



The Presbyter Manual

Building From the Ground Up

Arkansas Assemblies of God

FOREWORD

Congratulations on being elected to serve as a presbyter for the Arkansas District of the Assemblies of God.

This manual is intended to assist the Executive and Sectional Presbyters of the Arkansas District in fulfilling their ministry as effectively as possible. By combining the information for each into one manual, information is shared, roles are better understood, and a foundation and sense of teamwork is created that benefits all areas of the district.

The Arkansas District of the Assemblies of God is comprised of Assembly of God ministers and churches partnering to glorify God by recognizing and nurturing spiritual leaders to plant, grow and reproduce Assembly of God, biblical, self-governing churches. Further, there shall be a commitment in the district to (1) Praise and Worship, (2) Anointed Preaching of the Word, (3) Missions, and (4) Soul-winning.

“Empowering and Equipping ministers and churches to Evangelize the Lost; making disciples who make disciples, who make disciples.”

The effectiveness of God’s work in Arkansas will be enhanced by the care that characterizes your ministry as a presbyter. This manual is to encourage your ministry of devotion and excellence to the men and women under your leadership.

We welcome you as a member of the District Presbytery and are pleased to have you serve with us. Your counsel and fellowship is very much appreciated.

Thank you to the Kentucky Ministry Network for the initial basis for this manual. It has been re-written to fit the Arkansas Assemblies of God.

THE PRESBYTER

In ancient Greek usage, the word *Presbyteros* meant “older”, and thus easily came to denote leaders, who were usually older men. In ancient Greek and Old Testament texts, “elders” (*Presbyterio*) were normally lay political leaders. After the exile, lay synagogue council members came to be called *presbyteroi*, and the term began also to be applied to professional religious leaders as members of the Sanhedrin.

The Early Church applied this familiar language to its ministers, but not apparently, to its laypersons (who could be *diakonoi*, “deacons”). The *presbyteroi*, “elders”, were appointed to serve both the spiritual and business affairs of the church. They were shepherds and overseers as Paul makes clear in this address to the Ephesian elders (*presbyterio*). “*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (episkopoi, “bishops” or “overseers”), to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*” Acts 20:28.

The elders in a large church or city seemed to have functioned together frequently as a body and were then called the *presbyterion*. This term is seen in Timothy’s ordination: “*Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders (presbyterion) laid their hands on you.*” 1 Timothy 4:14

Presbyteros has been brought into modern use as in the name of the Presbyterian Church, which is governed representatively by elders (in Presbyterianism, both laypersons and clergy). Early leaders in the Assemblies of God were concerned to use biblical language, e.g. “assembly” to translate the Greek *ecclesia* (church), which had its roots in the assembly of the Greek city-state. They rightly restricted “presbyter” to professional clergy, but did give it a more restricted usage in applying the term to elected District and General Council officers. While recognizing that all ministers are elders, the Assemblies of God calls only its elected leaders “presbyters” and its councils of leaders “presbyteries.” Such modern usage is certainly appropriate so long as it is recognized that no attempt is being made to exactly reproduce the full range of New Testament usage.

To Timothy, who is unquestionably a presbyter involved in the appointment of presbyters (and bishops), Paul wrote: “*...set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity*” 1 Timothy 4:12b. Paul expected that his younger protégé’s life would be a living representation of what a Christian is. One who serves as a presbyter in the Assemblies of God should be similarly committed to being a living example of what it means to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The presbyter is given in Scripture a strong leadership role. To the Ephesian *presbyteroi* (elders) Paul said: “*...the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (episkopoi) of the flock*” Acts 20:28. The model of the overseer is that of the self-sacrificing shepherd, for Paul adds, “*be shepherds of the church of God...*” One can hardly forget the words of Jesus, “*I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep*” John 10:11. Jesus uses another metaphor in Mark 10:45 when He taught that His disciples were not to “lord it over” His followers, but if they would become great, they were to become servants. “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” Mark 10:42, 45.

THE MINISTRY OF THE PRESBYTER

Duties of Office.

