

Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Part 1 of 11

Plan for this morning:

- Opening comments
- Abbreviations
- Why does the session want us to study this?
- Four concepts from the Preface of the BCO
- What the Form of Government *isn't*.
- The Form of Government's main topics
- Main principles of Presbyterian church government
- Diagrams of 3 types of church government

Opening Comments

- There are a few experts on our Form of Government in the OPC.
- I am NOT one of them!
- My experience:
- Unless I say something that is wrong, nothing is original.
- I have quite a few resources I'll be reviewing in preparation.
- A resource I will be regularly reading in preparation is Dr. Alan Strange's *Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* published serially in *Ordained Servant: A Journal for Church Officers*. It is supposed to be printed with his commentary on the BD as a single volume.

Abbreviations

- **BCO** or BOCO
- **FG** or FOG
- **BD** or BOD
- **DW** or DPW

Why does the session want us to study this?

- The Bible is Christ's authority over his church.
- He gives his Spirit and shapes the church by the Bible.
- The FG is *a* time-tested application of scripture's commands, teachings, examples, and principles to the practice of church government.
- It helps members to see the connection between scripture and our practice—conscience!
- It's also just helpful to learn how it all works—practice!

Four concepts from the Preface of the BCO

Paragraph 1: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has three standards.

- Primary: the Bible
- Secondary: the Confession and Catechisms of the OPC
- Tertiary: FG, BD, and DW (together the BOCO)
- Being the word of God, the Bible is not part of the OPC's Constitution.
- Being human documents, the secondary and tertiary standards comprise the OPC's Constitution—they are how we constitute ourselves a church.

Paragraph 2: BCO works under scripture and consistent with doctrine

- The tertiary standards intend to work out *in practice* the *principles* of the Bible and doctrine of the secondary standards.
- We don't pit the BCO against scripture or our doctrine.
- We read the BCO under scripture and with the understanding that the BCO intends to work out our doctrine.
- The Bible *does not* provide polity details.
 - Acts 15:28, "...it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..."
 - Romans 12:8, "...the one who exercises authority..."
 - 1 Corinthians 14:40, "...all things should be done decently and in order."

Paragraph 3: “...a book that rightly orders the church is not necessary for the being of the church...but is necessary for the well-being of the church.”

- The attributes and marks of the church are essential to the being of the church.
- Presbyterian church government is not essential to the church's existence.

Paragraph 4: The OPC self-consciously ascribes different levels of authority to the primary, secondary, and tertiary standards.

- “Do you **believe** the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?”
- “Do you **sincerely receive and adopt** the Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scripture?”
- “Do you **approve** of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?”

Dr. Alan Strange:

“In summary one cannot differ with the Scriptures, as they are of direct divine origin; one may differ only in minor ways from the doctrinal standards, given that they are the church’s expression of the system of doctrine contained in the Bible. One may, however, believe that the church order merits considerable revision, and yet approve of it if one is willing to work within it.”

What the Form of Government *isn't*.

- Government isn't a computer program that directs everything.
- Government of the visible church is committed by Christ to men by the Spirit under his word—they're given gifts recognized and desired by a congregation.
- These men must grasp and be committed to Christ, to scripture, to its doctrine, and Christ's blood-purchased people.
- These men must grasp the guiding principles of the FG so they have a sense of how to use it.

Dr. Alan Strange:

“The FG and BD neither contain all that the church may do or needs to do. What is there is binding but any given judicatory may (and will) face situations that this church order does not describe. This does not mean that the judicatory may not or should not act, but it must do so in keeping with the principles of the Word of God. The church order is understood to be an expression of the principles of the Word of God relating to polity, so that the Scripture should never be pitted against the church order or vice-versa.”

