

Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Part 3 of 11

Plan for this morning:

- Review first two classes
 - Preface
 - FG 1 & 2
- Study FG 3 & 4
- Questions

Reviewing the Preface

- Three standards
 - Primary
 - Secondary
 - Tertiary
- Our Constitution
 - Secondary + Tertiary (human and amendable)
 - Secondary is seldom amended and difficult to amend
 - Tertiary is regularly and more easily amended
 - NOT the Primary (Divine and fixed)

Reviewing the Preface (cont.)

- We use the Tertiary standard *under* the Primary and Secondary standards—**not** *against* them.
- Our tertiary standards *don't* cover every circumstance but provide a *framework* within which sessions *actually lead* every circumstance. Sessions must exercise judgment—this is why ministers/elders must be men of wisdom, love, and deep faith.
- Presbyterianism isn't necessary for the being of the church but the *wellbeing*. We *don't* excommunicate Congregationalists, etc.

Review: 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.

REVIEW, Chapter 1: Christ, the King and Head of the Church

- Resurrected and seated at the Father's right hand, Jesus gives gifts and offices to grow and perfect his church (FG I:1).
- Jesus, the only king, rules his church directly and through men that his Spirit gifts to teach and rule according to his word (FG I:2).
- The church submits to Jesus' kingship by conforming her government to the commands, pattern, and general rules of Scripture and by conducting such with decency, in order, and for edification (FG I:3).
- Jesus, who is in heaven, is truly present with his church by the Holy Spirit through whom he gave his word, saves and governs his church, and gifts men for office (FG I:4).

REVIEW, Chapter 2: The Church

- The church is the way Christ currently exhibits his reign in this world (FG II:1).
- Those who profess faith in and promise submission to Christ (and their children) comprise the universal, visible church (FG II:2).
- Scripture teaches that the universal, visible church should be organized in local and regional churches confessing a common faith and submitting to a common form of government (FG II:3).
- The work Christ has assigned his church to fulfill in fellowship with him is three-fold: divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness (FG II:4).

The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

Chapter 3

The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

1. The **power** which Christ has committed to his church is not vested in the special officers alone, but in the **whole body**. All believers are **endued with the Spirit** and called of Christ to **join in the worship, edification, and witness of the church** which grows as the body of Christ fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplies, according to the working in due measure of each part. The **power of believers in their general office** includes the **right to acknowledge and desire the exercise of the gifts and calling of the special offices**. The regular exercise of oversight in a particular congregation is discharged by those who have been **called to such work by vote of the people**.

The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

2. Those who **join** in exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction are the **ministers of the Word** or teaching elders, and other church governors, commonly called ruling **elders**. They **alone** must exercise this authority by delegation from Christ, since according to the New Testament these are the **only permanent officers of the church with gifts for such rule**. Ruling elders and teaching elders join in **congregational, presbyterial, and synodical assemblies**, for those who share gifts for rule from Christ must exercise these gifts **jointly not only** in the fellowship of the saints in **one place** but also for the edification of all the saints in **larger areas** so far as they are appointed thereto in an orderly manner, and are acknowledged by the saints as those set over them in the Lord.

The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

3 (cont.)

Government by presbyters or **elders** is a New Testament **ordinance**; their **joint** exercise of jurisdiction in presbyterial assemblies is **set forth** in the New Testament; and the **organization of subordinate and superior courts** is **founded upon** and **agreeable to** the Word of God, **expressing the unity** of the church and the **derivation of ministerial authority from Christ** the Head of the church.

The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

3. All church power is **only ministerial and declarative**, for the Holy **Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice**. No church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority; all its decisions should be founded upon the Word of God. "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, **contrary** to his Word; or **beside it**, if matters of **faith, or worship**" (Confession of Faith, Chapter XX, Section 2).

The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

4. All church power is **wholly moral or spiritual**. No church officers or judicatories possess any **civil jurisdiction**; they may not inflict any **civil penalties** nor may they **seek the aid of the civil power** in the exercise of their jurisdiction further than may be necessary for civil protection and security.

