

Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Part 5 of 11

Plan for this morning:

- Briefly REVIEW BCO Preface
- REVIEW FG 5-9
- STUDY FG 10-11
- QUESTIONS

REVIEW: Preface

- Three standards
 - Primary: the Bible
 - Secondary: Confession and Catechisms *of the OPC*
 - Tertiary: FG, BD, DW (comprising the BCO)
- 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)

REVIEW: 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.

REVIEW: Principles of Presbyterian government

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

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

Overall Plan for the Class: FG 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 15; January 5
3. Assemblies (FG XII-XIX)—January 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

Overall Plan for the Class: FG 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 15; January 5
3. Assemblies (FG XII-XIX)—January 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

Special Offices (FG 5-11)

- FG 5: Offices in the Church
- FG 6: Ministers
 - FG 7: Evangelists
 - FG 8: Pastors
 - FG 9: Teachers
- FG 10: Elders
- FG 11: Deacons

Special Offices (FG 5-11)

- FG 5: Offices in the Church
- FG 6: Ministers
 - FG 7: Evangelists
 - FG 8: Pastors
 - FG 9: Teachers
- FG 10: Elders
- FG 11: Deacons

Discussed on December 15th

Special Offices (FG 5-11)

- FG 5: Offices in the Church
- FG 6: Ministers
 - FG 7: Evangelists
 - FG 8: Pastors
 - FG 9: Teachers
- FG 10: Elders
- FG 11: Deacons

TODAY

SUMMARY: FG 5

- Under the new covenant, the **foundational** special offices are the **Apostles and prophets** (FG V:1)
 - The Apostles were appointed by Christ to witnesses to his resurrection and testify to his teaching.
 - The Lord provided the fullness of truth in the New Testament Scriptures through the Apostles and prophets.
- Jesus **continues** to gift men for **teaching**, **rule**, and **service** (FG V:2).
 - To better serve the church, some with strength in such gifts and commendable character should be called by the church to hold an office.
 - Public recognition of gifts and character with office increases a man's ability to benefit the body.
 - Men bring diversity of gifts to the same office.
- There are **three ordinary, perpetual** offices in the church: **ministers**, **elders**, and **deacons** (FG V:3).

SUMMARY: FG 6

- All ministers have a stewardship in the gospel; some ministers are especially fruitful in evangelism, shepherding, or teaching (FG VI:1).
- Varying strengths acknowledged, still, every minister, as a servant of Christ, should possess gifts for and seek to grow in feeding, oversight, gospel proclamation and defense, administration of the sacraments, and being an example to the flock (FG VI:2).
- Every minister should have a solid faith, be educated, be able to teach and rule, live a holy life, be wise, lead his home, and have a good reputation with everyone (FG VI:3).
- Membership of ministers is in the regional church (FG VI:4).

SUMMARY: FG 7

- Some ministers are especially gifted in **evangelism** and are specifically called to the church as such (FG VII:1).
- Specific labors common to evangelists include (FG VII:2):
 - Foreign or home missionary
 - Stated supply in a church
 - Chaplain of an institution or of the military
 - Administrator of an agency for evangelism
 - Editor or a press or publication

SUMMARY: FG 8

- The pastor is Christ's undershepherd in a local congregation.
- He joins the elders of the church to govern her members and lead them in the service of Christ.
- His special responsibilities include:
 - conducting public worship;
 - praying for the flock and leading them in prayer;
 - reading and preaching the word with ministerial authority;
 - administering the sacraments;
 - blessing the people from God;
 - visiting and counseling members with care for the poor, sick, afflicted, and dying;
 - evangelizing the lost.

SUMMARY: FG 9

- Teachers are ministers with notable gifts for expounding Scripture, teaching sound doctrine, defending the faith, who are called by the church to labor in such areas of strength (FG IX:1).
- A minister may be called as a teacher by a congregation (when there is already a pastor), a theological seminary, a Christian school, or some other form of instruction (FG IX:2).