The Form of Government's main topics

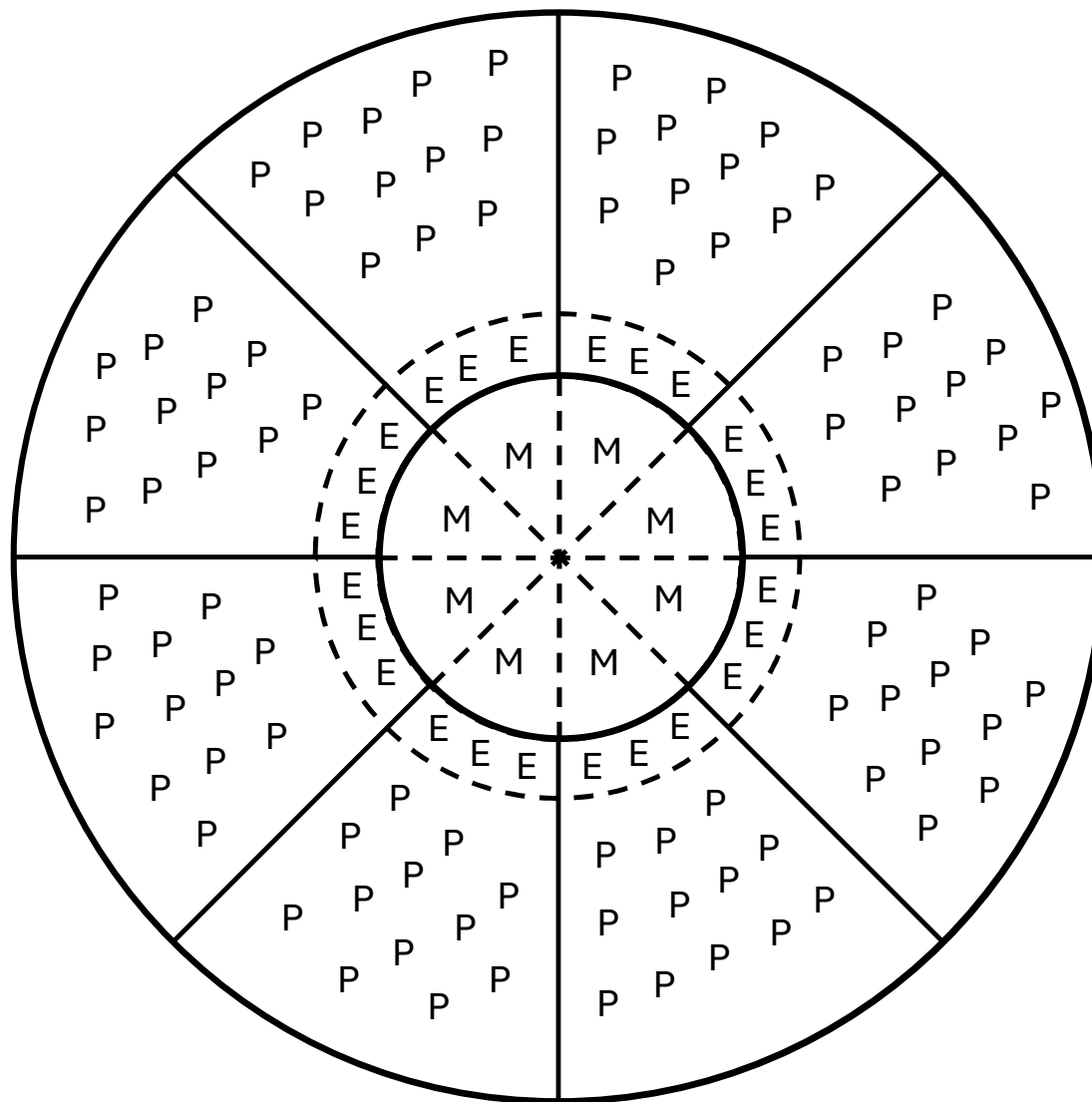
1. Foundational doctrinal commitments and principles for the government of Christ's church (FG I-IV)—September 8, 15, 29
2. The Special Offices (FG V-XI)—December 8, 15
3. Assemblies (FG XII-XIX)—January 5, 12, 19
4. Ordination and Installation to Special Office (FG XX-XXVI)—April 27, May 4
5. Good Order in Miscellaneous Matters (FG XXVII-XXXII)—May 18