Art. IV, Section 5. Executive Presbyters The executive presbyter is one chosen from the district at large without any thought to representation of any specific area. He serves according to the guidelines in the bylaws and by call and oversight of the district superintendent. His function is fulfilled within the confines of the Executive Presbytery meeting. He has no leadership status beyond this without assignment from the District Superintendent or the Executive Presbytery.

Art. IV. Section 6. Executive Presbytery

A. The executive presbytery shall constitute the board of directors of the corporation with the superintendent serving as chairman of the board. The business and ministry of the Arkansas District Council shall be managed by the board of directors. It shall be authorized to act for the fellowship in all matters that affect its interest while the district council is not in session and shall make report to the district council of its activities in behalf of the fellowship as may be directed. It shall provide for its own meetings.

B. The district superintendent, assistant superintendent, and secretary shall constitute the executive committee of the executive presbytery and shall act as trustees of the corporation. They shall sign all legal documents as directed by the executive presbytery. The executive committee shall act as a standing editing committee for the minutes.

C. Relations

1. In all matters relating to an individual section, the executive presbytery shall invite the sectional presbyter of that section to be present. In matters involving ministerial discipline, the sectional presbyter in whose section the offense was committed shall be invited to the meeting in which this matter is discussed.

2. The executive presbytery shall authorize a letter of information be sent to each sectional presbyter regarding the status of ministers who have been disciplined and also information pertaining to major decisions which affect the entire district.

D. The executive presbytery shall act as a standing credentials committee.

E. All funds sent to the district office are to be used as designated by the executive presbytery, according to provisions in the bylaws.

F. The executive presbytery shall arrange for date and location where district meetings are to be held.

G. All decisions of the executive presbytery shall be final unless reversed by a decision of the district council.

H. The removal of directors shall be administered under the procedures set forth in Article XII. Discipline, to the exclusion of all other removal procedures.

I. Vacancies on the board of directors shall be filled pursuant to the procedures set forth in Art. III. Nominations and Elections.

Art. IV, Sec. 7. District Presbytery

A. The executive presbytery and the sectional presbytery shall be the district presbytery.

B. The district presbytery shall function in an advisory and consultatory capacity. The action of this board shall be subject to ratification by the executive presbytery in session, except in cases provided for by Article XVII, Finance, Section 1.E.

C. Meetings of the district presbytery shall be called by the superintendent as the need may arise.

Art. IV, Section 8. Sectional Presbyters

A. The sectional presbyter is a district presbyter chosen from the section within which he resides. He is to work in consultation with the district superintendent as a representative of the district to the section, and as a representative of the section to the district. His leadership is confined to the churches and ministers within the particular section which has chosen him as their overseer. He shall meet with the executive presbytery as needs arise. In matters of interest and concern to his particular section, he is a member of the district presbytery with the right to vote on those matters. As the overseer and supervisor of all ministers and churches within his section, he must give special attention to the district affiliated churches in the section. He shall keep an up-to-date record of ministers and churches and report to the district office as needed and requested. He shall interview and be part of the process for granting credentials to ministerial applicants from his section.

B. The sectional presbyter shall take the initiative in settling all difficulties which may arise in his particular section. He shall take the initiative in the investigation of any charge submitted in his respective section against any minister. An exception is made for moral charges which are the responsibility of the superintendent.

C. The sectional presbyter shall be associated with each of the ministries that come out of the district office in the promotion of the ministry. Any sectional ministry leaders are to be appointed by district ministry leaders in consultation with the sectional presbyter and district superintendent under guidelines developed by the executive and sectional presbytery.

D. He shall serve as the sectional missions director.

Art. IV, Section 4. General Presbyters

The district shall be represented in the general council activities by three General Presbyters: the district superintendent and assistant superintendent (unless said person is not a pastor within the Arkansas District), and the district secretary. In the event the assistant superintendent is not a resident pastor, an individual meeting the qualifications shall be elected in the manner prescribed by Bylaw Article III, Section 3, Paragraph E, Sub-paragraph 1.

PRESBYTER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE DISTRICT:

The Presbyter – Executive or Sectional – is representing the Arkansas Assemblies of God in both ecclesiastical and business matters. Care should be given to avoid representations, promises, or creating expectations which cannot (or should not) be fulfilled. All due effort should be made to provide for complete and thorough communication to the district superintendent concerning the status of the work and specific items that are being handled.