Ruling Elders

Chapter 10

SUMMARY: FG 10

- In addition to ministers, Christ gives some men gifts to rule, and they have authority to use such gifts when called to the office of elder by a vote of a congregation (FG X:1).
- The elder should have a solid faith, exemplary Christian life, wisdom, and the respect of the congregation (FG X:2).
- Elders are to lead the church in serving Christ individually and together with the pastor (FG X:3).
 - Elders should carefully oversee members; try to correct errors in doctrine and life; bring difficult cases to the session; visit, counsel, and comfort members; and pray with and for the members.
 - Elders should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors.

From Dr. Alan Strange's commentary:

Note that the requirements for the office of ruling elder focus on solid **life** and **doctrine**, practical **application** of such to cases requiring **good judgment**, a **good reputation** in the congregation as one able to give **leadership**, and being **worthy of the respect** of God's people. Ruling elders are **not required to have gifts for teaching** as they do not hold the teaching office. Rather, they need the kinds of virtues and gifts required for **governance**, which is what this section describes.

Excursus: Minister & Elder—OPC vs. URCNA

FG 8: Christ's undershepherd in a local congregation of God's people, who joins with the ruling elders in governing the congregation, is called a pastor. It is his charge to feed and tend the flock as Christ's minister and with the other elders to lead them in all the service of Christ.

FG 10.3: Ruling elders, individually and jointly with the pastor in the session, are to lead the church in the service of Christ. ...They should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors.

Excursus: Minister & Elder—OPC vs. URCNA

Article 2 – The Duties of the Minister The duties belonging to the office of minister of the Word consist of...*assisting the elders* in the shepherding and discipline of the congregation.

Article 14 – The Duties of Elders. The duties belonging to the office of elder consist of...*They shall see to it that...the minister(s)...faithfully discharge their offices. They are to maintain the purity of the Word and Sacraments....*

The Ruling Elder, Samuel Miller (early 1800s)

The essential character of the officer of whom we speak is that of an *ecclesiastical ruler*. “He that ruleth, let him do it with diligence,” is the summary of his appropriate functions, as laid down in scripture. The *teaching elder* is, indeed, also a *ruler*. In addition to this, however, he is called to preach the gospel and administer [the] sacraments. But the particular department assigned to the ruling elder is to cooperate with the pastor in spiritual inspection and government. The scriptures, as we have seen, speak not only of “pastors and teachers,” but also of “governments”—of “elders that rule well, but do not labour in the word and doctrine.” [page 11]

And as the members of the church session, whether assembled in their judicial capacity or not, are the pastor's counsellors and colleagues in all matters relating to the spiritual rule of the church, so it is their official duty to encourage, sustain and defend him in the faithful discharge of his duty. It is deplorable, when a minister is assailed for his fidelity by the profane or the worldly, if any portion of the *eldership* either takes part against him, or shrinks from his active and determined defense. It is not meant, of course, that they are to consider themselves bound to sustain him in everything he may say or do, whether right or wrong; but that, when they really believe him to be faithful, both to truth and duty, they should feel it their duty to stand by him, to shield him from the arrows of the wicked, and to encourage him as far as he obeys Christ.

[Page 16]

