

ECO POLITY AND THE ROLE OF CHURCH OFFICERS

Description of Elders

Adopted by the Session on September 26, 2016

THE ROLE OF AN ELDER

1. The character of the church should reflect the character of Christ.

The Lord is my shepherd... (Psalm 23:1)

And He is the head of the body, the church... (Colossians 1:18)

2. Elders serve at the foot of God's throne as shepherds of His flock. Therefore, the character and effectiveness of a church are directly proportionate to the character and quality of the church's leadership.

Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders... The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and worship Him who lives for ever and ever. They lay down their crowns before the throne... (Revelation 4:4, 10)

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. (Acts 20:28)

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (I Peter 5:1-3)

3. Elders are shepherds of the Flock much more so than the board of directors of the institution. As a result, our ordination to the office of Elder is a 24/7 calling, and for life.

Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” declares the Lord. Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the Lord. “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 23: 1-4)

4. Elders are accountable to the Chief Shepherd, and therefore have a higher calling as ordained with accountability to God rather than elected with accountability to the congregation.

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (I Peter 5:4)

THE ATTRIBUTES OF AN ELDER

1. Is called by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2))
2. Demonstrates a shepherd’s heart – love, care and prayer for flock (Jeremiah 23:4)
3. Is an example of servant leadership (I Peter 5:3)
4. Lives by the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26)
5. Exhibits spiritual and relational maturity (James 1:19; Ephesians 5:15-17)

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER

I Timothy 3:1-7

1. Aspires to be an elder (called by the Holy Spirit)
2. Above reproach
3. The husband of but one wife
4. Temperate
5. Self-controlled

6. Respectable
7. Hospitable
8. Able to teach
9. Not given to drunkenness
10. Not violent, but gentle
11. Not quarrelsome
12. Not a lover of money
13. Must manage own household well and see that children obey with proper respect
14. Not a recent convert
15. Good reputation with outsiders

Titus 1:6-9

1. Blameless
2. The husband of but one wife
3. A man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient
4. Not overbearing
5. Not quick tempered
6. Not given to drunkenness
7. Not violent
8. Not pursuing dishonest gain
9. Hospitable
10. One who loves what is good
11. Self-controlled
12. Upright
13. Holy
14. Disciplined
15. Must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught
16. Able to encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it

The Actions of an Elder

in the context of our Strategic Vision Plan

Worship: Be in Awe of God	Cultivate: Be a Secure Home	Impact: Be an Effective Mission	Fortify: Support Our Vision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model personal and family worship • Be in awe of God and glorify Him in all that you do • Attend worship services • Assist in worship services (testimony, Scripture reading, prayer, music) • Pray for members after worship services and at other times as needs arise • Participate in prayer ministry • Usher and greet • Assist in baptisms (adopt family, pray, mentor) • Serve communion and minister to those to whom you serve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve in Church ministries • Grow in faith and seek genuine transformation in own life • Shepherd a community group (Sunday school, small group) • Teach (Sunday School, Wednesday night, Bible studies) • Lead a discipleship group • Serve on prayer team, services, intercessional • Mentor (couples, men, women, youth) • Make hospital visits • Assist in assimilating new members and visitors into the life of the Church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in mission trips • Practice hospitality at home, work and play • Reach out in Christian love/ service to those within networks of relationships • Develop relationships with unbelievers with a goal of sharing the good news of Jesus (missional living) • Live like Christ (a true disciple and not conforming to the worldly culture) • Have a good reputation with those inside and outside the Church • Recognize and accept divine appointments (be available) • Live out the Gospel before an unbelieving world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain/live our vision plan (use vocabulary) • Tithe and give sacrificially of time, talents and treasures to the Church • Serve the congregation by providing spiritual/servant leadership • Be visible and accessible • Engage our members into active service and ministry • Serve on committees and special teams • Have a clear understanding of and engage in duties as an elder, including governance in conformity with ECO Polity • Be an equipper of our members