The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

5. Nevertheless, church government is a **valid and authentic jurisdiction** to which **Christians are commanded to submit** themselves. Therefore the decisions of church officers when properly rendered and if in accord with the Word of God "are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but **also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God** appointed thereunto in his Word" (Confession of Faith, Chapter XXXI, Section 2).

Summary: The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

- Whole body is endued with power by the Holy Spirit.
 - Join in the worship, edification, and witness
 - Acknowledge and desire exercise of the special offices by vote
- The only permanent special offices of oversight are minister and elder, and the NT requires them to rule jointly (FG III:2).
- The power Christ committed to this joint work of rule is strictly ministerial and declarative, not magisterial and legislative.
- The power Christ committed to this joint work of rule is entirely moral and spiritual.
- This ministerial, declarative, moral, and spiritual power to rule is Biblical and real

The Unity of the Church

Chapter 4

The Unity of the Church

1. **Since the church of Christ is one body**, united under and in one God and Father, one Lord, and one Spirit, it must give **diligence to keep** this unity in the bond of peace. To this end the church **must receive those endued with gifts** of Christ as Christ himself, **must submit to those whose call to govern** in the church has been properly acknowledged, and in particular **must learn of those with gifts of teaching** the Word of God. Further, since **every Christian** is endued with some gift for the edification of the body, he **must minister this gift to the church** as a faithful steward. **Church government must maintain this fellowship** in Christ and in the gifts of the Spirit and **seek its restoration** when it has been disrupted through schism.

The Unity of the Church

2. It is the **right and duty** of those who rule in the church of God **to maintain order and exercise discipline**, for the **preservation** both of **truth** and **duty**. These officers and the whole church **must censure or cast out the erroneous or scandalous**, always observing the requirements of the Word of God, and seeking the **honor of Christ's name**, the **good of his church**, and the **reclamation of the offender**.

The Unity of the Church

3. The manifestation of the unity of the church requires that it be **separate from the world. Apostasy in faith and life is destructive of the fellowship in Christ**; only by rejecting such error can Christian fellowship be maintained. There are **many** antichrists, **many** false apostles and teachers. **From these the church must turn away**, and those who steadfastly hear the voice of false shepherds and follow them cannot be regarded as the sheep of Christ. There are organizations which falsely call themselves churches of God, and others which once were churches, but have become synagogues of Satan. **Communion with such is spiritual adultery** and an offense against Christ and his saints.

The Unity of the Church

4. The **visible unity of the Body of Christ**, though not altogether destroyed, **is greatly obscured** by the division of the Christian church into different **groups or denominations**. **In such denominations** Christians exercise a fellowship toward each other in doctrine, worship, and order that they do not exercise toward other Christians. The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error, and some have gravely departed from apostolic purity; yet **all of these which maintain through a sufficient discipline the Word and sacraments in their fundamental integrity are to be recognized as true manifestations of the church of Jesus Christ**. All such churches should seek a closer fellowship, in accordance with the principles set forth above.

