



The Good Book

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One of my favorite scenes (and there are many) from the movie “The Jerk” is when Nathan Johnson (played by comedian Steve Martin) gets a copy of the latest telephone book. He thumbs through it quickly and jumps up and down, shouting, “The new phone book’s here! The new phone book’s here!” Replay it [here](#) in case your memory’s a bit fuzzy.

My mom still uses the phone book. She’s 91.

Few books will send me into such a twitter, but have you heard the news?! Maybe I’m a little early on the announcement, but a new BOOK OF ORDER will be published this summer! Or maybe this fall, but soon! The BOO is our much beloved book of how we govern ourselves, worship together, and hold each other accountable according to the foundations of the church. For those of us who spend time thumbing through the Book of Order (one half of the constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)), we cringe that we’re still working from the 2019-20 version. Usually the BOO is amended after every General Assembly, which happens every two year. In 2020, the pandemic interrupted that schedule. Now that we’re back on track, presbyteries are voting on proposed amendments to the Book of Order. As those pass,¹ we get closer to final language. [Insert my squeal of joy as a former Clerk of Session, presbytery executive, and stated clerk.] Presbytery and synod leaders will participate in a session to learn more about the changes in mid-June, and the amendments approved by the presbyteries will become part of the Book of Order on July 9. And, it’s off to the publishers!

We will help every congregation and affected ministry understand the changes. Where new policies are required, we will offer some suggested language that you can tailor to your circumstances. Together, we will test out these new ways of being together, in the hope that it makes us more faithful to our calling as the church.

All these changes, however, have led me to wonder: what if we operated instead by a Book of Disorder? What would we gain and what would we lose if we shook things up a bit? If we discarded one of the principal resources for we view ourselves as Presbyterians, would we better or worse off? For example, we have a whole section about membership. A colleague in another presbytery has shared the utter chaos created when membership records were not kept by a church, especially when it came time to dissolve a pastoral call that had soured. Our polity of ordination (ministers of Word & Sacrament, elders, and deacons) is a core aspect of how we are set apart for a time to be spiritual leaders. What would you change?

It's worth considering how we might shake things up *as we plan for the General Assembly in 2024*. Through overtures to the GA, we keep amending and correcting and tweaking who and how we are together in the BOO. Where would you like a little disorder to make us better? It’s the perfect time to give it some thought.

¹ All proposed amendments have received the required 84 votes in favor, except significantly 22-E (honorably retired?), 22-I (family leave requirement), and 22-U (invitation to Baptism “when appropriate”), which are still awaiting a final vote.