

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. He is the true source of all the church is and does, and His glory is to be the objective of every act, function and motive of the Body, both individually and corporately (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22, 23).

It is our belief that, just as believers individually should seek to govern their lives by guidelines given in the Scripture, church bodies should follow scriptural instructions and precedents in governing themselves. The Elder form of government, as set forth in the New Testament, is, we believe, not only potentially the most satisfactory form of church government; but is also the form of government which most closely follows Scriptural example (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:17-32; Philippians 1:1).

The New Testament pattern of leadership in the church is the mediation of the authority of the Lord through a plurality of Godly men called elders. The elders are to be assisted by a special office of servants called deacons.

We understand that the terms elder, overseer, and pastor are used in the New Testament to describe the same individuals who occupy the teaching and primary office of authority in the local Church. The term "elder" refers to the spiritual maturity of the individual; whereas, the term "overseer" is descriptive of their work of overseeing the affairs of the local Church. The term "pastor" refers to the elder's task of feeding the flock of God with his divinely revealed truth and protecting them from the infusion of error into their life (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

How Elders are Selected

As the Holy Spirit is involved in granting gifts for leadership, edification and encouragement within the Church (1 Corinthians 12:1-11), He is also directly involved in filling leadership positions in particular church bodies. It is the Holy Spirit who raises up the Elders in the church (Acts 20:28). It is the task of the church to recognize those individuals by the qualifications stated in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Scripture gives evidence of the first elders being appointed by the founders of the church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). By this example, it is implied that the existing spiritual leadership of a church be intimately involved in the process of selection based on spiritual rather than superficial qualifications. The process should be done with great sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit, the direction of the Word and the unanimity of the existing Elders (1 Timothy 5:22).

Beyond this, there are no specific guidelines provided in Scripture regarding the selection process. It would therefore appear that freedom is given to the individual church to develop a process that will best serve its own special needs.

The Term Elders

Since Scripture indicates no fixed term for elders, no specific term of office is recommended. Instead, each elder, upon appointment, shall be asked for a one-year commitment, subject to review, re-commitment and reaffirmation by the existing Elder board. At least once a year, notice should be given to the church to bring to the attention of the existing Elder board the names of men who are members of New Community Church whom they believe meet the character qualifications and required skills of an Elder, as stated in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. The existing Elders will examine the prospective Elder candidates in accordance with the revealed

qualifications.

The Number of Elders

The board of elders will consist of those who have been raised up by the Holy Spirit and recognized by the church as possessing those qualifications stated in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

No certain number is to be maintained. Requiring a specific number can lead to selecting some individuals based on superficial qualifications and pressuring others into taking the office in order to fulfill the numerical requirement, a practice that would be contrary to the test of aspiration (see 1 Timothy 3:1).

The Biblical Role of Elders

1. To shepherd the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3).
2. To lead by example (1 Peter 5:3).
3. To teach skillfully (1 Timothy 3:2). This capability distinguishes him from the deacons.
4. To refute those who contradict truth (Titus 1:9). The implication of this role is that an Elder possesses a workable knowledge of the Word of God.
5. To manage the Church of God (1 Timothy 3:5-7).
6. To humbly serve the Church (Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:3).

Elders are admonished not to lord their position as church leaders over the congregation, nor are they to inflict their will on others. Such an attitude would disqualify them from this position. Instead, they are able to guide and direct the flock of God in obedience to the will of God.

7. To pray for the sick (James 5:14).
8. To preserve the unity of the Body of Christ.

In an effort to maintain the unity of the church, the Elders will not operate on the basis of simple majority rule or vote. If all of the Elders are guided by the same Holy Spirit and all have the mind of Christ, there should be unanimity in the decisions they make (1 Corinthians 1:10; 2:15-16; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 1:27; 2:2).

If there is division, all of the Elders should study, pray, and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. It is imperative that the Elders understand each situation requiring a decision falls into one of two categories: principle and personal preference. Biblical principles are non-negotiable; whereas, personal preference, as long as it remains within the boundaries of the Word of God, must remain open to compromise and negotiation.

Unity and harmony in the leadership will result in unity and harmony within the church body.

The Congregation's Responsibility to the Elders

The church is best served when the congregation submits to the leadership of the elders (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 5:17). The congregation is to hold those who teach them in high esteem (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17).

It is the responsibility of the congregation to support financially those Elders who preach and teach the Word of God as their vocation (1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:14).

Those in the local church are not to spread or receive any accusations against an Elder unless two or three witnesses can substantiate that an Elder has violated God's Word (1 Timothy 5:19). If an Elder has sinned and refuses to repent of his sin, he is to be rebuked publicly (1 Timothy 5:20-21).

The Biblical Role of the Deacons

The Greek word for deacon conveys the idea of a servant. Deacons are to serve under the direction of the elders, undertaking those areas of service necessary for the church's functioning that would otherwise prohibit the elders and other leaders from performing their Biblical responsibilities. No specific, ongoing roles are mentioned in Scripture, probably because service necessitates change, and so the role of the deacons should be flexible. The deacons' qualifications are stated in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. It should be noted that character is the issue in this passage, but there are no statements about specific duties. This position, unlike the office of Elder, is open to both men and women who are qualified.