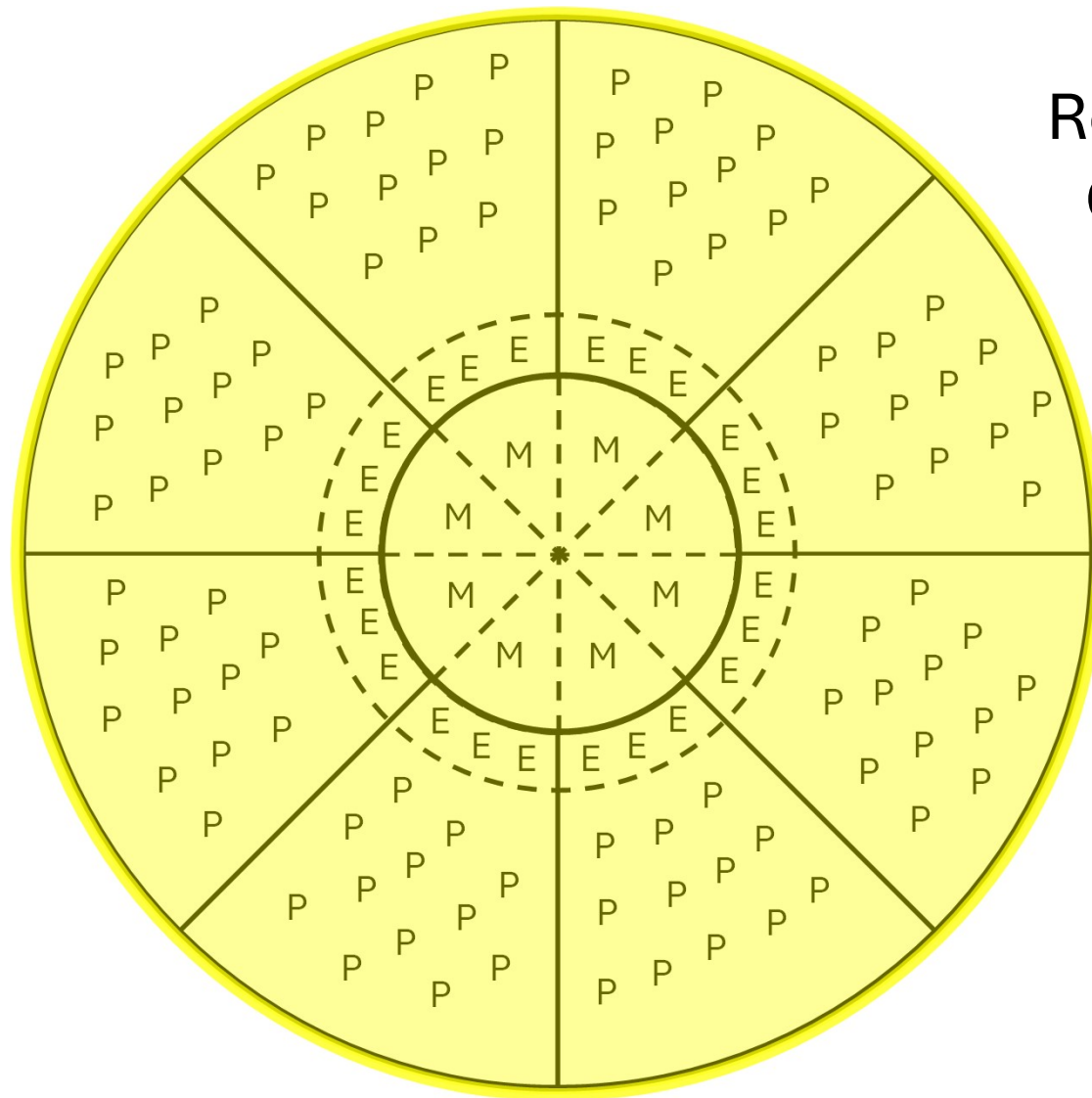
Principles of Presbyterian government

Assembled from works of Dr. Edmund P. Clowney and Louis Berkhof

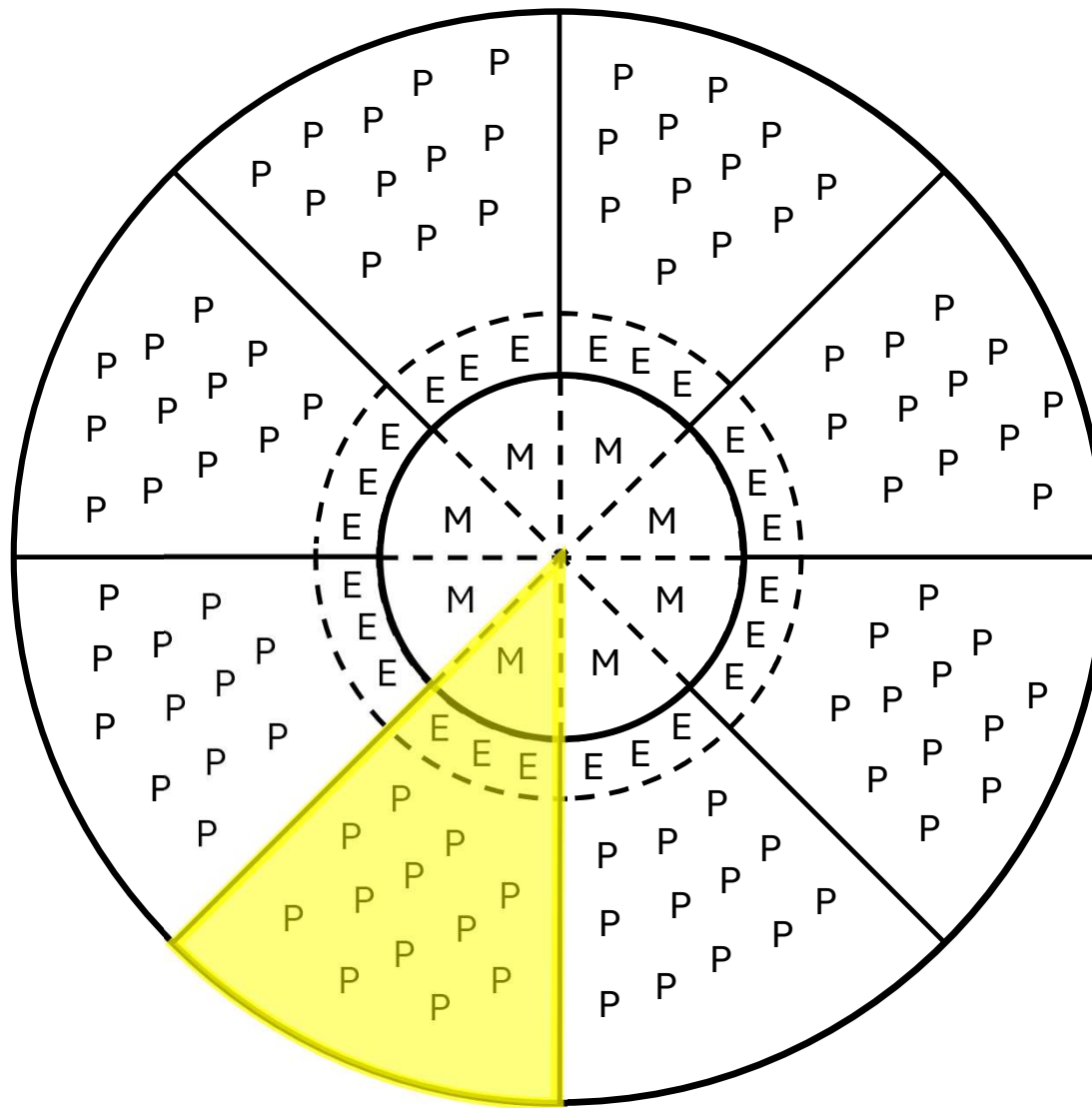
- Christ is the only King and head of the church.
- Christ alone is Lord of the conscience of his people in scripture.
- Christ has endued his whole church with power.
- Christ established special offices in the church for her edification.
- The highest permanent office in the church is the preaching presbyter/minister.
- The role of rule in the church is exercised jointly by ministers and rulers “of the people,” elders.
- The principle of joint rule extends to the regional church and whole church.

