

ELDERS

QUALIFICATIONS, DUTIES, & ORDINATION

The calling to the office of Elder is a “fine work” (I Timothy 3:1). The terms Elder (presbyters) and Overseer (episkopos) are used interchangeably in the New Testament. The first term seems to emphasize the dignity and maturity of the office, while the second emphasizes the duty to nurture and feed the flock of God. The Elders of the New Testament were the pastors (Eph. 4:11), bishops (Acts 20:28), leaders and rulers (Heb. 13:7, I Thess. 5:12) of the flock. While some of the duties of the Elder are described in the New Testament, much more is written directly about the qualifications for those being considered for the office. As with much of Christian life, the emphasis is on who we are to be since that will determine what we do.

QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER (as found in I Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9)

- Above reproach - nothing sinful in his life for which to accuse him
- Husband of one wife - totally devoted to his wife (if married) and not flirtatious or polygamous
- Temperate - sober in judgement
- Prudent - discreet, sound-minded
- Respectable - well balanced, not abrasive
- Hospitable - loves and hosts strangers
- Able to teach - discerns and communicates sound doctrine
- Not addicted to wine - would apply equally to other substances, drugs, etc...
- Not pugnacious - not given to physical violence
- Gentle - reasonable and under control
- Uncontentious - avoids fighting
- No lover of money - not greedy or irresponsible concerning money
- Managing his own household - attends to own family in such a way that they are believers and orderly
- Not a new convert - the emphasis is on spiritual maturity not just years since conversion
- Good reputation with unbelievers - respected in the community at large

The practical responsibilities of Elders can be grouped into two areas of service. The first of these is Ministry, which includes insuring that the church continues to operate in accordance with the core values, beliefs and mission to which we have committed. This will include modeling and teaching others to translate these values into the behavior of our lives. Biblically these are called out as shepherding the flock (Acts 20:28), teaching (I Tim. 3:2), and guarding against error (Titus 1:9). The second area of service is Stewardship, which includes the discharging of the fiduciary responsibility of the organization as trustees and managing the assets of the church. Biblically this is termed ruling or general leadership (I Tim. 5:17). Consequently, an Elder must also be at least 21 years old.

DUTIES OF AN ELDER

1. The Elders will serve the saints and guard the spiritual welfare and doctrine of the church. To this end they will serve the flock by regular prayer for the members and by seeking to develop nurturing relationships based upon mutual submission to God and His Word. They will exemplify and promote the core values and beliefs of the church. They are responsible to consider and take action in matters of church discipline. They will hold each other accountable to live lives characterized by the qualities listed above. They will exemplify and promote the importance of strong family relationships and responsibility to train our children in the ways of the Lord.

2. The Elders will lead the saints and oversee the teaching of God's word and exhort the flock to live according to those teachings. They will oversee the conducting of various assemblies of the church. They oversee the administration of church ordinances. They will be responsible for the appointment of elders, deacons, deaconesses and additional church staff. They will use biblical principles to develop sound fiscal plans for the church and will oversee execution of those plans.

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1 Peter 5:1-4

5:1 I WARN and counsel the elders among you (the pastors and spiritual guides of the church) as a fellow elder and as an eyewitness [called to testify] of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a sharer in the glory (the honor and splendor) that is to be revealed (disclosed, unfolded). **2** Tend (nurture, guard, guide, and fold) the flock of God that is [your responsibility], not by coercion or constraint, but willingly; not dishonorably motivated by the advantages and profits [belonging to the office], but eagerly and cheerfully; **3** Not domineering [as arrogant, dictatorial, and overbearing persons] over those in your charge, but being examples (patterns and models of Christian living) to the flock (the congregation). **4** And [then] when the Chief Shepherd is revealed, you will win the conqueror's crown of glory.

Shepherding: know the condition of the flock (Prov. 27:23), love, care for, feed, protect, give rest, and discipline.

Overseeing: general pastoral oversight, pray for the sick, economic care for the poor, laying on of hands.

Job 4:3-4

3 Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. **4** Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees.

Job 29:11-17

11 Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, **12** because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. **13** The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing. **14** I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. **15** I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. **16** I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. **17** I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth.

Job 30:25

25 Have I not wept for those in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor? -NIV

“Thus the elders stand out among their brethren as those the community desires to follow and obey because of their irreproachable lives; their humble, loving service to others; and their sacrifice and suffering.”

Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, page 153, paragraph 2.

ORDINATION OF AN ELDER

Ordain: kathistemi (kath-is'-tay-mee); to place down (permanently), i.e. (figuratively) to designate, constitute, convoy:

Titus 1:5-6

5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. -NIV

Acts 14:21-23

21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, **22** strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. **23** Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. -NIV

1 Tim 3:1

3:1 Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. -NIV

STEPS FOR BECOMING A NORTHSTAR ELDER

- 1. Nomination process:** There are at least three avenues for nomination of a man to be an Elder
 - a. Elder board member:** based on personal interactions or recommendations from others; typically someone who's already leading.
 - b. Other mature believers:** regular attenders of NSV who have demonstrated a life of Spiritual maturity and are knowledgeable of the Biblical criteria for Elders; the person needs to let any active Elder know who they would like to nominate.
 - c. Self:** a man who is persuaded that God has called him to serve in this way may nominate himself to the board to Elders. Although the Elders may pray about and discuss the addition of new Elders at any time, there should be a defined period during which the prayer team and the congregation should join the Elders in praying about and nominating candidates.

- 2. Review process:** For each accepted candidate an Elder should be assigned to carry-out the first two checks below.
 - a. Meet Biblical criteria:** see above.
 - b. Meet Northstar criteria:** see above.
 - c. Informal meetings with candidate:** each Elder should arrange an informal one-on-one meeting with candidates that desire to go through the nomination process and who pass the first two (2) steps above.
 - d. Formal meeting with all current Elders:** after the completion of *c* and with the agreement of all current Elders, a formal meeting with the Elder board will be scheduled. This meeting will be used to bring up any new questions and to explain the duties of the Elders in more detail for the candidate so that he can ask questions.
 - e. Meeting with Elders, wives, candidate and wife:** this gathering should be used as an opportunity to get feedback from the candidate's wife as to her thoughts about her husband being in the role of an Elder
 - f. Make other leaders and church body aware of candidate:** this announcement to the wider church body should allow a period of time for individuals to give feedback about the candidate to any current Elder.

- 3. Approval process:** this will happen in parallel with the review process above.
 - a. Elders meet to review findings:** initial approval (or not) by the end of *2c*.
 - b. Elders meet with candidate to get further explanation and to explain duties:** see *2d* above.
 - c. Elders make final decision:** this should be done after *2f* above and with special prayer covering from the Prayer Ministry.

- 4. Ordination process:** this may or may not happen before the approved new Elder begins to meet with the rest of the board.
 - a. Church leaders informed:** the candidate and the church staff will be informed as soon as a decision is made; ministry and mission group leaders will be informed at the earliest convenience (possibly during 4. B. below).
 - b. Church body informed and ordination date set:** the entire body will be informed during a celebration designated by the Elders.
 - c. Ordination Service:** a formal dedication and introduction of the new Elder(s) during a time when the entire church body can participate.