

Christ Community Fellowship Elder Affirmation

Each year, we as a church go through a process of affirming existing elders and/or selecting new elders, charged with the responsibility of providing leadership and shepherding care for the body. This is in accordance with article IV (Leadership) of our church constitution. (Copies are available on request.)

What is an elder? What are his responsibilities? Who is qualified to serve in such a role? How is an elder selected? These are but a few of the questions often asked. It is our hope that these and others might be answered in the pages that follow. If you have additional questions or would like further explanation, we invite you to contact one of the elders.

What is an elder, and what is his work?

As described in our constitution, an elder is, "a member of our fellowship identified as being gifted by the Holy Spirit to oversee the life of the church and to make decisions necessary for the daily needs and accomplishments of the church's purposes."

What does that mean? As elders, we have recently been asking ourselves that question. Does "overseeing the life of the church" mean that we are simply the business managers-- the corporate officers--of the church, or are we to be about something more. Unfortunately, the "work" of an elder is not as clearly delineated in Scripture as, say, the "character" of an elder. There is no one passage to which we can turn that exhaustively spells out what an elder is to do.

Our desire to answer this question led us to a study of the New Testament words, "elder," "shepherd," and "overseer" (which occur nearly 100 times). What we found was surprising and helpful. We were surprised to discover that of all the occurrences of these words, the work of directing the business affairs of the church is mentioned only twice. In fact, the overwhelming number of uses have to do with providing spiritual care for the body. A few examples might help illustrate:

- Shepherds **Protect** the sheep (Matt. 9:36).
- Shepherds **exercise discernment**--differentiating truth from error (Matt. 25:32).
- Shepherds **teach** the sheep (Mark 6:34).
- Shepherds **provide a sense of safety** for the flock (mark 14:27).
- Shepherds live with their sheep (Luke 2:8).
- Shepherds **sacrifice** themselves for their sheep; they're **intimately acquainted** with them, they know each one--their character, temperament, gifts and needs--and they are concerned with meeting their needs. Likewise, they are **intimately known** by the sheep. Their voice is recognized and trusted. The sheep know their heart, and are confident in their love (John 10-11-16).
- Elders **consider theological questions** of concern to the body. They **study the Scriptures** together, seeking god's wisdom for his church (Acts 15:2ff).
- Shepherds **guard themselves and the flock** from danger (Acts 20:28).
- Elders **provide pastoral care and direction for missionaries** (Acts 21:12).
- Elders **call and commission** certain believers for ministry (1 Tim. 4:14).

- Elders **hear accusations** brought against another elder, and when necessary, they **handle such discipline** (1 Tim. 5:19).
- Elders **pray for the sick**--they visit, comfort and counsel the hurting (Jas. 5:14).
- Elders **provide spiritual oversight** for the flock. They freely give of themselves in love, because they deeply care for the sheep (1 Peter. 5:1-4).

In short then, elders are to give themselves first and foremost to the spiritual life of the body. They are to feed, nurture, and protect the sheep. Administration is secondary to the ministry of "prayer and the Word: (Acts 6:1-7).

What qualifies one to be an elder?

The New Testament indicates that those who are called to the office and ministry of overseer are to be of unique and exceptional character. According to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, elders are to be:

Personal Qualities

- Temperate (calm and clear in their thinking);
- Sensible or prudent (wise);
- Self-controlled (not given to impulsive behavior);
- Respectable (possess a well-ordered life);
- Not self-willed (able to work with others, sharing leadership);
- Devout (possess a growing devotion and intimacy with God);
- Free from the love of money;
- A lover of what is good;
- One who avoids drunkenness;
- Not fond of unworthy gain (can't be improperly influenced);

Family Life

- The husband of one wife (a one-woman kind of man);
- The father of children who believe and are not rebellious;
- able to manage one's family (a consistent testimony at home);

Relationship with Others

- Gentle (patient, kind);
- Uncontentious (not argumentative);
- Just (fair in decision making);
- Hospitable (ministry in the home);
- Not quick-tempered (able to control emotions);
- Of good reputation with those outside the church;

Spiritual Maturity

- A mature believer (literally, "not a new convert");
- One who holds fast to the Word (the Scripture is his authority);
- Able to teach and exhort in sound doctrine (can apply the truth to life);
- Able to refute false teaching (to present a defense for the faith).

How does an elder fit into the overall structure of the church?

At CCF, the congregation has the responsibility of affirming/selecting their elders on a yearly basis. The elders then have the responsibility of shepherding and leading the body. Elders have equal authority, accountability, and shared leadership with the pastor. Indeed, they too are pastors (though self-supporting).