HONORARY PRESBYTERS:

The District Council in session may select Honorary Presbyters in accordance with bylaw Art. III, Secs. 7 and 8. Honorary Presbyters will be afforded the respect and honor that their years of service merit and the Council has bestowed upon them. Service of the Honorary Presbyters shall be determined by specific declaration of the vote at District Council regarding their election, and by the request and designation of the district superintendent.

EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER MINISTRY DESCRIPTION

The executive presbyter is to attend the Executive and District Presbytery meetings held every other month (February, April, June, August, October, and December) and other meetings as requested by the district superintendent.

TERM OF OFFICE:

The term of office for the Executive Presbyter shall be for four years, or the term set at election when fulfilling an unexpired term. The executive presbyter may serve two terms in succession, but then must rotate off the board for a period of one year before eligible for election again.

CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE:

The credentials committee shall consist of the executive presbytery. A special credentials committee shall be appointed to function whenever meetings are scheduled to examine credential applicants. They shall consider applications for ministerial recognition and credential promotions. This committee shall be amenable to the entire executive presbytery whose decision will be final. Routine renewals, reinstatement of disciplined, delinquent or lapsed ministers shall be the responsibility of the executive presbytery.

DISTRICT MEETINGS AND EVENTS:

When possible, the executive presbyter should be faithful to attend district meetings and events, including, but not limited to Presbyter/Missionary Retreat, Sectional and District Councils, Ministers Retreat, and department events.

EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER EXPENSES AND STIPENDS:

Expenses should be submitted using the district's expense form. Travel to and from regular board meetings, official committee meetings, and special called meetings, as well as meal expenses, hotel expenses and specific expenses that may be incurred in carrying out duties and assignments should be listed on the form and original receipts attached for reimbursement. Forms should be sent monthly to the district office.

Executive presbyters receive a stipend for each board meeting. These are processed automatically for those in attendance, and the presbyter is not required to request the stipend.

SECTIONAL PRESBYTER MINISTRY DESCRIPTION

The sectional presbyter is to attend the District Board meetings held in February, June, and October, and other meetings as requested by the district superintendent.

TERM OF OFFICE:

The sectional presbyter is elected by the ministers and delegates in their respective sections for terms of two years. All sectional presbyters are elected in even-numbered years at the Sectional Council meeting for their respective section.

SECTIONAL TEAM:

The sectional presbyter, in cooperation and consultation with the district superintendent, shall select the assistant presbyter and the secretary/treasurer. The assistant presbyter and the secretary/treasurer are not required to be pastors, or to hold a specific credential. These appointments are reviewed at the time of a new presbyter election, or as needed.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MINISTERIAL MISCONDUCT:

The sectional presbyter is to work toward resolution of conflicts concerning ministers and/or churches within their respective section. The sectional presbyter should initiate investigation and gather necessary information in addition to contacting the superintendent. Information should be e-mailed or faxed to the superintendent, following an initial phone call. The superintendent will evaluate and determine methods of resolution. The sectional presbyter is to keep him informed of the progress of any investigation, as well as the settlement of the conflict.

In all instances of moral failure on the part of a minister, or in any situation where a minister is involved in a lawsuit, or is arrested, the sectional presbyter shall immediately contact the superintendent, who will initiate investigation.

PASTORAL CARE:

A vital part of the work of the district is to provide pastoral care to ministers. The sectional presbyter is often the first to learn of a minister's need, and should contact the district upon learning of any pastoral care issue, including but not limited to illness of a minister, or a minister's family; hospitalization of minister or family member; death of a minister, minister's spouse or widow, or close family member; births within a minister's family; financial or personal crises. Information should include specifics as much as possible.

With relevant and complete information, the superintendent and members of the district team are able to respond quickly and appropriately in situations where pastors care is needed.

SECTIONAL MEETINGS:

It is the discretion of the sectional presbyter to determine the frequency of sectional meetings, as well as the type of meeting (breakfast or lunch meetings; traditional evening services, etc.)