Oversight and Governance of the Church

	Spiritual/Heart/Missional	Legal/Structure/Form
“Institutions”	Church (ecclesia) Congregation = flock	Legal entities (Corporation and Foundation) Congregation = members
“Governing bodies”	Spiritual leaders Upper Room Session = shepherds Diaconate = shepherds Congregation = flock Pastors/Staff = equippers ECO = equippers and tools	Directors/Committee Chairs Board Room Corporation Board of Directors Foundation Board of Directors Congregation = constituents Pastors/Staff = paid professionals Denomination = authority and programs
“Policies and procedures”	Bible Strategic Vision ECO Essential Tenets Ministering	By Laws Nomination and election procedures ECO Polity and Discipline Authoritative
“Focus/ emphasis/ perspective”	Spiritual: Bible and Ministry → heart People Discipling/shepherding/ enabling	Legal: Boards & By Laws → business Programs Organizing/administering/ doing

Excerpts from “With a Shepherd’s Heart”

by John R. Sittemea

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CHAPTER 1

OUT OF THE BOARD ROOM

I lived in Texas for many years. When I crossed the Red River some years ago when moving from the Midwest with my family, I had to learn many new things and learn them quickly. I had to learn a new language that folks here actually call “Texas friendly”: what I had known as “baptists” were actually “babbdists”; where I had “done business” before, I would now be “doin’ bidness”; and where previously I had referred to a group standing before me as “you,” I would have to learn to say “y’all” instead. (Actually, “y’all” is an all-purpose pronoun serving as both singular and plural, though local linguistic “purists” insist that the plural of “y’all” is “y’alls.”) I had to master the difference between “tote,” “fetch,” and “carry”; I had to learn that soft drink is not “pop” but that all varieties are called “cokes” (“What kind of coke do you want? Orange?”). I had to learn the strange Texas lilt that raises the end of each sentence a note or so, so that to my Midwestern ears, very indicative sounded more like an interrogative. I learned to say “fixin’” a lot (as in “I’m fixin’ to fetch a six-pack of cokes”).

I also learned an important lesson in Texas-style home maintenance; to “water my foundation.” Since most of you don’t know what that means, a brief lesson is in order. (Y’all listen up, I’m fixin’ to make a point here.) The soil in Texas, especially in the Dallas region, is of such a kind that it expands and contracts rapidly--almost violently--with the increase or decrease of moisture. This soil volatility is so pronounced that there are few if any basements; homes are constructed on specially prepared slabs. Now I’d seen cracked and parched earth before in Midwestern droughts, but I’d never seen half-inch cracks fracture a lawn only days after a 5 inch rain! Unless the soil around one’s foundation is kept moist, the expansion and contraction cracks the slab, and wall damage results. Repairs can be very costly, so wise homeowners all water their foundations faithfully.

The church of the Lord has a foundation too. God’s Word says in Eph. 2:19-20, “you are...members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” This book is written to train and equip elders because to them is assigned the important task of caring for the foundation. They must keep the church firmly fixed on the Word--as the inspired apostles and prophets transmitted it--and see to it that no cracks weaken the walls and damage the holy temple in which God dwells on earth. Their task is an urgent one, not only to preserve what God has already given us, but also because the church is always under construction: “...in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). The church is our Lord’s; she is precious in His eyes. He paid a high price for her redemption--His own blood.

This study aims to be Biblical. We will analyze what the Bible says about the tasks assigned to elders, and how the men who hold this office must do them. It will also be practical. We will target the “bottom line,” providing insights and skills to enable elders to fulfill their calling before the Lord and among the membership of the church. It is designed to challenge the reader to study on his own at home with the Bible open on lap or table, and with heart open to the Spirit of Christ. It will also challenge the reader to gather for discussion with others to share insights and for mutual encouragement.

ELDERS ARE PASTORS

You may wonder why so much emphasis is placed on the word “shepherd” throughout this study. More than just a convenient handle, it defines what the office of elder really is, a shepherding--that is, pastoring--duty. The work of elders properly understood is nothing other than the pastoral care of the flock of God. That Biblical imagery is one that is repeated from Genesis through the New Testament. It describes both God’s description of His care and the needs of His people; it is dominant in both Jesus’ description of Himself and His work and in His assignment to the Apostles of His Church.

“Wait a minute,” you may say. “Pastoral care is the minister’s job, isn’t it? After all, he is the one *called* “Pastor.” He has the training and the experience, and he receives a salary for his work. Elders are busy laymen who have full-time jobs and many other responsibilities. Their term of office is only for a few years (in most churches). They simply can’t do the job like “the pastor” can. We shouldn’t expect them to try!”

There is no doubt that a preacher ought to be busy pastoring the flock, tending to their feeding and their care as a representative of the Good Shepherd. But is it just he (or, in the case of multiple-staff ministries, “they”)--the paid “professional”--who is to do the work of pastoring the flock?

