

Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Part 9 of 10

Plan for this morning:

- Scant Review of FG 1-19
- Review FG 20-23 (from last week)
- Study FG 24-26
- QUESTIONS

Overall Plan for the Class: FG Main Topics

1. Foundational doctrinal commitments and principles for the government of Christ's church (FG 1-4)
2. The Special Offices (FG 5-11)
3. Assemblies (FG 12-19)
4. Ordination and Installation to Special Office (FG 20-26)
5. Good Order in Miscellaneous Matters (FG 27-32)—May 18

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Foundational doctrinal commitments and principles for the government of Christ's church (FG 1-4)

- FG 1—**Christ is King**: exalted; offices; word; Spirit
- FG 2—**Church**: visible kingdom; organized as congregations; work is worship, edification, and witness
- FG 3—**Power**: whole body; general office acknowledge special officers.
 - Ministerial and declarative
 - Moral and Spiritual
 - Christians are commanded to submit themselves to this government.
- FG 4—**Unity**: under Christ; under **special officers** of rule; discipline

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The Special Offices (FG 5-11)

- FG 5: **Offices** in the Church: New Covenant foundational special offices discontinued; NC **ordinary & perpetual** special offices
- FG 6: **Ministers**: **rule + stewardship in the gospel**; regional church membership
 - FG 7: Evangelists: particular gifts for evangelism/church planting
 - FG 8: **Pastors**: especially suited to congregational ministry of word and sacraments + shepherding/rule with elders in a **local church**
 - FG 9: Teachers: more suited to the seminary, school, or publication
- FG 10: **Elders**: apt to teach but the focus is really on **rule**
- FG 11: **Deacons**: serving and offering **leadership in mercy and mutual service** in the body

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Assemblies (FG 12-19)

- FG 12—General Principles: all have *same* rights and powers; “original jurisdiction”; neither “episcopal” (implying *different* power) nor “congregational” (because the act of one is act of all)
- Specific Governing Assemblies
 - FG 13—The Local Church and Its Session
 - FG 14—The Regional Church and Its presbytery
 - FG 15—The Whole Church and Its General Assembly
- Congregations
 - FG 16—Congregational Meetings
 - FG 17—Congregations without Pastors
- Officers of Governing Assemblies
 - FG 18—Moderators
 - FG 19—Clerks

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Ordination and Installation to Special Office (FG 20-26)

- Ordination and Installation (FG 20)
- Ministers (FG 21-24)
 - Licensing Candidates to Preach the Gospel (FG 21)
 - Calling a Minister (FG 22)
 - Ordaining and Installing Ministers (FG 23)
 - Dissolving Ministerial Relationships (FG 24)
- Electing, Ordaining, and Installing Ruling Elders and Deacons (FG 25)
- Divesting from Office (FG 26)

REVIEW: Ordination and Installation to Special Office (FG 20-26)

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REVIEW: Ordination and Installation (FG 20)

- It is **contrary to scripture** for men to **appoint themselves** to office in the church (FG 20:1).
- The church solemnly **approves** and **publicly attests** to a man's inward call, gifts, and call of the church by **ordaining** him to the office of deacon, ruling elder, or minister (FG 20:2).
- The church must only ordain a man to office when it is **satisfied** that he is qualified, and he has actually been called to a work (FG 20:3).
- A body is to be sure a man has been **sufficiently trained** and **tested** before ordaining him (FG 20:4).
- The body that ordains a man is the body that examined the man (FG 20:5).
- **"Installation"** is the act of a governing body that **puts a man in a position to actually execute the work of an office**. The **first time** a man is installed he is also **ordained** (FG 20:6).
- [The application of FG 20:5 is repeated in FG 20:7.]
- An officer retiring due to advanced age or disability can be honored by the body that called him by designating him **"emeritus"** (FG 20:8).

REVIEW: Licensing Candidates (21)

- The purpose of licensure is to provide a season to test a man's gifts and suitability for the gospel ministry so that the office of minister will not be degraded (FG 21:1).
- A man must be taken "under the care" of a presbytery prior to licensing him (FG 21:2).
- A man must ordinarily have a Bachelor of Arts degree and have finished half a seminary education to be academically qualified for licensure (FG 21:3).
- Several areas of learning are specified that the presbytery should determine the candidate has competency in (FG 21:4-5).
- How to deal with educational exceptions are described (FG 21:6).
- The licensure ceremony is described (FG 21:7-8).
- How to continue trials for licensure between presbyteries is described (FG 21:9).
- Licentiates normally serve within the bounds of the presbytery that licensed him (FG 21:10).
- Circumstances for recalling a man's license is described (FG 21:11).

REVIEW: Calling a Minister (FG 22)

- A church, presbytery, or general assembly may call a licentiate or minister (FG 22:1).
- Only the presbytery approves a call for presentation to a man, and a man may not be approved for a call without his consent (FG 22:2).
- The procedure a church should follow when it desires to call a minister is outlined (FG 22:3-9).
- The procedure a presbytery should follow when processing a call is outlined (FG 22:10-13).

