



September 2, 2020

TO: Pastors and Clerks of Session
FROM: Fred A. Holbrook
RE: Congregational Meetings and Ordination and/or Installation Services

During the pandemic, it has been a challenge for churches to hold congregational meetings or to plan for the examination followed by ordination and/or installation of officers. There have been several options that have worked and which I, as stated clerk, have approved.

Congregational Meetings

Option A: With the Phase Three Executive Order, congregations can meet “in-person” while following the requirements of the Virginia Department of Health (facial coverings, physical distancing, disinfecting, 50 people or less, hand washing, etc.). As long as the quorum set by the congregation’s Bylaws is met, the meeting can proceed.

Option B: If a congregation chooses to meet virtually, the congregational meeting is announced as per the requirements set by the congregation. If members of the congregation participate via Zoom conferencing, each can hear and see, thereby being able to participate fully in the meeting. If some members participate through audio conferencing only, they can “voice” their approval or disapproval of a matter and the moderator will be able to hear and respond. If the meeting is called for the purpose of electing officers, the congregation should be informed in advance, through email and/or US mail, of the names of the nominees who will be placed on the floor by the Nominating Committee.

If there are nominations made from the floor, the voting shall be by ballot distributed to and collected from the members present and voting; distributed to and collected from members (who were connected virtually) who “drive by” the church (e.g., prior to 2:00 p.m.), complete a ballot handed to them, and drop the ballot in a box; or distributed to and received from members whose ballot is sent via U.S. mail following the meeting (the ballot shall include all names and shall state the total number of votes allowed to be cast). There will need to be an envelope, addressed to the church and stamped with first-class postage, included with the ballot. Votes will be tallied and the vote results announced ten days after the mailing was sent from the church.

Some churches have used email with those members who were connected via audio conference and whose vote is cast via the church’s email account and tallied by appointed

elders or deacons who tally the vote and report to the moderator who has kept the meeting open for twenty minutes after the casting of votes in the congregational meeting.

Examination and Ordination and/or Installation

The pandemic has required examination of officers to be done via Zoom, teleconference, or “in-person” with all precautions in place (see *Book of Order 2019-2021* G-2.0402). Ordination and/or installation may have to be delayed until the congregation can be together again, in person (G-2.0403). If that proves necessary, I have authorized ruling elders and deacons in the class of 2023 to begin serving with full approval of voting on matters that come before the respective entities. As soon as is practicable, the ordination and/or installation service can take place at the church and in the midst of the congregation.

Due to the required physical distancing, it may become necessary to have alternate means of ordination and/or installation via Zoom conferencing. In this case, the ruling elders would hold their hands up to the camera and the ordinands (those being ordained) would look at the screen, see the participants’ hands, and ask the Holy Spirit to seal this extraordinary installation.

Other alternatives might be:

1. in person but dispensing with the “laying on of hands.”
2. having one or two ruling elders who have quarantined in advance of the service who lay their hands on the shoulders of the ordinands(s) while ruling elders and ministers “aim” their hands towards the shoulders of the ordinands from a safe physical distance.
3. having an alternative means of “laying hands” on the ordinand(s) by gluing a felt hand or a paper dove to the end of a 36” dowel stick and extending it onto the shoulders of the person who is kneeling (if able) or has their head bowed.

Unique times require unique practices. Congregational meetings and ordination and/or installation services are very important and special moments in the life of a congregation. Use your creative side and allow God to bless whatever manner you choose to meet, to act, and to affirm God’s work in and through the congregation.