

Cross of Grace Church

Guidelines for Appointing Elders

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1. Preliminary Notes

a) The Purpose of This Document in Examining Elders

God gives elders to the church as one of the many and varied gifts he pours out on the body for the mutual edification and building up of the body¹. This process exists to help the elders and church *recognize* the gifts already present in the body of Christ. As gifts are beginning to emerge the elders and the church have a responsibility to develop and cultivate future elders by training them. This document aims to sketch out a process whereby qualified men are identified, trained and appointed.

b) Non-Vocational Elders

It is important to note that while this process would lead to a man being confirmed as an elder this may not *necessarily* translate immediately or ever to a full-time staff position at the church. While the Bible is clear that elders should be compensated whenever possible (1 Tim 5:18), it does not mandate this be true in every single case. However, for a man to be a non-paid or part-time elder would mean that this man would still need to be able to fulfill all the character and gifting qualifications for an elder as well as be able to serve actively as an elder in the church.

c) Sovereign Grace Ministries and Appointing Elders

This document is grounded in the conviction that it is the responsibility and role of the local church to recognize and appoint elders. Ultimately, appointing elders is a local church decision but Sovereign Grace Ministries will be involved for the supplemental training and assessment of elders in order to provide an objective process to serve the local church body. The partnership of the local church and SGM is currently under discussion and may affect this process.

d) Past Sin and Eldership

Romans 8:1 reminds us “there is therefore now no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus.” The purpose of examining each elder is not to condemn but to discern qualification and protect the body of Christ. If serious sin has occurred in an elder’s past this should be discussed in light of the gospel and the process of ongoing repentance should be discussed with the goal of restoration.

e) Former Pastors or Elders

¹ In this document the terms “pastor” and “elder” are used interchangeably, as well as “bishop” (some translations) and “overseer,” in the New Testament to describe the same office.

When possible, the character and testing of the man should be affirmed by his previous church in written form. If the former church cannot affirm him, a reasonable attempt will be made to investigate the matter.

f) Individual Plans

During the process of evaluation a member of the pastoral team should create a more detailed individual plan for each candidate pursuing the office of overseer with clear contexts for evaluation and a general time frame for the evaluation.

Clear individual plans and evaluations are especially important at the following benchmarks:

- When the individual is going to be recognized as an “elder-in-training” and invited to the elders meeting
- When formal training (such as PC or seminary) is being recommended or funded
- When the elder is being put forward for appointment as an elder

2) Seven Questions for Examining Elders

The following seven questions are designed as a tool to help evaluate elder candidates.

1. Is this man “known” to the elders and congregation?

- **Explanation:** This includes an intentional pursuit of life together with the church community and a willingness to participate in the fellowship with the church community. Practically, this can take the form of involvement in a small group, mens group, etc.
- **Scriptural Basis:** In order for the elders and the church body to affirm that this man qualifies according to 1 Tim 3 and Titus he must be “known” to some degree by the elders and the church. There must be a willingness to live “in the light” with other Christians (1 John 1:5-7).
- **Key Questions:**
 - Do others in the church know this man beyond the level of acquaintance?
 - Does there appear to be a willingness to ask for counsel from others in the community?
 - Is there a willingness to confess sin to others in the Christian community and ask for help?

2. Is this man growing consistently in his character as a Christian and does he qualify according to the biblical character guidelines?

- **Explanation:** This includes concerted work on known character issues. This does not mean perfection, but a trajectory toward Christ-likeness and in keeping with the character qualifications for an elder.
- **Scriptural Basis:** An elder must qualify according to the qualifications laid out in 1 Tim 3 and Titus. Beyond that, there should be a consistent—though not necessarily perfect—pattern of “walking by the Spirit” and not gratifying the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16-26) and of making progress in character (1 Tim 4:15).
- **Key Questions:**

- Does this man fulfill the qualifications of an elder for character found in Titus and 1 Timothy?²
- Is this man open to correction about these areas of character?
- Is this man able to resolve conflicts in a biblical manner?
- Would those around him, including his wife and family, affirm his growth in Christ-likeness?
- Would those outside the church affirm his character?

3. Has this man been tested?

- **Explanation:** This usually means testing in character and ability at the diaconate level in some form. Practically, this can take the form of leading a Sunday morning team, leading a Neighborhood Group, or leading another aspect of church life.
- **Scriptural Basis:** In 1 Timothy 3:10 Paul says that deacons must first be tested and it would follow that those who desire to elders should also be tested first. Additionally, 1 Timothy 3:6 forbids new converts from becoming elders and also indicates a principle of allowing a man's character to be proved out over time.
- **Key Questions:**
 - Is this man's gifting notable and clear in his work?
 - Is there biblical fruitfulness in his ministry in the church?
 - Would those he serves affirm his gifting?
 - Would the congregation, generally, as a whole, see him as fit for the office?

4. Does this man hold to sound doctrine?

- **Explanation:** This usually means an ongoing exploration of doctrine as he serves, as well as, eventually, a formal evaluation of the doctrine he holds.
- **Scriptural Basis:** The role of a pastor is the role based in the word of God and includes articulating core Christian doctrines and refuting error (1 Tim 1:3, 1:10, 4:6-7, 4:16, 6:2-5)
- **Key Questions:**
 - Can this man discern doctrinal error and refute it biblically?
 - Does this man agree with the doctrinal statement of this church?
 - Is this man's theology rooted and grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ as of "first importance" (1 Cor 15:1-5)?

