

PATHWAY COMMUNITY CHURCH

ELDERS
ROLE &
RESPONSIBILITIES

WHAT IS AN ELDER? A Biblical Definition

Church Elders are spiritual overseers. The Greek word, in both noun and verb forms, combines the word for *upon* with the word for *look* or *watch*. It is the noun (and verb) from which our English word “bishops” is derived.

Philippians 1:1

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

There in brief is the properly structured local church - the saints (all the believers), among whom are the bishops (overseers, elders, pastors) and deacons. Do you see it? Plural “bishops” (the elders in their oversight roles), plus deacons.

SPECIFIC ELDER RESPONSIBILITIES

Provide for Spiritual Oversight

Elders are also to work hard at preaching and teaching. Preaching is the proclamation of the Word to unbelievers for the purpose of salvation and to believers, for the purpose of maturity.

Titus 1:9

⁹ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Simply stated, elders determine what is doctrinally correct, and then they proclaim and defend that body of truth. Further spiritual oversight responsibilities include:

- Worship, sound biblical teaching, and educational life of the congregation
- Regular celebration of the Lord’s Supper and administration of Baptism
- Discipleship of the congregation and new believers, and nurturing of the common life of the congregation.
- Leadership for the congregation in ministries of evangelism, compassion, and justice
- Developing and nurturing relationships with other congregations

Shepherd the Flock

Another function that is clearly related to the elder’s teaching ministry:

Acts 20:28

²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.

Proverbs 27:23

²³ Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds.

The elder is to shepherd the flock. The immediate context of this verse makes it clear that the shepherding is feeding (encouraging others with right teaching) and guarding and protecting (showing those who oppose it where they are wrong).

1. Provision of pastoral care of members, including directing them for assistance or problem resolution.
2. Providing praying in all areas of church life, including prayer for the sick.

James 5:14-15

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

3. Open communication and outreach to the congregation, staff, and community.
4. Participating in biblically based conflict resolution as outlined in Matthew 18, and in other discipline and restoration acts specified in the Pathway Community Church Discipline Process.
5. Confronting false teaching, and bearing witness against error in doctrine and practice/behavior.
6. Serving in judicial matters related to the congregation as specified in the PCC Biblical Church Discipline Process.

Engage in Discernment, Planning, and Strategy

1 Timothy 5:17

¹⁷ The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

Two specific functions are specified in this verse. First, elders are to rule, preferably well. This function speaks of the leadership and decision-making responsibilities of the Elder. Secondly, they are to teach as stated earlier in this document.

1. Collaborating with the lead pastor in discerning PCC's mission and strategy, setting organizational goals, making key decisions and strategic choices.
2. Engaging in regular dialogue with the congregation for advice, feedback, and communication, including meeting with site ministry teams and staff, inviting feedback, information meetings, and other useful forums.

3. Contributing to periodic evaluations of the Elder Board itself and its effectiveness, and participating in ongoing learning to keep up to date on developments or best practices that further the church's mission.
4. Assisting in identifying and recruiting elders, in alignment with the PCC Elder Process, who can make significant contributions to the work of the Elder Board and the church.

Oversee and Monitor Church Management

1 Timothy 3:4-5

⁴ He must manage his own family well, with children who respect and obey him. ⁵ For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?

In other words, one function that the Elder is expected to perform is to take care of the church, to manage the church.

1 Peter 5:1-2

¹To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ²Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them -- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;

The elder is to be diligent to watch, to look upon, the flock and to know its condition.

Proverbs 27:23

²³ Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds.

1. Regularly review progress and hold staff and leadership accountable for church impact and execution of its mission, vision, and goals, and church ministry plans and outcomes, through dialogue and reports, metrics, and other measures.
2. Approving an annual budget and audit report, material business decisions, and monitoring the financial status of the church on a regular basis.
3. Staying apprised of, and meeting, all legal and fiduciary responsibilities. Preparing for, and participating actively in, the Elder Board and committee meetings.
4. Ensuring an accurate and updated record of church members and baptisms.
5. Counseling and providing spiritual and practical support to the Lead Pastor in his role as head of staff. Encouraging and praying for the Lead Pastor, staff, and volunteers.
6. Providing an annual and other performance evaluations of the pastors of the church.
7. Serving on, and leading, committees or task forces; taking on special assignments.
8. Discerning the gifts and expertise from within the congregation and the community in helping PCC fulfill its mission.