Deacons

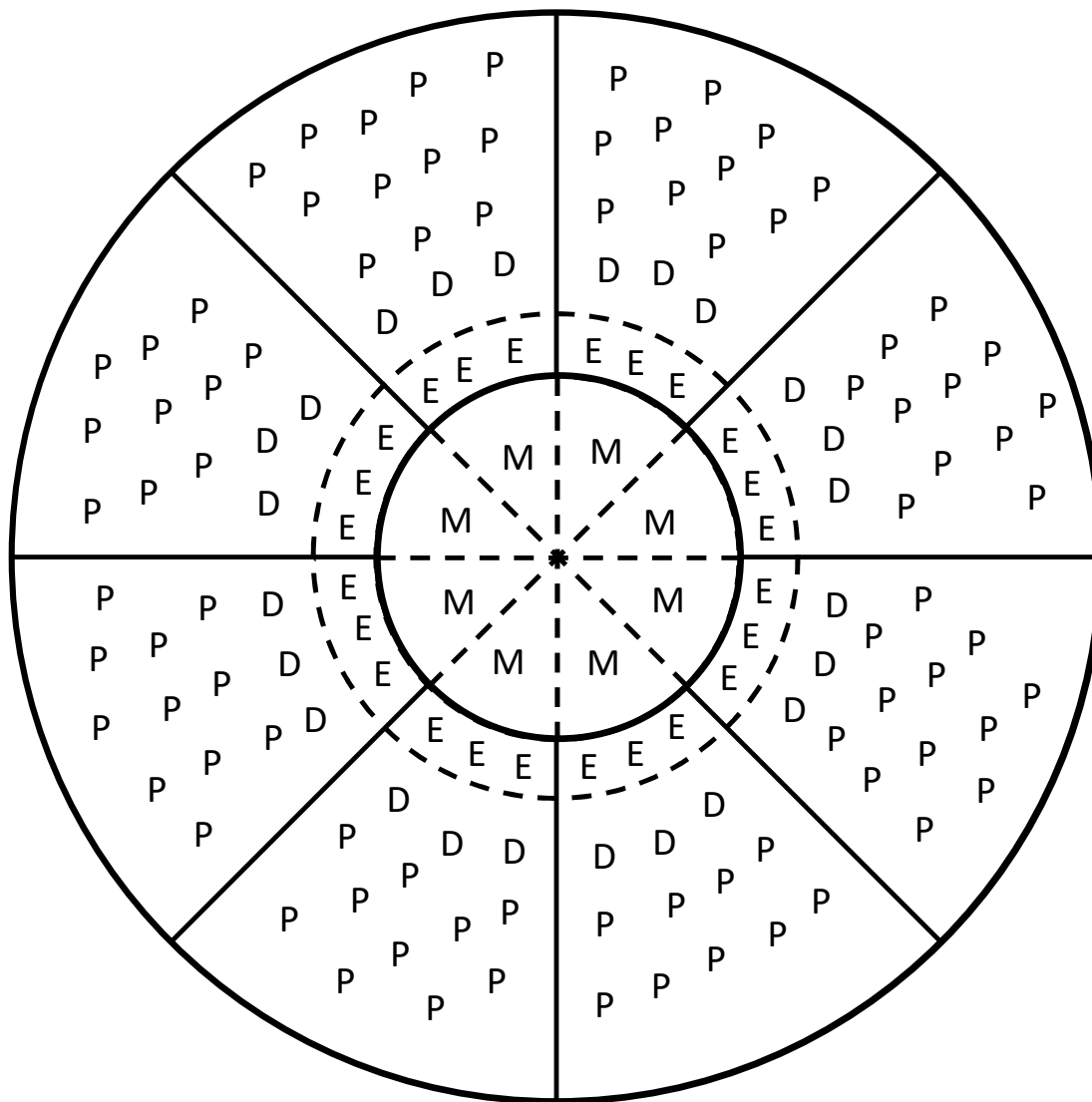
Chapter 11

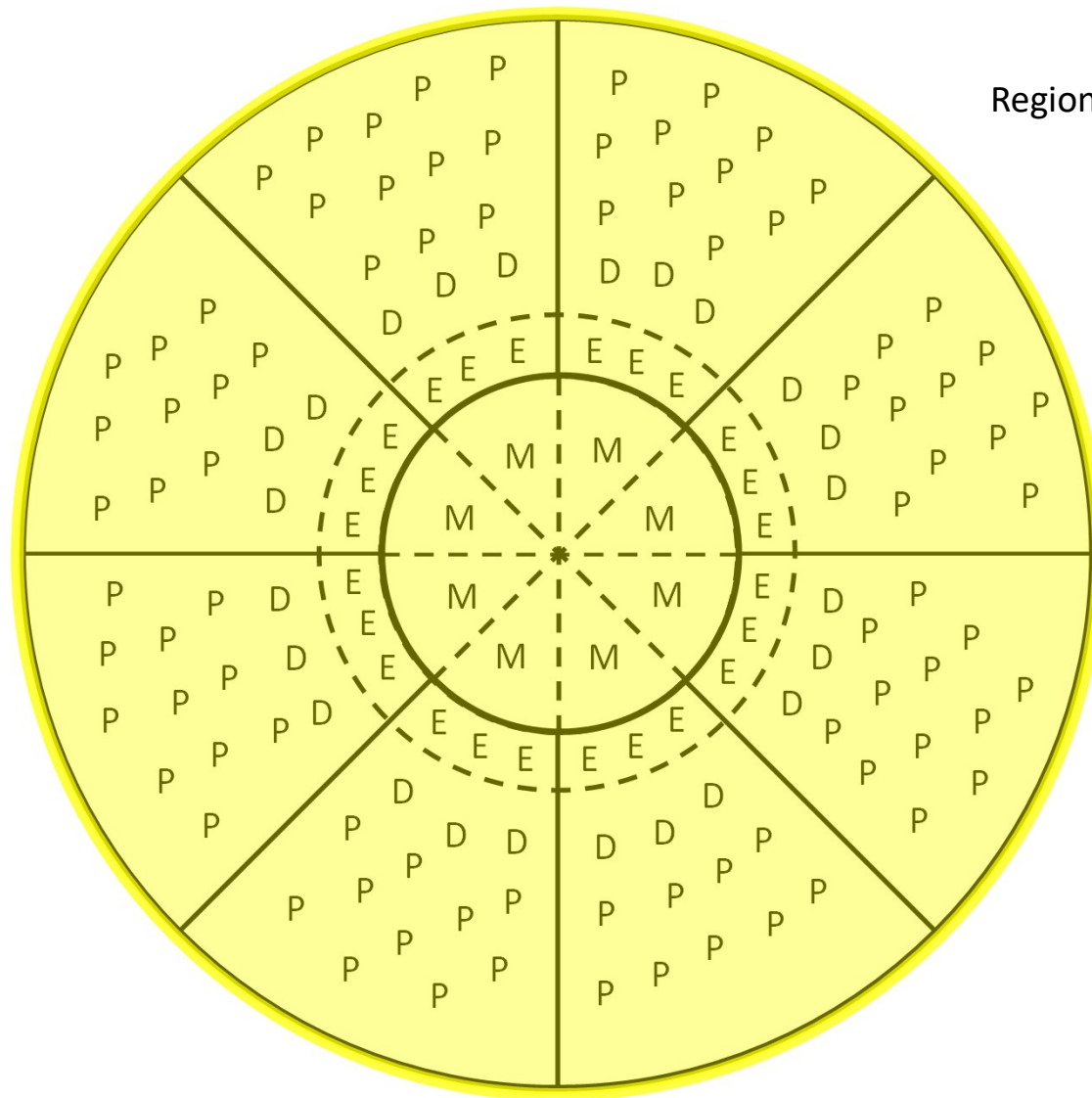
SUMMARY: FG 11

- Distinct from the office of rule, deacons execute a variegated ministry of mercy to members and “strangers” (FG XI:1).
- Deacons should have strong faith, exemplary lives, warm brotherly love, and good judgment (FG XI:2).
- It is desirable that a church have multiple deacons to serve as a board (FG XI:3).
- The board should oversee collecting and distributing funds for the needy. Other forms of service may be committed to them by the session (FG XI:4).
- Deacons serve under the supervision and authority of the session, should keep record of their finances, and report to the session quarterly (FG XI:5).
- In addition to quarterly reporting, it is desirable for the session and board of deacons to meet regularly to confer on matters of common interest (FG XI:6).
- When a church does not have a deacon(ate), the duties of the office devolve to the session (FG XI:7).