Diagrams of 3 types of church government

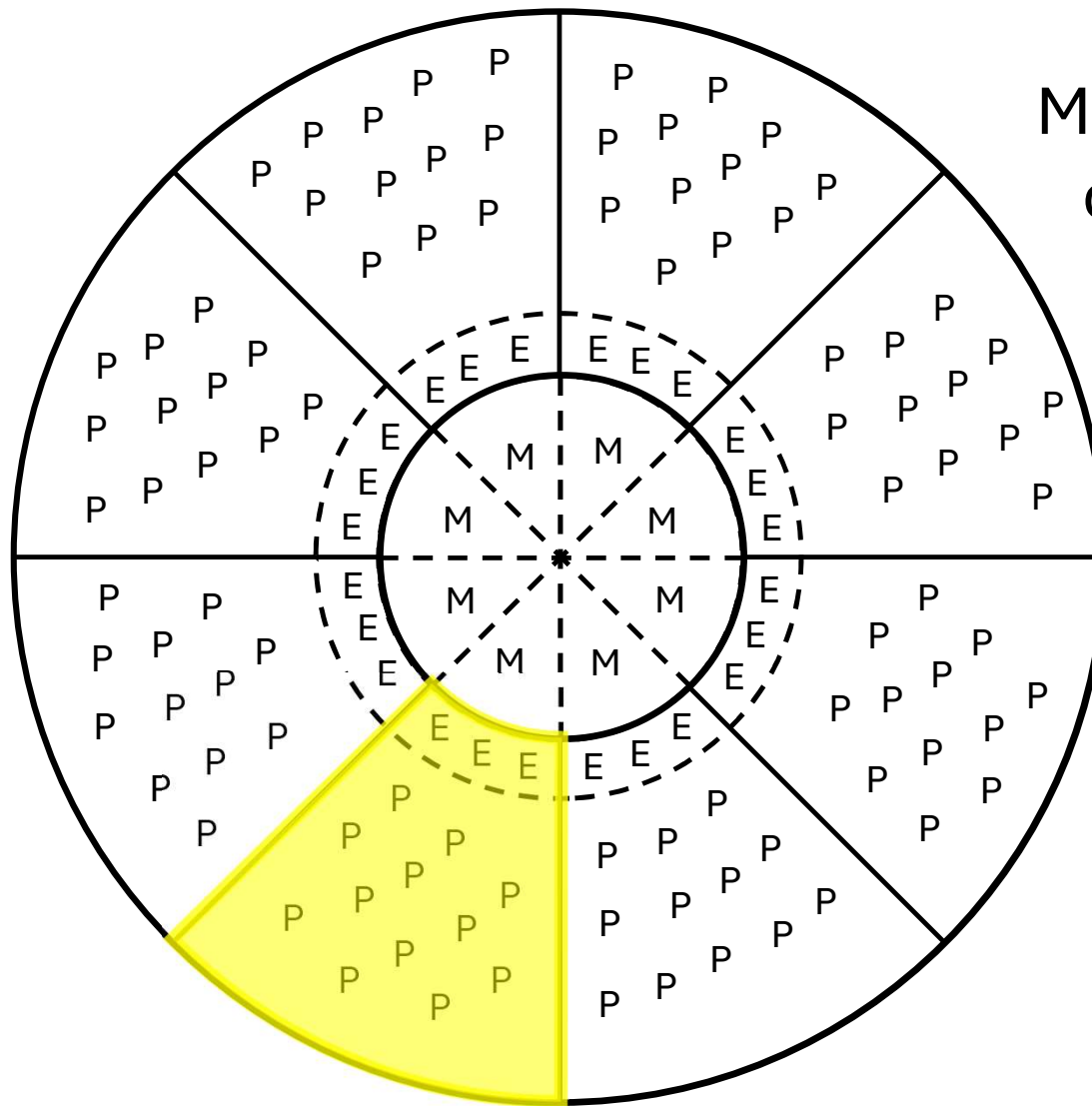