The Bible won’t allow it! Scripturally, the elders are the pastors of the church just as much as any paid, seminary-trained preacher. The elders themselves must understand that, the people of God must understand that, and the church must shape its life and ministry accordingly. In fact, it is a central thesis of this volume that the raging spiritual infection within the fevered body of Christ that has left so many churches weak, flaccid and ineffective, can be traced directly to the loss of the Biblical understanding and practice of the office of elder. As we shall see, the Bible assigns to the elders in each local church the awesome duty to protect and secure the health of the flock. It also speaks some of its most frightful judgments to the shepherds who fail in this assignment. If the local church fails to insist upon obedience to this Scriptural teaching simply because its elders aren’t paid “professionals,” that church will wither under the Evil One’s assault.

Why have churches in our time lost the pastoral office of elder in exchange for the paid religious professional? The problem runs deep. Cultural analysts of our age have observed the radical transformation of our society from a rural agrarian base to an information base, from a “hands on” style of work involvement to a “managerial” style of involvement, from face to face and person to person communication to that of phone, fax, modem, voice-mail and e-mail.¹ And the changes are coming faster than ever. Two hundred years ago, 95% of the US work force was involved in farming, compared to less than 4 percent today.² But the greatest impulse for such radical change has been in the last 50 years, and the majority of *that* change has been in the last 15, tied directly to the development and explosive growth of the personal computer. Make no mistake; these changes are not only changes about how we make our money and communicate with one another. These changes affect how we view ourselves as people, how we understand our purpose on earth, our way of living before the face of God and our fellow man. These changes also affect the way we view the church, and within the church the way we interact with each other and care for one another in Christian love.

We’ve become profoundly individualistic as a society, and that individualism has penetrated the church to her very marrow. American religion has become private, and sadly, irrelevant as a shaping influence for public life. It is fascinating--and grievous--that during the decade of the 80s, the pollsters report that “religion is up” but “morality is down.” (You can read all you can handle on the subject by picking up a book by Chuck Colson,³ for example, or one of the research reports by George Barna,⁴ or the

thorough and excellent study of American religious beliefs and practices entitled *Habits of the Heart*, written by Sociologist Robert Bellah.)⁵

The changing nature of American religion as a whole is reflected as well in the changing role of the life of the church for both society and the individual. Instead of looking to the church for spiritual vigor, to shape fundamental societal values, and to nurture core moral beliefs and practices, modern Americans view the church with fear, distrust and suspicion.⁶ After all, most of her “leaders” have revealed their own corruption, and the Supreme Court has reminded us of the “wall of separation” that exists strong and tall, seemingly to keep the church in her place. Instead of viewing the church as God’s “family,” the heart of one’s religious and social life, central to one’s identity, and thus a large part of one’s schedule, today’s Americans view the church much the way a suburban housewife (should I say house-husband?) views cereals. There are hundreds of options, all tailored to different tastes and preferences. So too with churches. Several researchers report that the generations coming of age in the 80s and 90s are generations that don’t make commitments, but rather seek value. Gone is “brand loyalty” to GM or Ford, Zenith or RCA, and with good reason; a family is as likely to have an American automobile manufactured in Mexico as one made in the USA, and not one single VCR manufacturer makes cassette decks in the US any longer. Gone as well is “brand loyalty” to church and denomination. An individual or a family may well choose to worship at one church on Sundays, attend Bible Study in another church, an inspirational “power lunch devotional” at still another. For such folks, the concept of “church membership” that has served for nearly two millennia to give visible testimony to spiritual commitment and communal “belongingness” has gone the way of the dinosaur.

With such profound societal and cultural transformation going on all around us, it ought not to surprise us that many within the church have begun to think more as the world does than as Scripture would have us think. Not without reason does Paul implore us not to “conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is...” (Rom. 12:2). And much to the point of this volume, such penetration of worldly ideas into the church’s way of thinking is especially evident in the way modern churches have begun to think about the role of elders in the life of the church. Simply put, elders are viewed today in an administrative role, as the corporate officers of the business known as “church such and such.” In fact, many churches have even adopted names that reflect their new “insights”; they call their elders “board members” or “trustees.” And, of course, along with the shift in emphasis and the change of name comes a corresponding change of qualifying prerequisites for the job. Gone the way of the Do-Do bird are the *spiritual* qualifications for the office of elder that are explicitly set forth in I Timothy 3 and in Titus 1. They have been replaced instead with the technical “skill set” necessary to be an efficient corporate officer.