DISTRICT AFFILIATED CHURCHES:

One of the most important functions of the sectional presbyter is to deal with the district affiliated churches (DAC) within the section. There will be phone calls, emails, and a variety of paperwork associated with these churches each year.

Sectional presbyters should establish general files for each DAC within their section, and include copies of notes from phone conversations, emails, letters to and from the church/pastor, etc. These should be kept indefinitely, and passed on to the next sectional presbyter. Copies of deeds, insurance, incorporation papers, or other official documents should be sent to the district office as well.

The monthly district affiliated church forms should be filed for each church after being reviewed by the sectional presbyter. These can be discarded after two years, as the district keeps these files digitally.

DISTRICT AFFILIATED CHURCH PASTORAL APPOINTMENTS:

The sectional presbyter shall appoint the DAC pastor in consultation with the district superintendent. The appointment shall initially be for a two-year period, with annual review. A report of appointments should be sent to the superintendent as they occur, and re-appointment information can be included in the minutes of the DAC board meetings.

DISTRICT AFFILIATED CHURCH BOARD MEETINGS:

The church pastor, sectional presbyter, and district superintendent make up the official board of the district affiliated church. To comply with non-profit laws, the church is to have a board meeting at least one time per year. These meetings will be arranged between the district superintendent, and the sectional presbyter. These meetings are not optional. In the event the sectional presbyter is also the pastor of a district affiliated church, the district secretary will serve as a member of the board.

At these meetings, items under discussion should include the pastor's salary and benefits, needs of the church concerning the building and grounds, financial matters, incorporation, background checks for volunteers, and other items that may need to be addressed. The district superintendent may craft the agenda for the meeting to expand on ministry, mentoring, or training topics as he sees the need.

DISTRICT AFFILIATED PHASE-IN:

The sectional presbyter shall evaluate the district affiliated churches in the section on an on-going basis. When a church has sufficiently matured and qualifies for phase-in, the sectional presbyter may recommend to the district superintendent that the church begin a phase-in process.

The sectional presbyter shall discuss the process with the pastor and other church leadership, and provide guidelines for the church during the process. The sectional presbyter shall also hold a phase-in service for the church, proving the guidelines and timelines for phase-in. At the end of the phase-in period, a set-in-order service will be held at the church, which includes the selection of a deacon board and church secretary, as well as the election of the pastor.

The phase-in process usually lasts for one year. If at any time during the year issues arise, the phase-in process may be stopped, and the church would revert to a district affiliated church until such time that the process may again be started, or reinstated.

RELATED DOCUMENTS:

Documents are listed in the table of contents of this manual that will assist the sectional presbyter in the procedures regarding DAC churches.

PASTORAL TRANSITION:

The sectional presbyter shall oversee the pastoral search for a DAC church in the event of a pastoral opening. They may also assist non-DAC churches, if asked, to assist during pastoral transition.

DISTRICT MEETINGS AND EVENTS:

When possible, the sectional presbyter should be faithful to attend district meetings and events, including, but not limited to Presbyter/Missionary Retreat, Sectional and District Councils, Ministers Retreat, and department events. The presbyter should also both promote events in their section and encourage ministers to attend.

SECTIONAL PRESBYTER EXPENSES/REIMBURSEMENT:

Expense reports with substantiating records, receipts (originals) and statements must be filed with the district bookkeeping department within 30 days of the end of each quarter in order to receive reimbursement of the expenses. Any excess amounts paid above actual expenses will be reported as income on form 1099.

Reimbursements are available for the following:

1. Mileage to and from the district office for board meetings, district committee meetings, to and from fellowship meetings for the presbyter's section, to and from churches for sectional business including mortgage burnings, homecomings and other services where the presbyter is present because of the office he holds.
2. Meals while attending to sectional or district business.
3. Telephone calls pertaining to sectional or district business.
4. Postage for sectional and district correspondence.
5. Paper, copies, and supplies directly related to presbyter business.
6. Lodging while attending a District Board meeting that requires an overnight stay.

The Secretary/Treasurer shall inform all new presbyters of the requirements for reimbursement and provide them with the proper expense report forms. He also shall inform them of the quarterly financial report that is required of presbyters.

Letterhead and envelopes will be provided through the Secretary Treasurer's office.

