

What's On Your Mind?

How do I handle electronically produced session minutes?

Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

Not long ago, virtually every clerk of session recorded session meeting minutes in a bound, hardcover book. For many clerks, those days are long gone since they now tap out minutes on computer keyboards. This transition has raised some practical questions, most of which grow out of the general query, "How do I handle electronically produced session minutes?"

Book of Forms sections 25-32, 82, 118

Please familiarize yourself with these sections. They provide general rules for church records and some that apply specifically to session minutes. The rules are intended to ensure records are kept accurately and held securely.

How do I store minutes electronically?

Since they are confidential, I recommend that minutes saved on a computer be password protected so only those knowing the password may open them. A backup copy should be saved on a flash drive or a compact disk that is kept in a separate location from the computer in case anything untoward happens to the original.

May I make copies of the minutes?

Along with the electronic copy, one paper copy is made for the official, signed record. Book of Forms section 27.10 allows for a second paper copy to be held in a secure location apart from the originals. Due to the confidential nature of the minutes, no other copies are to be produced.

May I email the minutes to elders?

Like paper copies, electronic copies of session minutes should not be distributed. When minutes are sent by email, control over where they go, who sees them and how they might be used, is lost. Deliberately or

accidentally, the minutes could be forwarded to the congregation or beyond.

Of course, it is important to keep the congregation informed by regularly communicating session news once it is ready for public consumption.

What about a summary of the minutes?

Section 27.10 provides guidance for the distribution of a meeting summary prepared under the supervision of the moderator and clerk.

How do I store printed minute pages?

I'm not certain what is meant by the approved "commercial-type binder of the rigid fastener form" noted in section 27.9, nor what the disapproved "ring type book" might look like. Nevertheless, I suggest printed minutes may be temporarily held in a good three-ring binder. The spirit of this legislation is that minutes should be held so they are conveniently available for reference and not easily lost or jumbled.

In accordance with section 27.12, once the pages number approximately 100, minutes should be permanently bound. As one option for this, many sessions have found that business supply stores (Staples, for example) provide a "cerlox" binding service.

Are minutes to be microfilmed?

Microfilm is still considered the most reliable way to preserve records long-term. For this reason, session records, along with other important church documents, should be microfilmed periodically. Contact the archives for more information.

www.presbyterianarchives.ca/microfilming.html

Blessings,

Don Muir

What's on your mind?

Do you have a question about the polity of our church? Are you confused by something that happened at session, presbytery, synod, or General Assembly? Puzzling over a section of the *Book of Forms*?

Send your questions to The Rev. Don Muir and he will strive to answer them in future issues of *Equipping for . . . Elders* in a manner that maintains confidentiality and seeks to be helpful to the church at large.

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