

Flourish

Rethinking Session Communication

Communicating maximally, not minimally, for the sake of trust



PCA General Assembly • Tuesday, June 23 • Matt
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Where we are going

A Session communicates best when it has first discerned spiritually, then shepherds the congregation along the way.

The presenting problem

- Congregations often say: "Our Session does not communicate."
- Sessions often hear: "We do not trust your decisions."
- The result is defensiveness, less communication, and more distrust.

The unhelpful cycle

Criticism → defensiveness → less communication → deeper distrust

The cycle usually feels rational to everyone inside it.

A sympathetic word to Sessions

- Most elders are earnest men doing the best they know how.
- Most ruling elders are carrying this as part-time volunteers.
- Sessions are often trying to preserve reputations, confidentiality, and peace.

Why this gets harder in smaller churches

Congregational instincts

- Everyone knows everyone.
- Informal networks are powerful.
- People expect access to the “real story.”
- Democracy can feel more natural than presbyterianism.

Session pressures

- Confidentiality matters.
- Process is often messy.
- Leaders are tired of the topic first.
- Silence can feel safer than risk.

The problem is not only “them”

Two Session-side factors commonly intensify the communication problem.

Two factors inside the Session

1. Decision-making

- Not merely “What did we decide?”
- How did we discern?
- Was this spiritual conversation or managed conflict?
- Can we stand behind the process?

2. Communication

- How often do we speak?
- How do we speak?
- Do we bring people along?
- Do we only pronounce conclusions?

The biblical target for decision-making

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It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.

Acts 15:28

When discernment becomes faux-versation

- The meeting is tense, but no one says the real thing plainly.
- One strong personality holds the room hostage.
- A “decision” is really a concession or power play.
- Men leave unconvinced, then communicate without conviction.

A defensible Session process

- Stop and name the real question.
- Search Scripture for principal guidance.
- Hear each elder as a member of one body.
- Pray before, during, and after discernment.
- Join together heartily around a path.

Frequency matters

Infrequent communication makes ordinary announcements feel like ambushes.

A marriage does not stay healthy on one forgotten mention. Neither does congregational trust.

“We don’t have anything to say”

- You are talking about things all the time.
- The congregation does not need every detail.
- But it can be invited to pray for what you are discerning.
- Silence often teaches people to supply their own narrative.

Manner matters

Do not merely announce the destination. Take people on the journey.

Before / during / after hard communication

Before

- Name the issue early enough.
- Explain why it matters.
- Ask for prayer before conclusion.
- Prepare channels for questions.

During and after

- Explain the path, not just the decision.
- Acknowledge costs and concerns.
- Say what remains confidential.
- Give the next update date.

#1 - A monthly communication commitment

- Set a monthly rhythm with the congregation.
- Make good on it even when there is no major announcement.
- Use categories: what we are thankful for, what we are discerning, what needs prayer, what comes next.
- Over time, rhythm becomes trust.

#2 - Finish Session meetings better - 2nd to last agenda item

- "What should we communicate?"
- "What can we communicate?"
- "By whom?"
- "By when?"

#3 - When you cannot say everything

- Say what has been decided.
- Say what remains in process.
- Say what you cannot discuss and why.
- Say how the Session is praying and working.
- Say when the congregation will hear again.

#4 - One more tip for those concerned to maintain reputations

- Decide to maintain reputations - this is important to Jesus
- But... remember your MAIN responsibility is to this flock
- Your goal is to “settle the sheep”
- Seek to achieve “cognitive rest”
- A timeline can be your best friend

The closing claim

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Communication is not public relations. It is shepherding.

For teaching elders and ruling elders serving together

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