How does a person become an elder, and how does a church member nominate a prospective elder?

1. When Vacancy on board of Elders

If a vacancy occurs, elders may appoint a replacement. The elders will go through a process similar to the normal elder affirmation process (see below) to select a replacement, except there will not be an immediate vote of affirmation.

2. Normal Nomination and Affirmation Process

Each January the elders present a slate of nominees whom God has placed on their hearts. These are men who, along with their wives, have prayed about this ministry, sought God's direction, and have a strong sense of calling to shepherd the flock. Indeed, these are men who have a shepherd's heart, as evidenced by their involvement in the lives of people.

Additionally, after considerable prayer and evaluation of elder responsibilities and qualifications, a church member may approach a potential candidate with their desire to nominate this individual as an elder. *When this happens, it is important to remember that our desire is to affirm those God has already called to this ministry and office. Therefore, we should prayerfully look for those who are already engaged in a shepherding ministry within the flock--men whom God is already using.*

After prayer and self-evaluation by the candidate, and hopefully with input from others within the body (including, current elders), the prospective nominee would let the one desiring to make the nomination know if he would like to be formally considered by the congregation. If so, the person doing the nominating will submit to the board of Elders, in writing, the individual's name, including the candidate's personal and spiritual qualifications.

What happens between the time the written nomination is received and the announcement is made?

After the nomination has been received, at least two elders will meet with the nominee to discuss the individual's qualifications and the work of eldering. If after this the nominee still feels called, the Board of Elders will meet to discuss the nominee's qualifications. If all the elders are unanimous in their support, then two elders will then meet with the nominee and his wife to discuss the duties of an elder, and the support required by a wife in this ministry. The nominee and his wife will spend some time praying about their decision to become a formal candidate. If their answer is yes, the nomination will be publicly announced.

Do the current elders have the authority to reject a nomination?

No. They do however have the responsibility to the Lord, and to the body, to express their position regarding nominees. As a general rule, the elders will indicate those candidates for whom they are unanimously in favor.

Once the individual nominated has met with the elders and has accepted the nomination, what events occur prior to the congregational vote?

The formal list of nominees will be announced to the church in mid-January, and mailed to current members two weeks prior to the vote. Additionally, at a body life meeting, currently scheduled for January 22, the nominees will be asked to share, as well as respond to questions from the body.

When is the elder affirmation vote held, and how many votes are needed to affirm a nominee?

Members are responsible to the Lord and to each other to prayerfully consider each nominee. The opportunity for affirmation will be made by secret ballot on February 5. To be affirmed, the nominee must receive the affirmation of at least 75% of those voting.

How soon does a newly affirmed elder begin his service?

Though their term of office officially begins March 1 (and continues through the end of February), new elders are encouraged to join in the ministry as soon as they are affirmed.

Who can nominate and vote for an elder?

Our constitution states that the church membership may add to the nominees presented by the Board of Elders, as well as vote to affirm elders from among those presented.

Since CCF does not have official membership roles, the elders have, based on Article III (Membership) of the constitution, defined church membership for the purpose of elder nomination and affirmation as follows:

1. Nominating and affirming members shall be at least 18 years of age.
2. Voting membership shall consist of those who have personally received Jesus Christ as Savior, and confessed this in baptism with the intent that Christ be Lord in all areas of life. Moreover, Christ's Lordship will be witnessed by the following:
 - a. Personal involvement with Christ through the Word and prayer;
 - b. Regular participation in corporate worship and a small group;
 - c. Proportionate and systematic giving to Christ and His mission;
 - d. Actively serving one another in the life of the church;
 - e. Actively involved in the church's mission concerns;
 - f. A Christian lifestyle in relationship with an unbelieving world.

If there is a question regarding who is considered a church member, who would decide?

At least two elders would meet with the individual(s) in question to help determine the status of church membership as it pertains to the nomination and affirmation of elders. If a mutual agreement cannot be reached, the board of Elders would decide.

Can a woman be an elder?

It's the position of CCF that a woman cannot hold the office of elder. This is based on our understanding that God has called men to serve in this role. As Paul put it, "...the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2). This is not to suggest that women are not a valued and crucial part of our body. We believe the Holy Spirit gives women the same gifts for the good of all believers--men and women. Indeed, because the elders recognize the unique and godly insights of gifted women, they seek their input and wisdom in the understanding and responding to the needs of the body, and in arriving at an understanding of the Scriptures.

Adopted: 1995