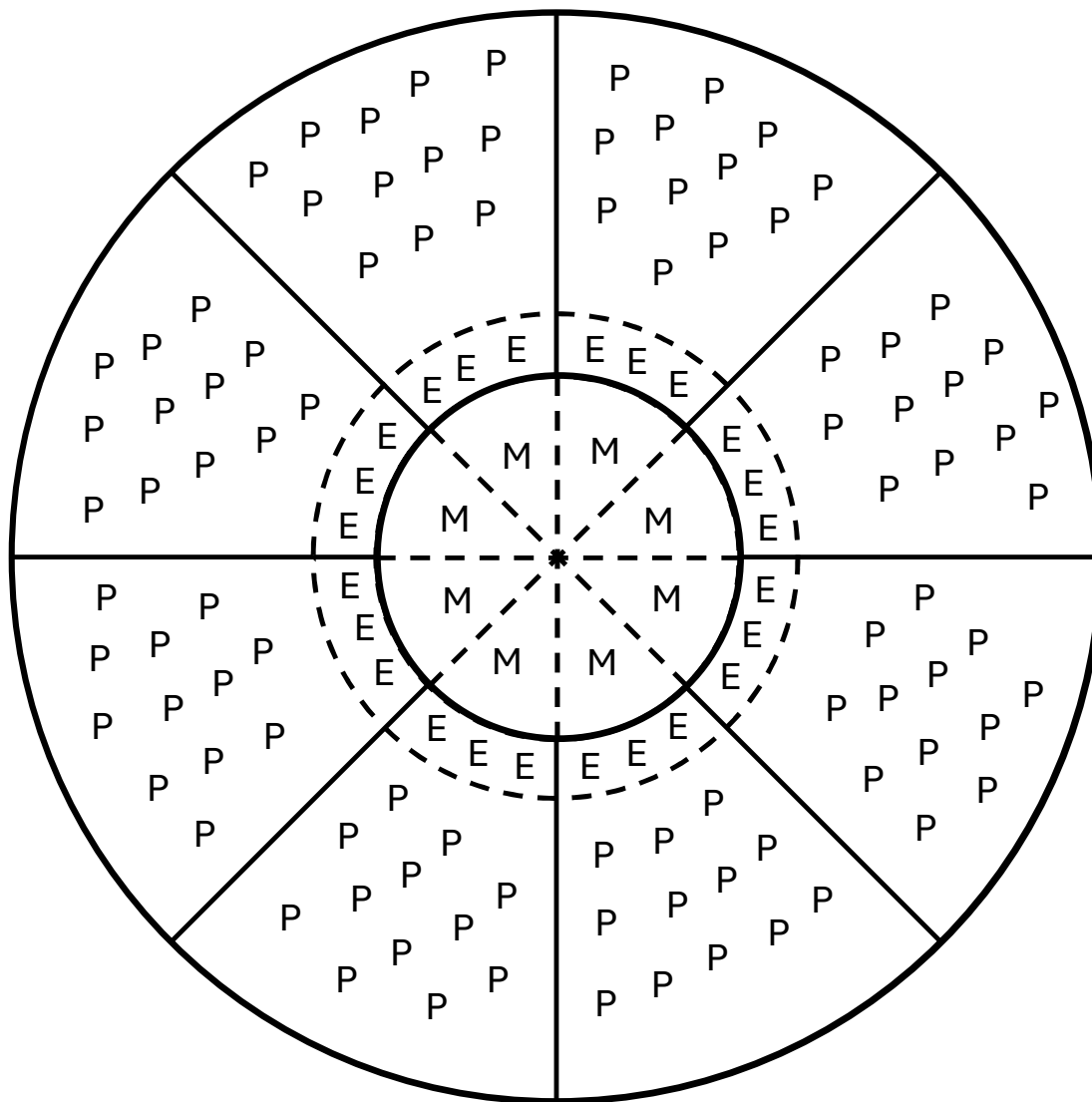
Summary: The Unity of the Church

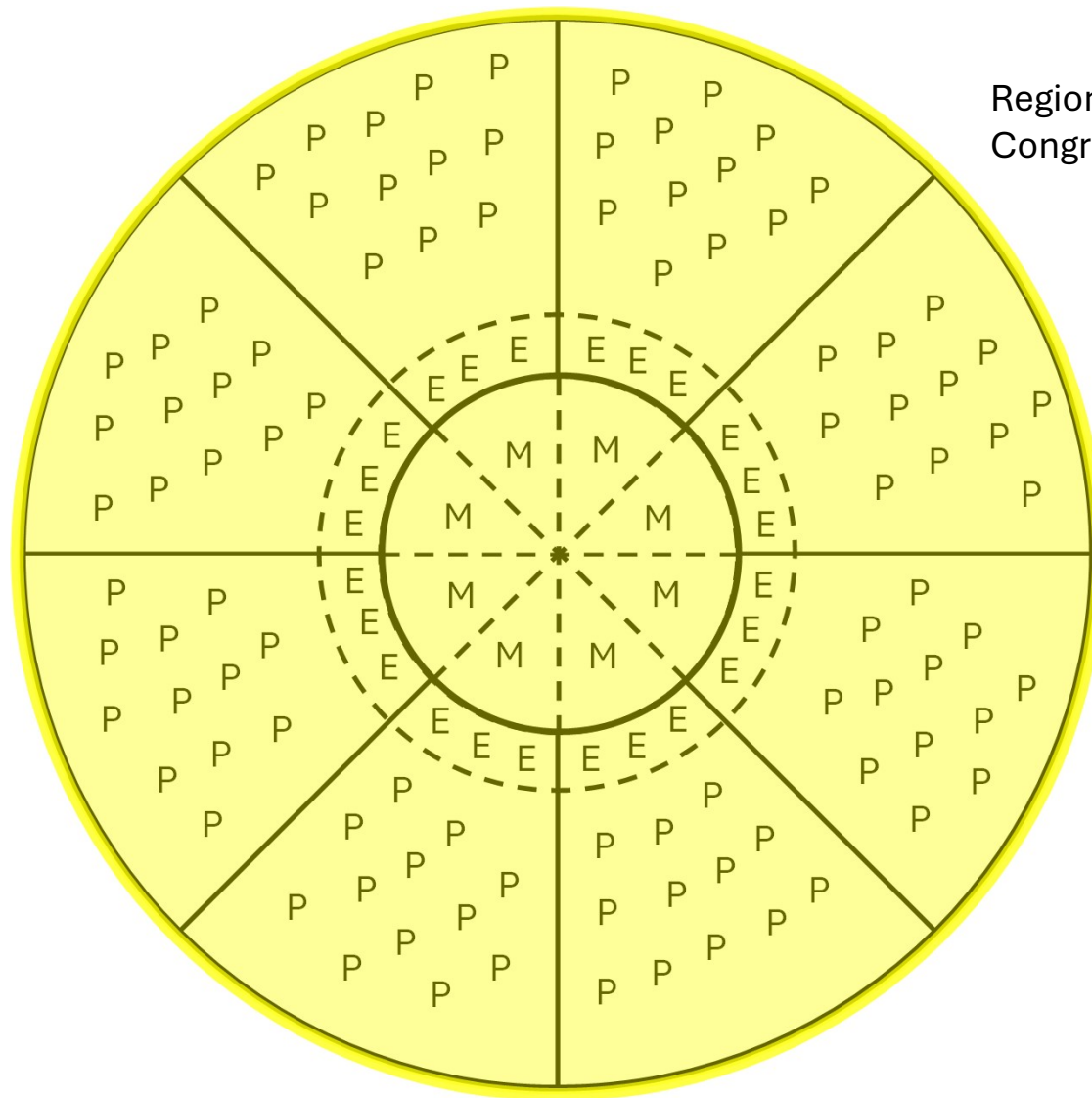
- Since the church really is one in the Triune God, she must work at unity by (FG IV:1):
 - Receiving those with the gifts of faith and repentance (along with their children),
 - ...submitting to those who have been ordained to jointly exercise Christ's power for government,
 - ...diligently learning from those with gifts for teaching the word of God.
 - As to...
 - Believers in their general office: each must use what gifts he/she has received to serve the body for her edification.
 - Special office of government: they must seek to remedy disruptions to unity.