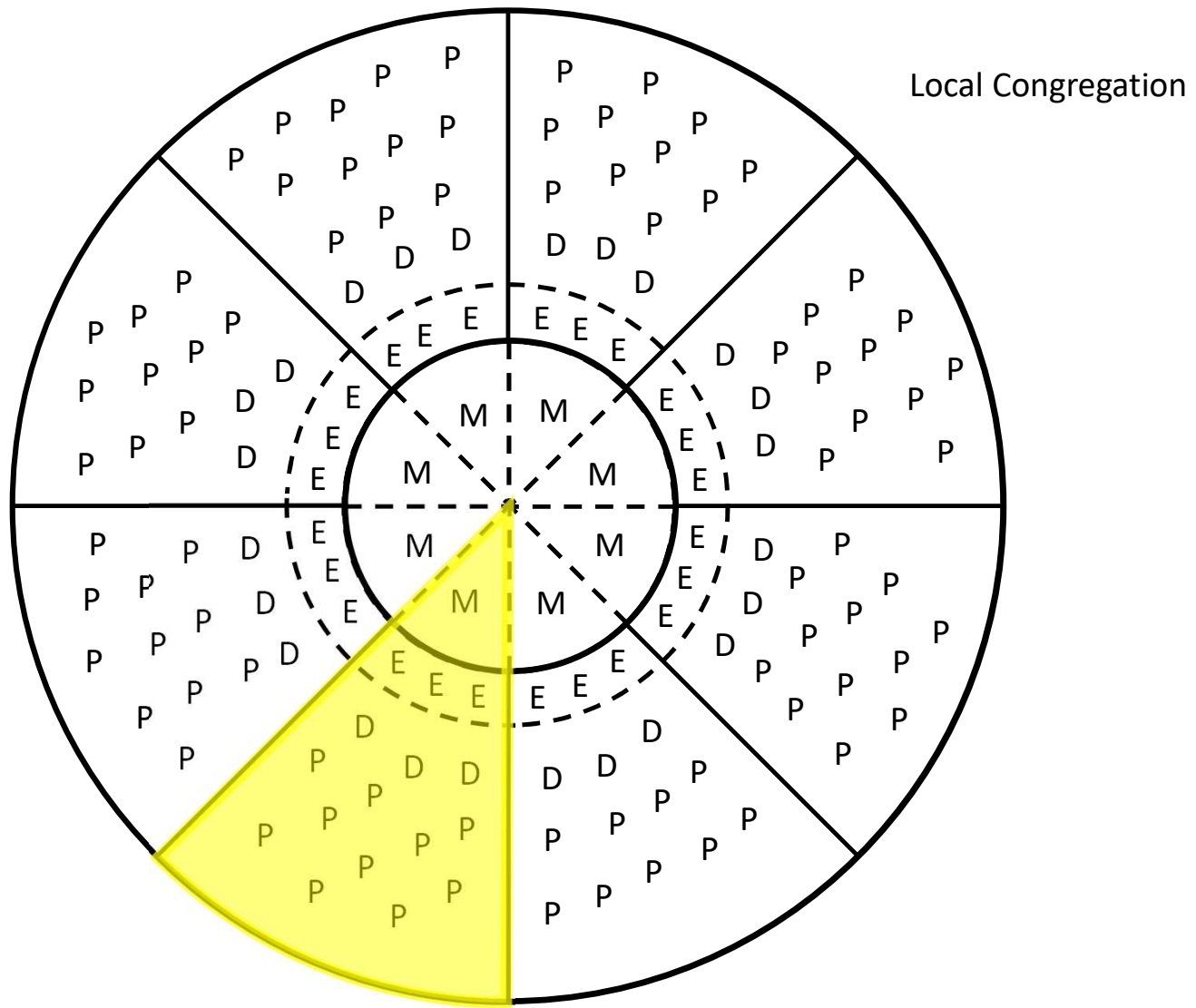
From Dr. Alan Strange's commentary:

