

Rivermont Evangelical Presbyterian Church*

Elders and Deacons

In examining the Biblical texts and constitutional references for the offices of elder and deacon, it seems to us that what is being required of all officers is a combination of saintly character, solid commitments, and significant competence.

I. SAINTLY CHARACTER

Perhaps we can summarize the Bible's teaching in this area by speaking of four primary traits:

A. Godliness

1. Temperate, self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined (Titus 1: 7, 8) [including sexual purity, moderation and maturity with alcohol, honesty]
2. Sincere (1 Timothy 3:8)
3. Not pursuing dishonest gain (1 Timothy 3: 8; Titus 1:7), not a love of money (1 Timothy 3:3); not greedy for money (1 Peter 5:2)
4. An example to the flock (1 Peter 5:3)
5. Full of the Spirit (Acts 6: 3, 5)

B. Desire to Serve (1 Timothy 3: 1; 1 Peter 5: 2) in humility (Acts 6:2)

C. Love for Others - hospitable, gentle, patient, not quarrelsome (1 Timothy 3: 2, 3; Titus 1: 7,8)

D. Good Reputation above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2) with good reputation among outsiders (1 Tim. 3: 7)

II. SOLID COMMITMENTS

The ordination vows required by our constitution nicely comprehend the expected commitments of the officer:

A. To Jesus Christ as Lord

Vow 1: Do you reaffirm your faith in Jesus Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior?

- Has no known sin in his life in which he/she is repetitively and unrepentantly engaged?
- Prepared to share his/her testimony of faith in Christ with others?

B. To the Bible as the Word of God

Vow 2: Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the supreme and final authority in all matters on which it speaks?

- Obviously submits to the Scriptures in belief and lifestyle?
- Regularly reads and studies the Bible?

C. To Reformed Theology

Vow 3: Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?

Vow 4: Do you promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the essentials of the faith you will, on your own initiative, make known to your church Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?

Vow 5: Do you affirm and adopt the Essentials of Our Faith without exception?

- Thinks carefully and theologically?
- Committed to distinctives of evangelical and reformed faith?

D. To Presbyterian Polity and Proper Authority

Vow 6: Do you subscribe to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church?

Vow 7: Do you promise subjection to your fellow Presbyters in the Lord?

- Can work well with others under a common structure for a common goal?
- Thinks independently and also works well with others for common solution. Known for brotherly/sisterly affection and mutual trust in working relationships?

E. To the Glory of God

Vow 8: *Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to accept the office of (Ruling Elder; Deacon) from love of God and sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son?*

Vow 9: *Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in promoting the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise to you on that account?*

- Obviously motivated by love of God?
- Courageously stands for God regardless of cost to self?
- Seeks to lead un-churched people to Christ and to Church?

F. To the Office of Elder or Deacon

Vow 10: *Will you seek to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as (Ruling Elder; Deacon) whether personal or relative, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before this congregation of which God will make you an officer?*

- Sets example that others should follow?
- Will participate fully in classes, mentoring, and assignments related to preparation for office?
- Will attend 8 out of 11 stated Session or Diaconate meetings per year (3rd Tuesday)?
- Will attend Officers' Retreat(s) each year?
- Regularly takes initiative to accomplish ministry assigned to him/her?
- Will give priority to ministry as officer above all other institutional ministries?

G. To the Church

Vow 11: *Are you now willing to take responsibility in the life of this congregation as a (Ruling Elder; Deacon), and will you seek to discharge your duties, relying upon the grace of God, in such a way that the entire church of Jesus Christ will be blessed?*

- Has no known un-reconciled relationship in REPC?
- Faithfully attends Sunday worship?
- Faithfully tithes?
- Faithfully participates in the life of the congregation (Sunday School, Neighborhood Care Groups, etc.)?
- Regularly encourages others to grow in their faith?

III. SIGNIFICANT COMPETENCE

The Bible teaches that there are some gifts and abilities that officers should have if they are properly equipped for service.

A. The Bible

A deacon should know his/her Bible well and should believe it deeply (I Timothy 3: 9). The elder should know his Bible, and be growing in his knowledge, but should also be able to teach it to others (Titus 1: 9-11) and to pray for the flock in public and in private (Acts 6:4).

B. The Family

An officer may be either single or married. The best way to test a person's ability to lead in the Church is to observe his/her management in the home (I Timothy 3:11). The children of an officer must be believers in Christ who are (as minors) obedient to their parents. (I Timothy 3:4, 5, 12; Titus 1: 6) The spouse of an officer must be a believer who is godly, loving, and supportive of the officer's ministry.