REVIEW: Ordaining and Installing Ministers (FG 23)

- A calling body expresses its desire for a minister or licentiate to be installed by issuing a call (FG 23:1).
 - A minister is requesting installation when he accepts a call.
 - A licentiate is requesting ordination and installation when he accepts a call.
- The steps a presbytery must follow to ordain and install a licentiate as a pastor are outlined (FG 23:2-10).
- Procedures for installing or ordaining/installing in situations other than licentiates being installed as pastors are described (FG 23:11-21).
- Other circumstances (FG 18-22)

Ordination and Installation to Special Office (FG 20-26)

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- Divesting from Office (FG 26)

Dissolving Ministerial Relationships

Chapter 24

Dissolving Ministerial Relationships (FG 24)

We're going to start collecting some in-house **terminology**:

- “**Ordain**” indicates the *action of a judicatory* that imparts an office to a man.
- “**Install**” indicates the *action of a judicatory* that puts an officer in a particular charge.
- “**Dissolve**” indicates the *action of a presbytery* that ends a minister's charge (we don't use this word with elders/deacons.)

Dissolving Ministerial Relationships (FG 24)

- The process for when a minister wants to resign from his current call to take a similar call within the church (FG 24:1 *cf.* FG 22.12).
 - Minister *receives a call* from another church.
 - He determined *if he wants* to accept it. If he does...
 - He informs the church he currently pastors and asks her to *concur* with him, by vote of the congregation, in *requesting the presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship*. If the congregation concurs, it *informs the presbytery* and...
 - The *minister asks the presbytery to approve* the new call and *to dissolve* his current pastoral relationship.
 - The presbytery may then:
 - grant the request,
 - require the pastor and congregation to give the matter further consideration,
 - require continuance of the relationship.

Dissolving Ministerial Relationships (FG 24)

Instructions for when a congregation wants to be “relieved” of its pastor (FG 24:2).

- A congregation determines and formalizes its desire to no longer have its current pastor by vote at a duly called meeting of the congregation (cf. FG 16).
 - 1/4th of the members may petition the session to call this meeting.
 - The session may call this meeting on its own initiative.
- The minister has opportunity to *resign*.
 - Unless important factors exist that he and/or the session is/are aware of, it is *advisable* for the minister to resign since he has *lost the confidence* of the congregation.
 - If he agrees to resign, the presbytery is asked to *dissolve* the pastoral relationship.

Dissolving Ministerial Relationships (FG 24)

Instruction for when a congregation wants to be “relieved” of its pastor (FG 24:2), **cont.**

- If the minister refuses to resign, the congregation *may yet vote to petition presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship*. Before taking action on the congregation’s request, the presbytery *must consider the pastor’s reason* for not resigning. The presbytery may then determine to:
 - Grant the congregation’s request
 - Urge the congregation to reconsider its actions

Dissolving Ministerial Relationships (FG 24)

Alan Strange: “The FG at this point does not stipulate what happens if the congregation persists in wanting to dissolve the ministerial relationship. Presumably it would come back to the presbytery, with further reasons for wanting the pastoral relationship dissolved, which request the presbytery would presumably ultimately grant, since governors are never imposed in Presbyterianism without the consent of the governed. It is conceivable that if the congregation persisted in what the presbytery regarded as improper reasons for desiring dissolution (they have become his enemy because he told them the truth, as Paul noted), then the presbytery could bring an exhortation along such lines to the congregation. In reality, however, it is impractical for a presbytery to insist that a congregation retain a pastor that they have come to desire to leave.”

Dissolving Ministerial Relationships (FG 24)

- Instructions are specified for when a presbytery, agency of a presbytery, or the general assembly desires to dissolve its call to a minister (FG 24:3).
- Instructions are specified when a minister wants to resign from his current call to take up a different kind of work in the church (FG 24:4).
- Instructions are specified when a minister desires to resign his call to take up a non-ministerial work (FG 24:5).

Electing, Ordaining, and Installing Ruling Elders and Deacons

Chapter 25

Electing, Ordaining, and Installing E's & D's (FG 25)

- Congregations are to elect male members as her elders and deacons (FG 25:1).
- Congregations may practice lifetime or term service of elders and deacons (FG 25:2). Each congregation decides in its bylaws.
- The qualifications, training, nomination, certification, and election of elders and deacons is described (FG 25:3-5).
- The ceremony for ordaining and installing elders and deacons to *life service* is specified (FG XXV:6)
- The ceremony for ordaining and installing elders and deacons to *term service* is specified (FG XXV:7).