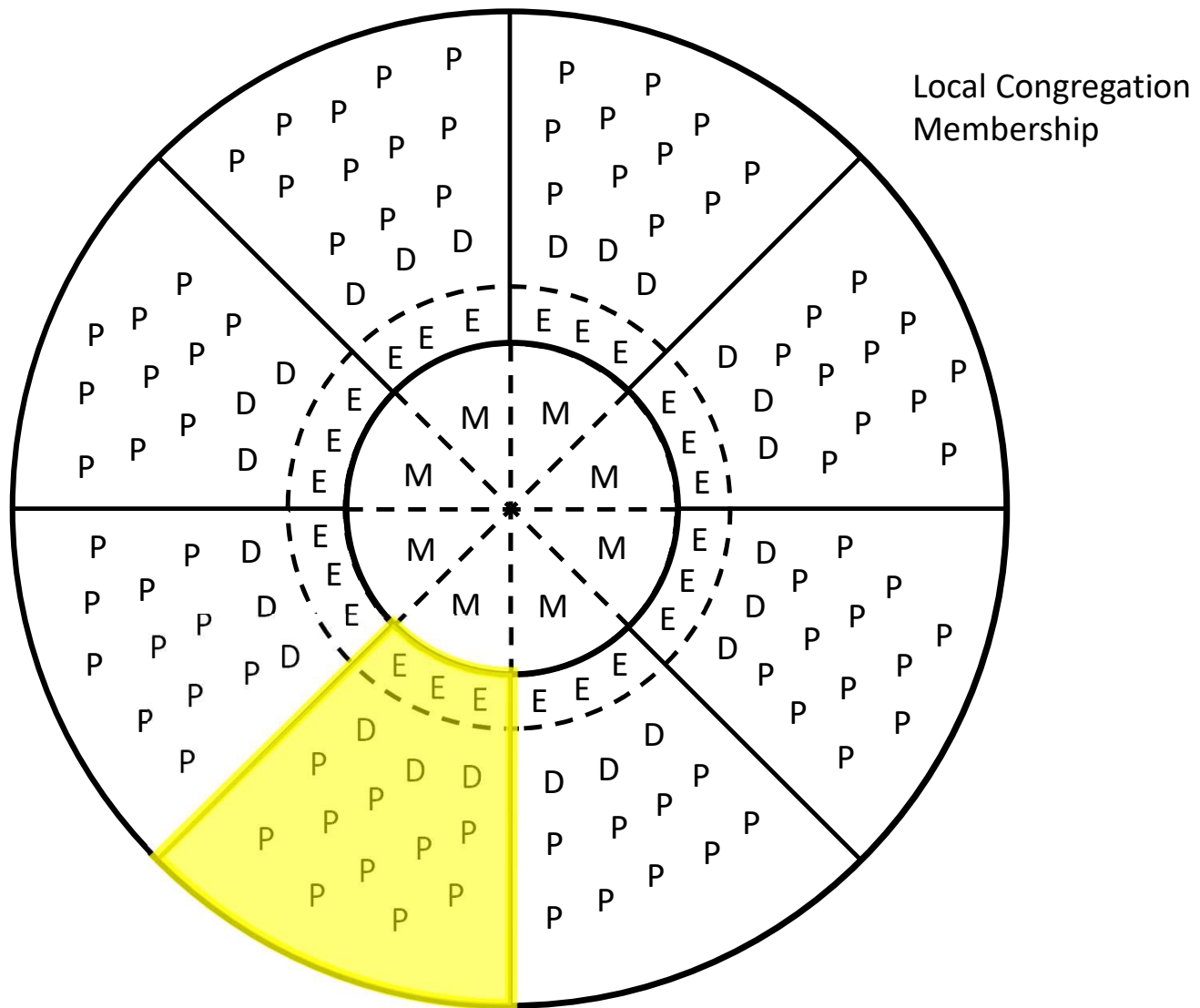
The primary duty of the diaconate is the ministry of mercy, which includes chiefly, but is not limited to, gathering and distributing monies to those in need. Other appropriate diaconal work includes yard and house work for seniors (sometimes done in conjunction with and training of the youth), food for families mourning or with sick/recovering members (often done in conjunction with the women of the church), financial counseling and help with budgeting, etc. Women have an important diaconal role to play in the church; the diaconate does well to work with them in its ministry of mercy.

