

# OFFICER TRAINING

## *Case Studies*

These *slightly* fictionalized case studies relate to the responsibilities of church officers. See if you can determine what should happen in each situation, making reference to your *Book of Order* in your response. Of course, nothing like these cases would ever happen in your church!



1. In the Presbyterian Church at Ritov Center, Indiana, a vacancy occurred on the session when John Movinonup was transferred to Big City. John's term had two more years to run. At the next stated meeting of the session, the elders elected Bill Goodfellow to fill out the remainder of John's term. Was this proper?
2. The Growsome Presbyterian Church had been given a bequest which specified that the interest each year was for the use of the Trustees in the upkeep, repair, and improvement of the buildings and grounds. Upon recommendation of the presiding officer of the Trustees--Joe Mowpaintnfixit--and in consultation with the Christian Education Committee, the session voted to use some of these funds to paint the walls of the Church School rooms. As the project was nearing completion, May Murmur began complaining that such a big change in the looks of the church should have been approved by the congregation. Was May right or did the session properly exercise its authority?
3. The Diaconate of the Wecare Presbyterian Church had the church's members and friends divided into small care groups for closer pastoral oversight. One deacon in particular, Helen Lovemwell, expressed a deep pastoral concern for the folks in her charge, and some very close relationships developed. When one of the members of her group died, the pastor was called to help the family plan the service of Witness to the Resurrection. As they talked, the newly widowed spouse asked if Helen might have a part in conducting the service--and so she did. Was this okay?
4. There is a couple who recently began attending worship at the Notasinneramongus Presbyterian Church. When they asked to be received into active membership, the pastor scheduled a time for them to meet with the session. After the motion was made and seconded to receive Mary by certificate of transfer and Joe by reaffirmation of faith, one of the session members said that he'd heard that Joe and Mary, who were both in their sixties, were living together without benefit of marriage. Tearfully, Mary and Joe explained that if they were to marry it would mean a substantial decrease in their Social Security income--a decrease they could not afford. The elder said that didn't matter; that people who lived in sin were not welcome in his church. Another elder asked the first how he knew they were doing anything sinful. With that, the moderator quickly called for a vote and, by a vote of eight to one, Joe and Mary were approved as active members, to be received the following Sunday at worship. Comment on all of this.
5. Bernard Bigstick was Treasurer of the Smoothitover Presbyterian Church for many years. No one remembers when he was first appointed, but the session has not bothered to address the issue since. Bernard is a powerful figure in the church, and is pretty easy to get along with as long as things are going his way; when they are not, he can be very difficult. Bernard always sits on the budget planning committee, and pretty well calls the shots there. No one questions his integrity, nor his ability to keep accurate financial records. But Bernard is cantankerous about paying any bill that does not meet his personal approval, even though it is well within the budget. It is generally thought wise to get his permission before any project or purchase is submitted to the session. What resolution can be made of this dilemma?
6. Ima Keepmymouthshut served faithfully as Treasurer of the Lotsadough congregation for many years. Her death was a serious loss to the congregation. Soon after she died, the Stewardship and Finance Committee met and appointed Ima's sister, Justas Goode, to be the new Treasurer. Was this how it should have been done?
7. At a meeting of the congregation of the St. Calvin Presbyterian Church called for the purpose of electing officers, the chair of the Nominating Committee presented its slate. The moderator routinely called for nominations from the floor and, to her surprise, heard two. She declared that these additional nominations were out of order since the people had not been contacted prior to the meeting and thus had not agreed to serve. Her ruling was challenged and she was overruled by the congregation. The election proceeded, and one of the two additional nominees was elected. Was this handled rightly?

**8.** John Fundamental was a relatively new member of the Welcome Presbyterian Church, having moved to Quiettown, Indiana from New Idea, California. He took an active part in one of the young adult classes, and it seemed evident to the class that John knew a lot about the Bible. A member of the class, who was also a member of the session's Education and Nurture Committee, suggested that John be asked to teach the class next year; and he accepted. When given the approved curriculum materials from the Presbyterian Publishing House, John countered that all the curricula from the mainline churches was too modernistic. He stated that he intended to teach on the Revelation and the latter half of Daniel, using materials he had ordered from the True to the Bible Fellowship. All this was reported to the session, which then voted to direct John to teach from approved material--or not teach at all. Incensed, John resigned as teacher and said he would be leaving the church. The session accepted his resignation before he had a chance to change his mind. Comments?

**9.** The session, on recommendation from the Christian Education Committee, approved a term limit of three years for Church School teachers. Miss Upinyears, who had been the teacher of the Gogetters Class for twenty-five years, was terribly hurt. She tried to arouse opposition to the session's action within the congregation. Did the session have the right to relieve Miss Upinyears through such action, even though her class wanted her to remain? Did the session act wisely?