C. The Church

The candidates must be well tested (I Timothy 3: 6, 10).

Our session normally recommends that a person be a member of the church for at least three years before nomination as an officer so that we have an adequate opportunity to observe him/her.

The candidates must have gift of leadership; that is, people in our congregation are already gladly following them and benefiting from their ministries.

*Adapted from Second Presbyterian Church (EPC), Memphis, Tennessee

“Officers of the Church”

In the Presbyterian Church, we believe that “As King and Head of His Church, the Lord Jesus has directed the establishment of church government, separate from civil authority, which is to be administered by officers of the church” (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 31, paragraph 1). These offices, appointed by God, are given in the Bible as minister (pastor or teaching elder), ruling elder, and deacon. The ministers and the ruling elders share the office of elder and serve together on the session, which is the ruling body of the local church.

In the Old Testament, Moses told the people to choose from each of their tribes those who were to rule over them (see Deuteronomy 1:13-15). This principle of Divine leadership through democratic election continues today in our church: “The particular church has the right to elect its own officers” (Book of Government 6-2).

FROM THE BIBLE

Acts 6:1-4 Seven Chosen to Serve

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

1 Timothy 3:1-13 Qualifications for Overseers

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Qualifications for Deacons

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Titus 1:6-9 Qualifications for Elders

If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

1 Peter 5:1-4 Shepherd the Flock of God

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

FROM THE BOOK OF ORDER (Government, Chapter 9, Officers of the Church)**9-1 Offices**

The Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, has given three offices to the Church. These are: Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, and Deacons. In higher courts, Teaching and Ruling Elders are also known as Presbyters or Commissioners and share in the governing of the Church. These offices are not indications of special pre-eminence by those who hold them, but rather indicate a call to service, to ministry, to special discipleship and the evidencing of the fruit of the Spirit in every part of life.

9-3 Life and character of officers

According to Scripture, those who bear office in the Church should exhibit certain characteristics of life. This includes being above reproach, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Persons who fill this office should exhibit a lifestyle that is an example to all, both in and outside the Church. A congregation preparing to elect persons to this holy office should carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to the Ruling Elder and be very prayerful in selecting persons to this office. ^[1]_[SEP]

As the law of love places certain duties upon each Christian, Church Officers are especially bound by their calling to fulfill them and to be an example to all. ^[1]_[SEP]

9-4 Qualifications of officers

Those that fill these offices should be mature in the faith, should be people of wisdom and discretion, and should have adequate training to equip them for their calling. Elders, especially those called to the office of Teaching Elder, should have an aptitude for teaching.

A local church should prayerfully search the Scriptures and choose for officers those who are best qualified. ^[1]_[SEP]

9-9 The life of the Ruling Elder:

According to Scripture, those who bear the office of Ruling Elder should be mature believers, led by the Holy Spirit, who exhibit a manner of life that conforms to the biblical description of an officer in Christ's Church. ^[1]_[SEP]

9-10 The Ruling Elder and the Responsibility of Order ^[1]_[SEP]

The authority to govern is exercised jointly by church courts in ascending gradation. Each Ruling Elder, by virtue of ordination, individually exercises the responsibility of order.

Ruling Elders should study and learn the Word. They should become equipped to teach the Word, lead worship and prayer, and may be invited or commissioned to supply the ministry of the Word where none is available.

Ruling Elders, as Undershepherds, should visit the sick, the bereaved, the lonely, the aged, the shut-in, and all those who have a pastoral need. In cases where there is a special need, the Ruling Elder shall be careful to inform the Pastor. ^[1]_[SEP]

Ruling Elders have a special responsibility to see to the development of the children of the congregation, to inquire after the inactive members, to encourage new members in spiritual development, and to otherwise show care for those whom they serve.

Ruling Elders should be attentive to themselves and church members, guarding against dangers to the faith and to dangers to the moral life of believers. They are also responsible to warn, admonish, and reclaim those who stray. Where it is deemed necessary, such situations should be brought to the attention of the Session for appropriate action in accordance with the *Book of Discipline*.

9-12 The office of Deacon

The office of Deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, concern for needs, and of serving others. Therefore, the first duty of the Deacon is sympathy and service. Historically, to this office has been given the duty of being the Church's instrument for the ministry of compassion.

9-13 The life of the Deacon

According to Scripture, those who bear the office of Deacon should be mature believers, led by the Holy Spirit, who exhibit a manner of life that conforms to the biblical description of an officer in Christ's Church.