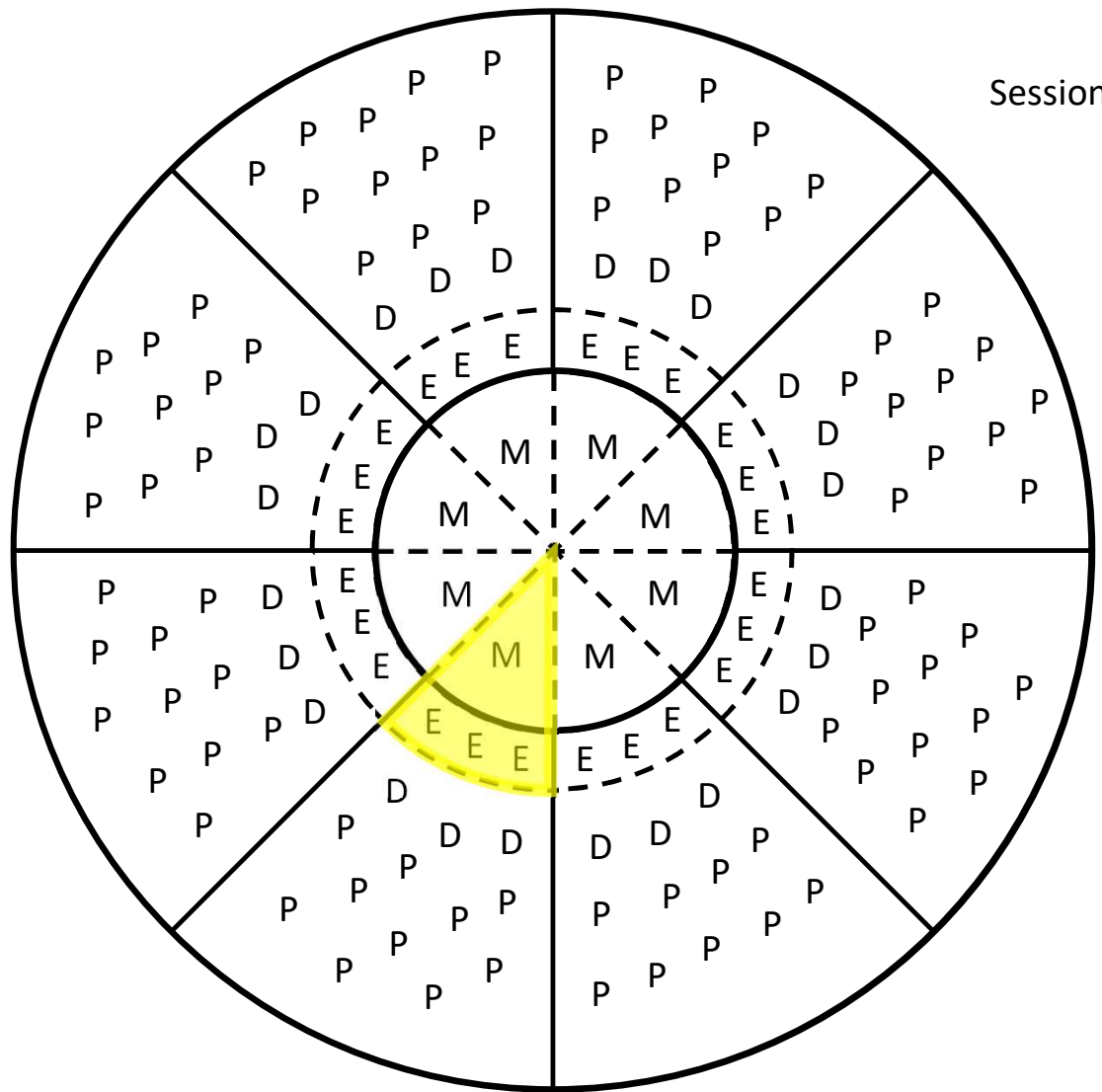