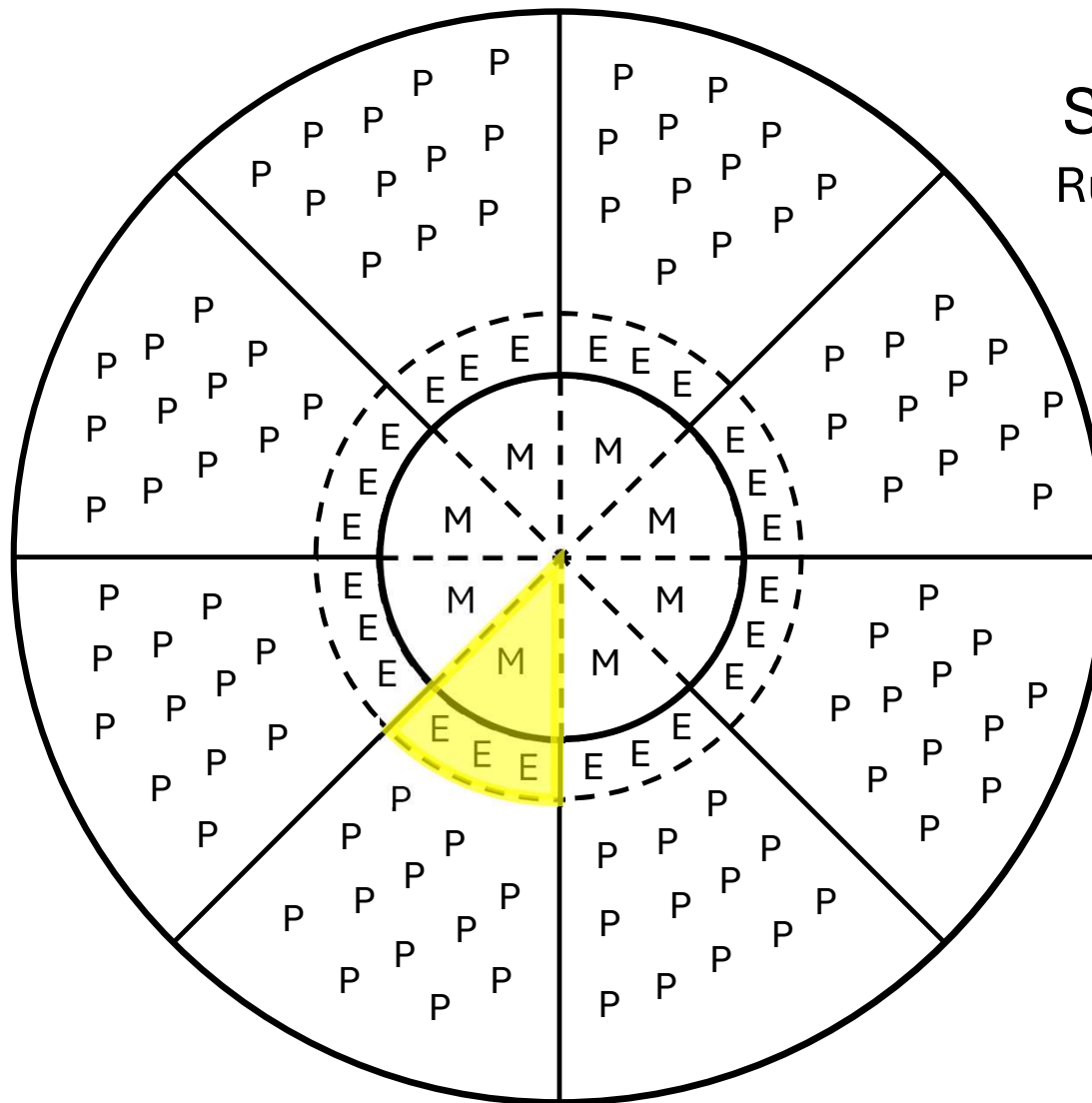
Regional
Church



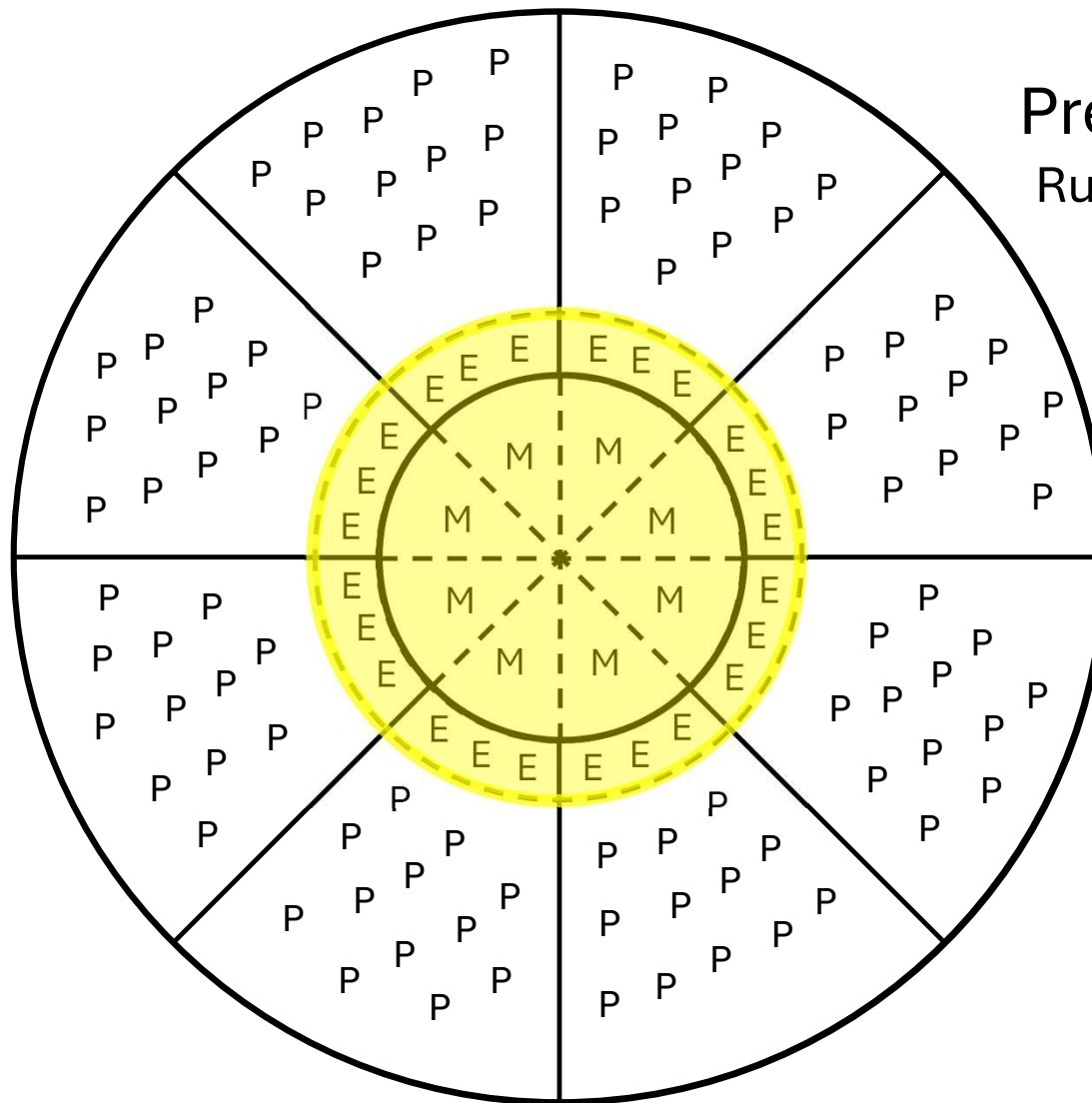
Local
Church



Members
of Local
Church



Session:
Ruling Body
of Local
Church



Presbytery:
Ruling Body of
Regional
Church