Electing, Ordaining, and Installing Rs & Ds (FG 25)

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Electing, Ordaining, and Installing Rs & Ds (FG 25)

- Some OPC congregations have term elder and deacons. This means that men serve a three-year term and then must be reelected for another three years or go inactive, etc.
 - Some argue this more easily allows for occasional breaks.
 - Some argue this allows a way to avoid the unpleasantness of FG 26.
- Reformation Fellowship elects elders and deacons to lifetime service.
 - An officer can take a leave of absence or be granted a sabbatical.
 - Lifetime service provides the most **continuity** for shepherding.
 - *In our view*, lifetime tend to highlight the importance of these offices over against a “it’s now your turn” culture.

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Electing, Ordaining, and Installing Rs & Ds (FG 25)

Here is the process by which a man is called as an elder or deacon.

- To help protect against ordaining and installing officers who are weak or unworthy, no one shall *normally* be eligible for election to office until he has been a communicant member in good standing for *at least* one year (FG 25:3).
 - He must receive appropriate training.
 - He must have served the church in ways that require leadership.
 - Men of piety and ability should be encouraged to prepare themselves.
- Each man must be nominated by a member of the congregation (FG 25:4).
- The session examines nominees in order to certify them for election by the congregation (FG 25:4).
- The man must be elected by the congregation.
- The man is subsequently (ordained and) installed as an elder or deacon.

Divesting from Office

Chapter 26

Divesting from Office (FG 26)

We're going to add to our in-house **terminology**:

- “**Ordain**” indicates the *action of a judicatory* that imparts an office to a man.
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- “**Dissolve**” indicates the *action of a presbytery* that ends a minister’s charge (we don’t use this word with elders/deacons.)
- “**Divest**”/”**depose**” indicates the *action of a judicatory* that removes an office from a man.
- “**Demit**” is when an office-bearer initiates being relieved of his office; the judicatory must still “divest” him of his office.
- “**Retire**” is when, for age or health, a man’s charge ends, though he retains his office. serving in his official position. In the case, he is not “divested” of his office. He can still occasionally perform functions of the office.

Divesting from Office (FG 26)

- A man may be deposed from special office because of an offense in life or doctrine according to the provisions of the Book of Discipline (FG 26:1).
 - It can be ethical: “an offense in the area of conduct and practice which seriously disturbs the peace, purity, and/or unity of the church.” This is the *same standard* for special and general office bearers.
 - It can be doctrinal: “a violation of the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures as that system of doctrine is set forth in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms.” This standard only applies to special office bearers. [The doctrinal standard for general office bearers is holding beliefs that contradict a credible profession of faith.]
- NOTE: Chapter 26 has to do with divesting from *special office* for reasons *OTHER THAN* offenses in doctrine or life.

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THE VISIBLE CHURCH MAKES *MISTAKES* SOMETIMES!!!

Divesting from Office (FG 26)

- A man may be divested of his office *without censure*, for reasons *other than* delinquency in faith or life (FG 26:2).
 - So, 26:1 is *judicial* divestiture/deposition.
 - 26:2 introduces *administrative* divestiture/deposition.
- Cases when a presbytery may contemplate divestiture of a minister are listed (FG 26:3.a).
 - failing to seek a call
 - failing to obtain a call
 - lack of gifts
 - permanent disability
- The exact process toward divestiture is described (FG 3.b-d).
- The process of a minister resigning/demitting his office is specified (FG 3.e).

Divesting from Office (FG 26)

An elder or deacon may be divested if his service is not edifying to the congregation (FG 26:4.a).

- The process to divest an elder/deacon can be initiated by:
 - The session, or...
 - A petition signed by ¼ of the voting members
- The officer is advised/informed at a meeting of the session and given opportunity to defend continuing or demit the office.
 - If the officer demits, the session proceeds to depose him.
 - If the officer defends continuing, the matter goes to the congregation.
- Two-thirds of the congregation must vote in favor of seeking permission of the presbytery to depose him from office; if presbytery grants the request, the session proceeds to depose him.

Divesting from Office (FG 26)

- An elder/deacon may initiate demitting his office by resignation.
 - Resignation doesn't remove his office.
 - The session is to counsel him (encourage or discourage).
- If upon hearing the session's counsel, he still wants to demit his office, he shall be allowed to do so. The session will "depose" him (remove his office).
- When a man is elected to an office subsequent to divestiture from that same office, it shall be handled as initial election/ordination/installation to that office (FG 26:5).
- A man has not been divested of any special office when he retires due to age or disability (FG 26:6 & 7).

Divesting from Office (FG 26)

NOTE: There is nothing in the FG equivalent to FG 24, “Dissolving Ministerial Relations,” for elders/deacons!

- The only time the word “resign” is used in connection with elders/deacons is FG 26.4.b and it culminates in “divestiture”/“deposition.” *Some conclude* that all elder/deacon resignations entail “divestiture.”
- There is a *de facto* practice in some circles of allowing an elder/deacon who “resigns,” for example, because he’ll be relocating, to “resign” without “deposing” him. He is treated as still possessing the office of elder/deacon though not installed, similar to how a non-reelected elder/deacon would be considered where term service is practiced (FG 25:2).

Questions?