministry"

FG XXV: Electing, Ordaining, and Installing Ruling Elders and Deacons

- 1-2. local church elects members as elders and deacons; lifetime elections, OR 3-year terms and classes
3. before eligible for office: member 1 year; trained (session must be available); demonstrated service
4. nominated by a member; certificated by session, elected by congregation
5. not an officer until ordained & installed
6. ordination & installation includes five vows for candidate, one vow for congregation
7. re-installing an ordained elder or deacon: similar to XXV.6, with only one vow for the candidate

FG XXVI: Divesting from Office

1. deposed by judicial process (for offenses in doctrine or life): see the Book of Discipline
2. an officer can also be divested without censure (if NOT for an offense in doctrine or life)
3. presbytery divesting a minister without censure
 - a. consider if minister isn't seeking a call, can't get one for 2+ years, does job poorly, or is disabled
 - b-d. minister defends or demits; presbytery can divest by two-thirds vote, dismiss to a local church
 - e. he wants to demit office: wait 6 months; presbytery investigates, presbytery may permit
4. divesting a ruling elder or deacon without censure
 - a. he's unwilling to demit, but isn't edifying: congregation gets presbytery's permission to divest
 - b. he wants to demit office: session counsels him, but must allow him to demit if he persists
5. if a divested man is ever elected again, must be newly ordained
- 6-7. don't divest officers who retire because of "advanced age"

NEXT LESSON: FG XXVII-XXXII (pp. 78-90) – special circumstances; amending the constitution