Summary (cont.): The Unity of the Church

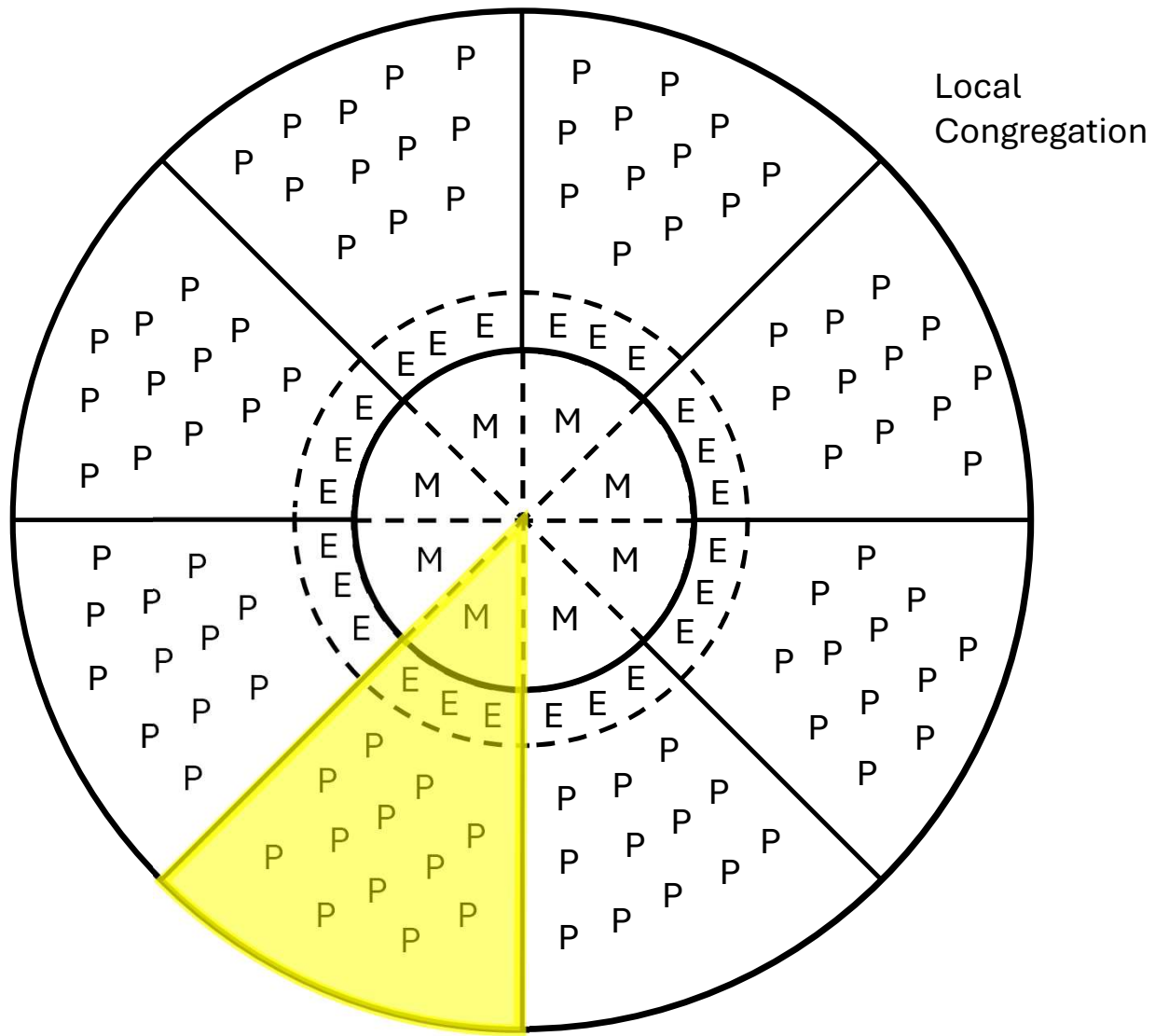
- Those who jointly share Christ's power for rule in the church must use that power to preserve unity of truth and practice in the church (FG IV:2).
- An essential aspect of maintaining true unity is recognizing and separating from teachers and organizations of false doctrine and practice (FG IV:3).
- Denominations obscure but do not destroy the unity of the church (FG IV:4).