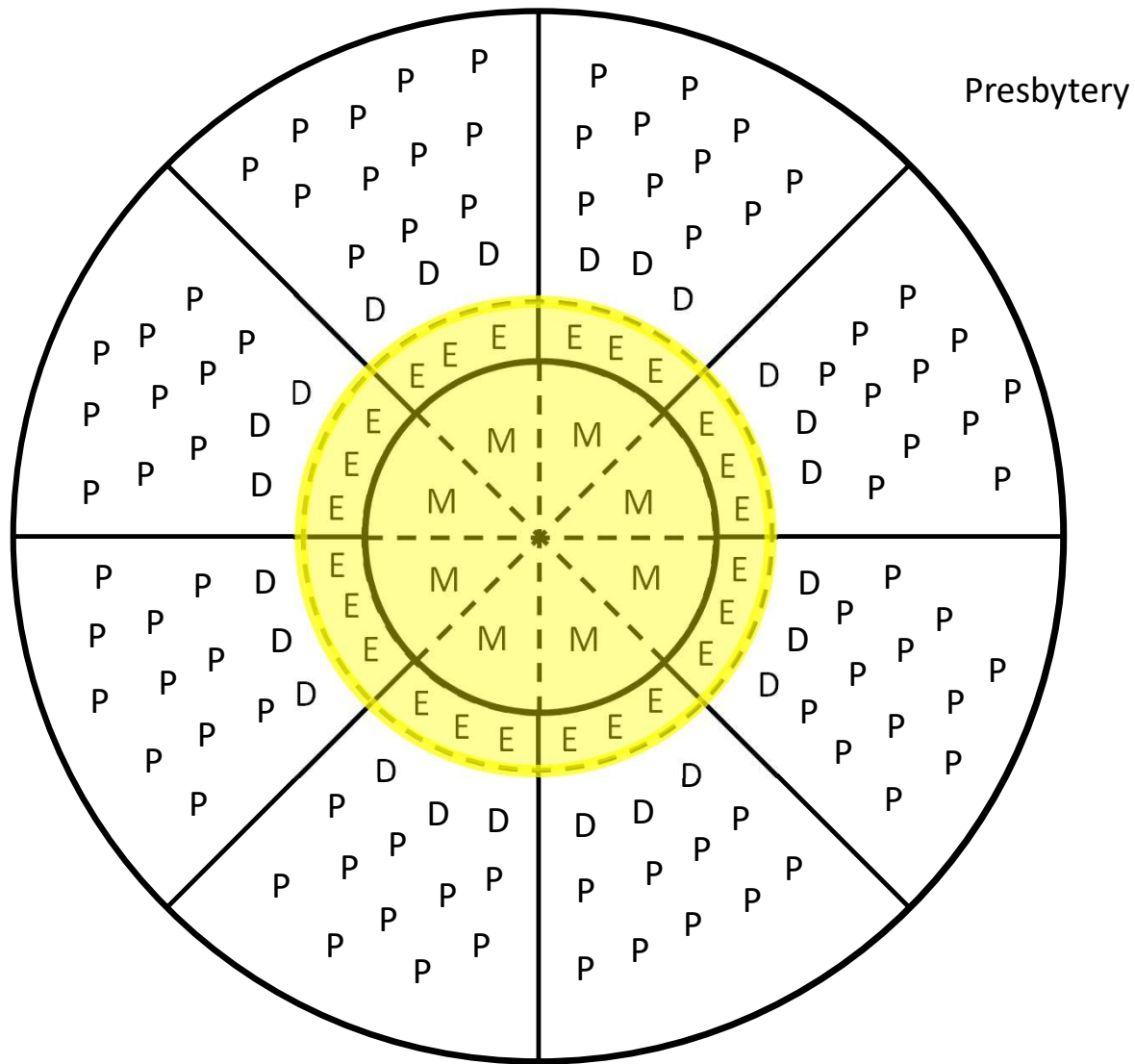
Regional Church







Session



Questions?