**Acts 20:17ff:
ELDERS, BISHOPS OR PASTORS?**

Recall, if you will, my thesis. Elders are pastors, not administrators. They are to care for the flock of the Good Shepherd, not merely to “manage the affairs” of a corporate entity. Let’s look at Scripture, specifically at Acts 20:17-38. In this passage, we read Paul’s well-known farewell to the Ephesian elders whom he had summoned so as to give them his final instructions (v. 13ff). In this important passage, Paul uses several words to describe the men to whom he speaks:

- in v. 17 he refers to them as “**elders**” (using the Greek word “presbuteros,” from which comes the English words “pres-byter” and “presbyterian”)
- in v. 28 he calls them “**overseers**” (from the Greek word “episkopos;” the root

word for “episcopalian,” in English “bishop”)

- also in v. 28 he charges them to be “**shepherds**” (the Greek word is “poimein,” the word for “shepherd” or “sheep-herder”).

What are we dealing with in these verses? Must we speak of elders, bishops *or* pastors, or must we speak of elders, bishops *and* pastors? Several interesting observations could be made here. For example, we could observe that entire denominations and ecclesiastical systems have arisen depending only on which word one chooses to emphasize while reading this chapter. (A stress on “episcopos” has led to the episcopalian system of church government, with authoritative and hierarchical bishops ruling the church instead of elders. Likewise, an emphasis on “presbuteros” has led to the presbyterian [lit. “rule by elder”] form of church government. And a neglect of both of these words in favor of an emphasis on the word for “pastor” could well lead to the benign dictatorship of the local preacher who alone is considered to be pastoral.)

Beyond these observations, what is more important to note is the relation of each of these Biblical words to the others. Read the passage carefully. The *office* (commission, authoritative assignment) is that of elder (v. 17). The passage simply but significantly calls these men “the elders of the church”; a few chapters earlier, in Acts 14:23, we were told that “Paul and Barnabus appointed elders for them in each church.” (Also see Titus 1:5.) The point is clear; the apostles and members of the early church viewed these men as “elders.” The *work* or *duty* of that office and of those elders holding it is described in v. 28 as the “oversight” of self and of flock (“episcopos,” from “epi,” meaning “on” or “over,” plus “scopos,” referring to “vision” or “sight” [like “microscope” means “small vision”]). Finally, the *spirit*, *the character*, or, if you will, *the heart* with which the elders are to do the work of oversight is that of “shepherd” (an English equivalent is “pastor”).

What may we conclude? *The Elders who oversee the flock are the pastors of the church!* The Lord’s church is a flock that faces savage wolves who would tear the sheep and devour the lambs with the bloody fangs of false doctrine and worldly lifestyle (vv. 29-30). Caring for that flock requires diligent oversight and alert watchfulness. Yet the oversight and watchfulness assigned to the elders of the church is a waste of time if it does not arise from a genuine and hearty *caring* for the flock. Pastoral care--shepherding--is never content with mere management of livestock resources. It demands genuine concern and love (look at Paul’s own example in v. 31. For further insights, read the delightful little volume by Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*).⁷ Pastoral care demands the involvement of the elder’s total being in careful attention to the well-being of each individual of the flock. It requires heart--a shepherd’s heart, one quite different from the reluctant spirit and diffidence of the hired hand. (Read John 10:11-13 to refresh your memory of the profound and important difference between the two.)

In contrast, what we see in today’s churches are *administrators*. The senior pastor functions like a CEO who “markets the vision”; the deacons (usually by committee) fulfill the corporate role of the CFO (Chief Financial Officer); and in such a modern corporate or business model for the church, the elders become the Board of Directors. To them falls the administrative responsibility of setting direction for the life of the corporation. They commission or develop a “marketing plan” for church growth, and hold the CEO account- able for the implementation and success of that growth plan. They oversee and direct professionally-run fund raising programs for building or operation budgets. They delegate any and all pastoral duties to the professionals trained to handle such contingencies.