5. Is this man "apt to teach"?

- **Explanation:** This usually will involve opportunities for this gift to be tested and an evaluation process leading to growth. It is important to note that being "apt to teach" does not mean he is gifted to speak to large groups (though it may) but refers to an ability to skillfully explain Scripture for the edification of others in a discipleship context, small group context, or counseling context.
- **Scriptural Basis:** The only explicit "ability" qualification in 1 Timothy and Titus is an aptitude for teaching (3:2). The role of the pastor is rooted in an ability to articulate and apply the word of God and is the chief function of the office (2 Tim 4:1-4).
- **Key Questions:**

- When given opportunities, can this man clearly explain Scripture to help others?
- Is there a grace gifting to apply God's Word to real life situations?
- What contexts is he gifted to teach in?

6. Is this man “called” to this office and at this particular local church?

- **Explanation:** This usually involves an affirmation of an internal sense of calling by the man and an external confirmation of the call. No man should serve in the office under compulsion, but willingly and freely. Additionally, if the man is being considered for the office of elder at this specific local church whether the man is called specifically to this church should be explored.
- **Scriptural Basis:** The gifting for the office of elder is one of the unique gifts that God gives to his church for the building up of the body (Eph 4:11-16) and is a unique grace gifting. The office should be freely desired and pursued by the candidate (1 Tim 3:1) but his ability should be confirmed by the church and other elders (1 Tim 3:2-7).
- **Key Questions:**
 - Would this man freely desire to serve in the office of elder?
 - Would this man's wife affirm her willingness to support her husband in this office?
 - Would this man and the team agree that he is called to serve at this specific local church? Is there a common enough philosophy of ministry? Does the man agree with the stated vision and mission of the church? Is there an agreement of philosophy related to governance, structure, and polity?
 - Does the man have trust and confidence in the existing pastoral team and in the Lead Pastor of the church? Is there general methodological agreement with the pastoral team?

7. Has this man received the necessary training for the office?

- **Explanation:** This usually involves training in a formal context or a concerted study of the Bible and Theology through directed study. Not every elder must be a graduate of a facility of higher education but each should have the training necessary to fulfill the office.
- **Scriptural Basis:** Paul encourages Timothy as a young elder to study diligent in order to be able to rightly handle God's Word (2 Tim 2:15).
- **Key Questions:**
 - Has this man attended a formal pastoral education course?
 - If not, what study has this man undertaken for the office?
 - What would ongoing training look like for this man?

3) Training Requirement for Elders

Since the New Testament is not completely prescriptive in matters of training for the office of elder, each local church and denomination is allowed freedom in the requirement they set for formal or informal training.

a) Basic Requirements for Elders

At Cross of Grace Church, basic proficiency must be demonstrated in the following:

- Systematic Theology

- Biblical Theology
- Bible Interpretation
- Biblical Counseling

To fulfill these requirements the elders can work with the potential elder to craft a study plan that may include the following resources:

- Ligonier [Training Certificates](#)
- Porterbrook [Learning Program](#)
- SGM Pastors College [Classes](#)
- Charles Simeon Trust [Course](#)
- Seminary Classes

All elders will be encouraged toward a process of continuing education.

b) Requirements for Lead Pastor or Church Planter

Because the Lead Pastor or Church Planter will be tasked with leading the team of elders and overseeing preaching it seems wise that this man be required to have at least the equivalent of one year of formal training (PC, Seminary, etc.).

4) Formal Appointment

When the pastoral team believes that the pathway toward eldership is complete a formal process of appointment shall begin. This will take place through a formal evaluation of both character and doctrine.

1. Evaluation of Character

- a. Pastoral Team Evaluation:** The entire pastoral team will undertake a formal evaluation of the man's character in keeping with the biblical qualifications—including encouragement in areas of Christ-likeness and exhortation in areas that need improvement.
- b. Wider Evaluation:** The elders will also be tasked with getting counsel and evaluation from others in the church, especially those working directly with the elder or being served in ministry by the elder.

2. Evaluation of Doctrine

- a. Written Exam:** The candidate will study for and take a written exam such as the one created by Sovereign Grace Ministries testing his ability to articulate biblical doctrine in multiple categories. The results will be shared both the local pastoral team and other pastors in the region for their review. The elders at Cross of Grace will take the results into account in their consideration of the man.
- b. Oral Exam:** If the candidate passes a written exam then he will be put before a panel consisting of one local elder and two or more pastors in the region for examination in his ability to articulate, explain, and defend biblical doctrine. These results will also be considered by the elders at Cross of Grace.

3. Affirmation by Church Body

- a. Churchwide Evaluation:** Once the pastoral team is satisfied that the man in question meets the formal character qualifications, the pastoral team should put him before the church for an affirmation of his character. Then there may be a

public announcement of the consideration of this man for the office of elder, a reading of the biblical qualifications of the office, and a timeframe for input.

4. Formal Appointment

- a.** Appointment Ceremony: If both the character evaluation and doctrinal evaluation affirm this man's qualification for the office a formal appointment will take place in front of the gathered local church.