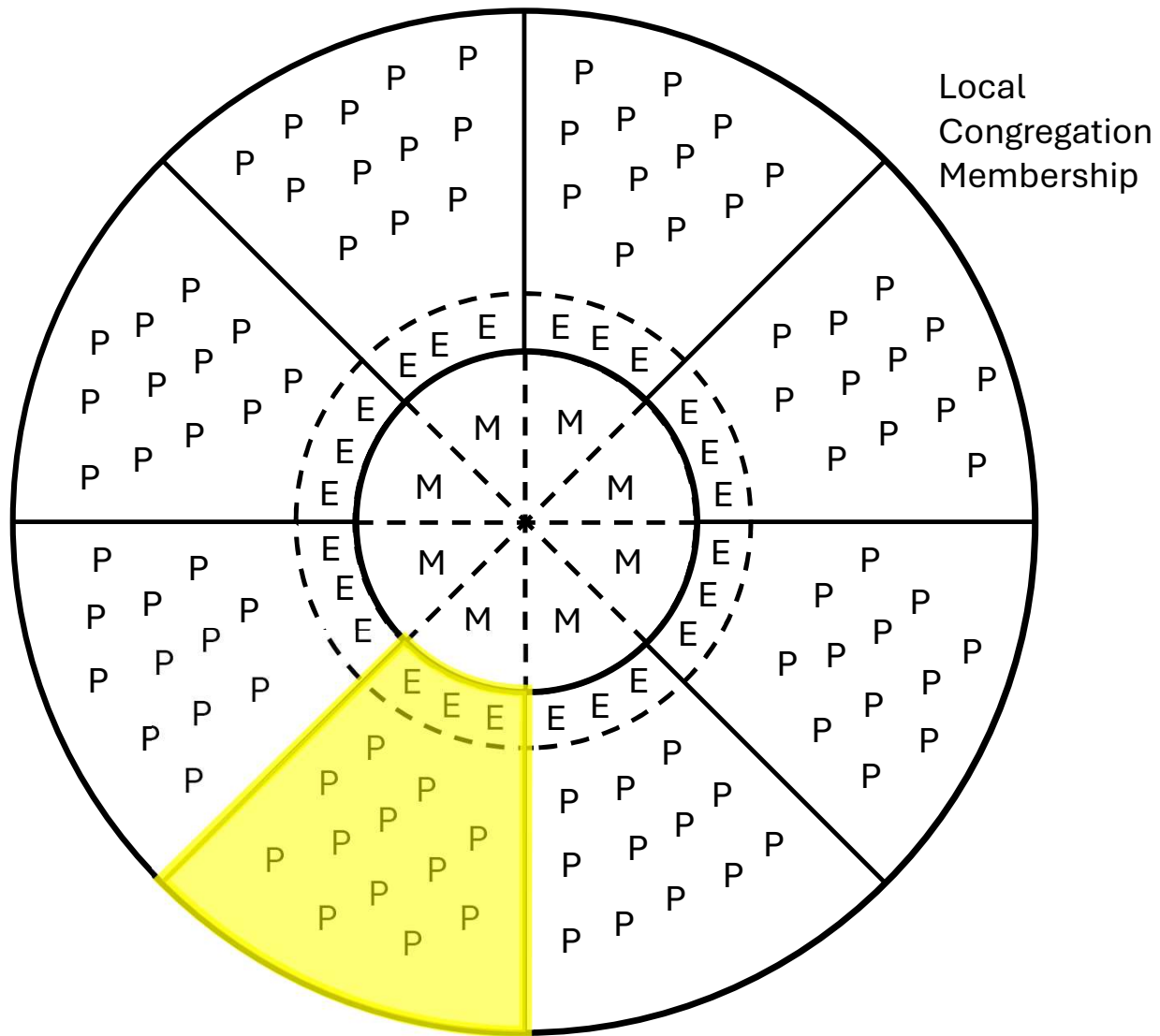
Questions?