**10.** A meeting of the congregation of the Decentlyandinorder Presbyterian Church was called by the session to adopt the budget for the coming year. All the figures had been worked out very carefully by the session in light of the pledges received. When presented to the members, there was a routine motion to adopt the budget, and that motion was seconded. A new member of the church, Justin Time, moved to amend the motion by taking \$1,500.00 from the Christian Education section and giving it to Worship so that new choir robes could be purchased. The moderator was at a loss about what to do, for this action had not been anticipated at all. He finally ruled that the motion was in order and called for a vote on the amendment. All this created quite a furor in the congregation. What is wrong with this picture?

**11.** Ian Congregationalist was elected to the session of the Tradition Memorial Presbyterian Church. When it came his time to attend the meeting of the Presbytery of Theologymatters, Ian feigned some excuse and so was docketed as commissioner for a subsequent meeting. Each time he found some reason for not going. The third year of his term, Ian was elected Clerk of the session. He kept the minutes and register books in good order, but refused to submit them to presbytery for the annual review. When the session was reprimanded by presbytery for its outright refusal to submit its records, it came to the surface that Ian was strongly opposed to the whole concept of governing bodies beyond the local church. He felt that it was none of presbytery's business what went on in Tradition Memorial Church. He found some ready listeners from among the congregation and soon found himself the leader of a group that sought to have the congregation withdraw from the denomination to become an "independent" Presbyterian Church. Explain what was wrong here and how some of it might have been avoided.

**12.** As an elder who takes an active part in the life of your presbytery, you have been appointed to serve on a special disciplinary committee. The complaint, filed with the presbytery against the pastor of a church by several members of the session, revolved around a particular incident:

Among the members of Dignified Presbyterian Church is an unwed mother who attends worship regularly and supports the church in the best way she can. She has asked that her child be baptized, and the pastor counsels with her about the baptism before bringing her request for the celebration of the sacrament to the session. The session's discussion of the matter centers around the facts that this woman has never been married to the baby's father, so how could she raise the child in a Christian home--and that the baby's father is of a different race than this woman, so what would people say if this child was part of our church? In a five to four vote, the session refuses to authorize the celebration of baptism for this child. The pastor, clearly angered by the session's action, baptizes the baby during corporate worship the following Sunday.

The complaint filed against the pastor centers on two points: a.) that this was a willful and deliberate violation of an order of the session by the pastor, and b.) that the pastor's action was harmful to the peace, unity, and purity of the church. Where would you begin?

**13.** The session of the Last Presbyterian Church (which broke off from First Pres. over a century ago), adopted a policy statement regarding weddings in the church house. A guide was printed to be given to each couple seeking to be married in the sanctuary, and considerable time was spent by the pastor during the first counseling appointment going over the guidelines. The session's statement covered such things as the taking of flash pictures during worship and the type of music that would be acceptable. The guide noted, and the pastor was careful to stress, that if some music was desired that was questionable, the couple was invited to submit a copy of it to the Worship Committee for review; the committee would make a recommendation to the session.

Bob Bigshot and Debbie Doitmyway sought to be married in the church. They hated having to spend several hours with the pastor in pre-marital counseling, but agreed when he told them he couldn't marry them otherwise. He spent quite some time with them going over the order of worship and the session's policy statement about weddings, including appropriate music. The couple had no questions.

At the rehearsal, the night before the wedding, Debbie's sorority sister showed up as soloist and rehearsed, with tape back-up, the song (recently on the top twenty list), "To Hell with Morality, We're Here to Have a Ball!" The pastor called Debbie aside and told her that that particular song could not be sung at the wedding. In tears, Debbie protested that it was being sung at all of the weddings these days. Then, in defiant anger, she told the pastor that this was her wedding, and that she'd have what she wanted. The pastor told her, calmly but firmly, that it would be without him; and he went home. Debbie assumed that he was bluffing, for she was accustomed to having her way. Her father, Bigbucks Doitmyway, assured her that he'd bring that pip-squeak preacher in line.

But he didn't. The next day, as the guests fidgeted and looked at their watches and the organist played through the prelude for a third time, dad arrived at the church with a rather confused-looking Justice of the Peace to perform the ceremony. What was right and what was wrong with this situation? Does the session have the authority to establish such guidelines for weddings? Did the pastor do the right thing by refusing to take part in this particular wedding?

**14.** An officer in the Marj's Corner Presbyterian Church, Thomas Katt, began taking part in numerous extra-curricular activities (if you know what I mean). Because Marj's Corner is a small town (you know--so small that you don't have to use your turn signal, 'cause everybody already knows where you're going), it wasn't long before Tom's conduct became widely known. At its next meeting, one member of the session suggested that Tom be contacted and carefully confronted with the rumors, both for his own good and for that of the church. A motion was passed, and two soft-spoken, kind-hearted members were commissioned to counsel with Tom. Tom became angry and dared them to bring charges against him. The session took him at his word, and instituted full proceedings in accordance with the Rules of Discipline. Tom was found guilty and his ordination was removed by the session. Was this proper for the session? Does Tom have any recourse, or is the session's action final?