9. Serving as an “ambassador” for PCC to the community, church at large, and the world.

Keep Watch over himself and his own walk with God

Acts 20:28

²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

It is easy for those serving in ministry to neglect the care of self. Elders continually need to keep their own relationship with the Lord alive and vital. Otherwise, they are not well equipped to help others follow the Lord.

Be Watchful

Watchful for problems:

Acts 20:29-31

²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

This is a never-ending responsibility for pastors and elders. The parable of the weeds among the wheat illustrates this (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). One of the devil’s continuing strategies is to sow his followers among the people of God. Watchful elders must identify such people and defend the flock against their harmful influence.

Elders must watch for people infiltrating the church with immoral intentions, destructive doctrines, divisive words, and a host of other evil influences.

Watchful for souls:

Hebrews 13:17

¹⁷ Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

God calls us His sheep, His flock. That is not, as some have suggested, a “put-down”. By contrast, it speaks of the loving care of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and of His desire that His flock be well taken care of. Loving watchfulness for souls is a major responsibility that Jesus has assigned to every believer and especially the elders in the church.

An Elder must work hard at his duties

1 Timothy 3:1

¹ Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.

The word “task” here comes from a Greek noun whose verb form means to work, to toil.

Ephesians 4:11-13

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The equipping of the people for works of service is a work in itself. It is a work with the intention of being built up into unity and maturity of faith in Jesus. The saving and nurturing of souls is serious business. No man should “set his heart on being an overseer” unless he is committed to loving the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and serving the church as himself. (Matthew 22:37-40)

SUMMARY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH ELDER’S MINISTRY

- Provide spiritual oversight
- Shepherd the flock
- Engage in Discernment, Planning and Strategy
- Oversee and Monitor Church Management
- Keep Watch over himself and his own walk with God as well as the church
- Must work hard at his duties

REMOVAL OF ELDRSHIP

An Elder’s position is ongoing until one of the following three things happen.

1. Death
2. The Elder requests to stand down from the role of Elder. This can be for any reason but may include poor health, family matters (or other responsibilities) requiring more attention, personal struggles, etc.
3. The Elder no longer meets the biblical requirements of an Elder as shown above and their position is terminated either temporarily or permanently (depending on the situation)
4. Their term has expired

RESPONSIBILITY OF CONGREGATION TO ELDERS

Members Honor Their Elders

Because God has ordained that godly men lead the church spiritually, it is also assumed that the members of the congregation honor them for that task. Notice Paul's clear words concerning this duty of the congregation:

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

¹² We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

1 Timothy 5:17-18

¹⁷ The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

Members Seek Guidance From The Elders

Because elders equip, it is natural then that the members of the church seek spiritual guidance from their elders.

Hebrews 13:7

⁷ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

One interesting passage is James 5:14 on this matter:

James 5:14-15

¹⁴ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

¹⁵ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

Much can be said about this section of scripture but suffice it to say that a strong argument can be made that the author is primarily concerned with spiritual sickness, but not excluding physical sickness. If so, what we have is instructions for those in the congregation to take the initiative when they are spiritually down, to seek the elders for encouragement, and to be uplifted by prayer.

Members Keep Elders Accountable

One of the fears folks may have in joining a church is that they are called to trust and follow the leadership of individuals that may have the potential of falling short in their calling. Are church

members simply to obey elders who are living inconsistent with their “above reproach” position? We understand this fear. We hear on the news frequently about moral failures made by church leaders, and it concerns us that we may experience similar outcomes.

But that should not deter anyone from being obedient and serving in the local church, or from following the command to submit to one’s leaders. However, God in his wisdom has instructed us that if an elder fails to lead like he ought then the church is required to confront that elder.

1 Timothy 5:19-21

¹⁹ Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰

As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. ²¹ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

Therefore, while members in the congregation are called to submit to the elders in the church, it does not excuse elders from living inconsistently with the qualifications set out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. In such cases the congregation has an obligation, according to the “PCC Biblical Church Discipline Process” to lovingly confront the Elder and encourage him to repent of his habitual sin.

Members Follow

If a church has healthy spiritual leaders, it follows that the members of the congregation will joyfully follow their leadership.

Hebrews 13:7

⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

TERMS/COMMITMENTS

Terms

- Elder terms shall be 3 years each
- An Elder may serve for 2 terms consecutively
- An Elder may be eligible for re-appointment after minimum 1 year rest
- Roles within the Elder Board to be determined by the Elder Board

Time Commitments

- 12 Elder Board Meetings per year
- Sub Committee Meetings and events as needed
- Church event participation, Town Halls, Member Meetings, Special Events
- Serving the congregation, as mentioned above
- Meeting with other leaders, staff and congregation
- Up to 10 hours per week