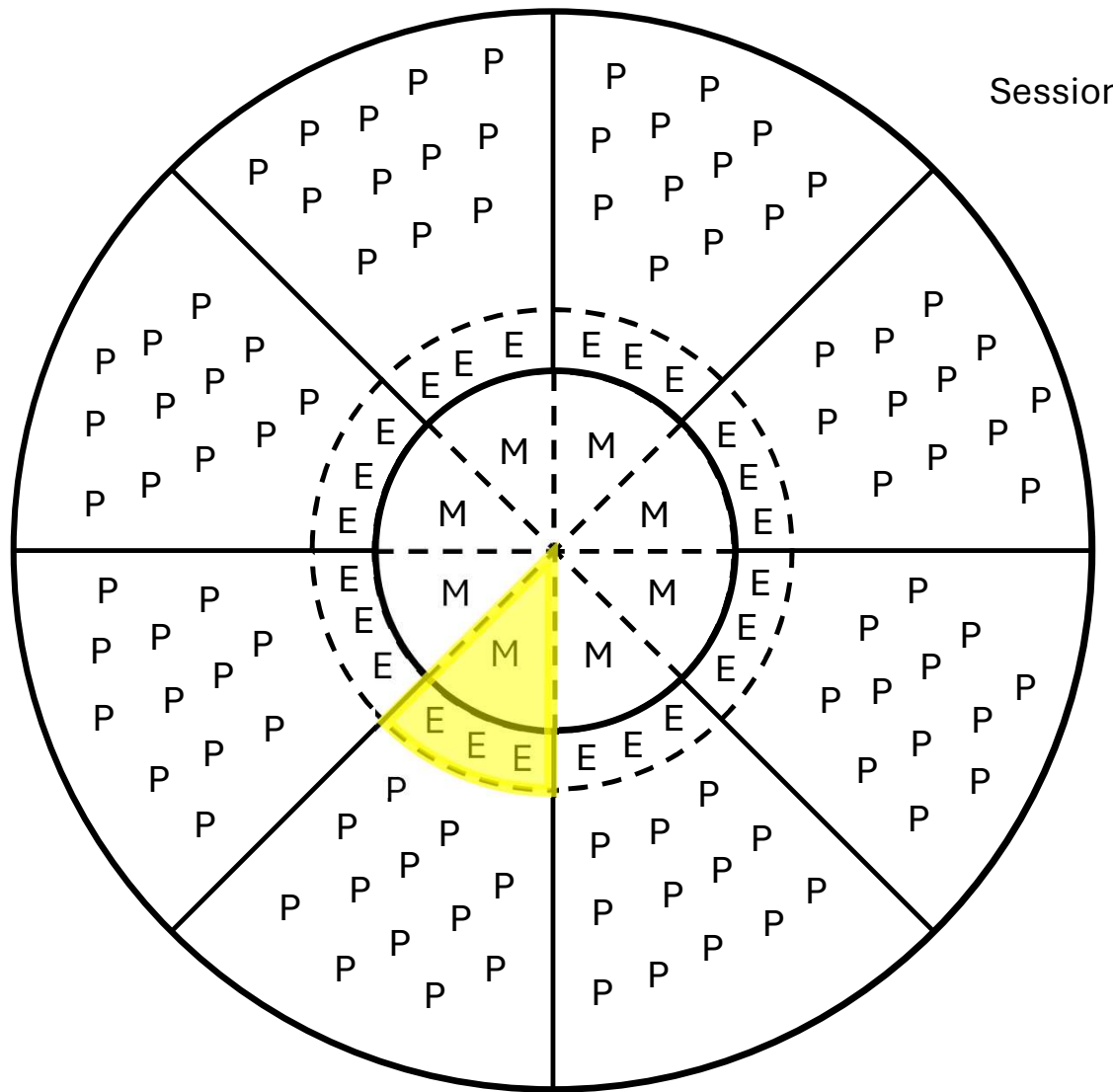




Regional
Congregation







Session