All genuine followers of Jesus will agree that the church must preach and teach the Word of God so as to evangelize the nations, incorporate them through baptism into the

body of believers by way of repentance, conversion and faith, and disciple them thoroughly unto disciplined Christian living. That's the mandate of the Great Commission in Matthew 28. When trying to fulfill the Great Commission in our rapidly changing age, the church meets new ideas, embracing some of them. Not all are bad, either. The corporate business model, for all the criticism I level against it, often arises out of a desire for an efficient use of the church's resources and a visionary and purposeful approach to reaching Biblically assigned goals. But efficient or not, goal-oriented or not, it has come at a high price; the transferal of her "pastors" to the new department of "administration." And the flock suffers for it.

I PETER 5:1-4: ORGANIZATIONAL PASSION OR A WILLING HEART?

The pastoral character of the eldership is a theme not only found in Acts 20. It is perhaps put even more forcefully in I Peter 5:1-4. "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be." Here the radical difference between administering and pastoring is most clearly seen. Administration is a *managerial* function, applying resources to reach carefully articulated goals. It is preeminently organizational and intellectual. Pastoring however is a *nurturing* function, involving care, demanding both strength and tenderness, arising out of a passionate love for the well-being of the flock.⁸ While good shepherding will involve the shepherd's calloused feet (today bald tires?), his skill with both rod and staff (both the ability to discern, and the communication skills necessary to challenge, rebuke and call people to repentance), and courage as he faces the predators of the flock (willingness to make the tough calls that generate "cotton mouth" fear?), good shepherding is preeminently a work of the heart, and depends greatly upon the intimate bond between the flock and the shepherd as they hear and follow His voice. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Pastoring focuses the flock on the *voice of Jesus*--the Bible as it shapes understanding and faith, and directs the flock to *follow*--to live in faith as the people of God.

In subsequent chapters, we'll examine each of these dimensions of pastoring more carefully. Before I close this chapter, I leave the reader with the following questions. I challenge you to wrestle with them personally; let them stimulate you to self-examination and church-examination in your local congregational setting.

If you are currently an elder, what occupies most of the time you spend in your official duties: administration (meetings, committees, organizational details) or pastoring (meeting with God's people, praying with and for them, admonishing them, instructing them, etc.)? Discuss with others how those time demands might be adapted so as to reflect a more Biblical view of office.

If you are not an elder in your local church, think about the visible work of the elders who hold office. Are they involved in pastoral care, or is their visibility only that of "meeting attender" or "committee member"?

On paper, make a list, based on Acts 20:28-31 and I Peter 5:1-4, of specific duties that arise from an understanding of the eldership as a pastoral office. Discuss this list with others, comparing your findings with your perceptions of the practice of elders in your congregation.

Ask yourself whether you genuinely love the people of God in your local church? (Yes, warts and all, lovable and unlovable alike! Be honest, and admit it if you view them more as porcupines or skunks than as precious lambs.) If you can't state that you do, allow me to challenge you today to pray that God will forgive your sin, and that God will grant you the grace to enable such love!

¹ Many authors have written on the subject; perhaps the most popular is John Naisbitt, *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives* (New York: Warner Books, 1982).

² *Net Results*, September 1994, cited in REACH, Vol. 20, No. 6, Church Development Resources of the Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI.

³ For example *Faith On The Line*, Victor Books, 1994, p. 11-54. Also see *Kingdoms in Conflict* and *The Body*, both by Colson.

⁴ *The Barna Report: An Annual Survey of Life-Styles, Values and Religious Views*. (Ventura, CA.: Regal Books), and Barna and William Paul McKay, *Vital Signs: Emerging Social Trends and the Future of American Christianity*. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books), 1984.

⁵ Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

⁶ Colson, *Faith on the Line*, pp. 58-59.

⁷ Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1970.

⁸ When I entered the ministry twenty-some years ago, the most sage advice I received was from an old elder who counseled me: “Make sure you love the people of God. You might become a great preacher, you may become an astute theologian, you may have the skills to be an effective administrator or church program manager, but if you don’t love God’s people, they’ll know it, and your ministry will suffer.” Sounds like he took it right out of I Cor. 13, doesn’t it?

CHAPTER 2

CHECK YOUR AIM

Whenever I've had opportunity to train new elders, I tried to show them what Scripture says about the pastoral character of the work they are called to do. When I do, I usually meet wide eyes, dry mouths, and panic-stricken expressions. It's one thing to be elected to a board that meets the 1st and 3rd Monday of the month for a couple of hours to talk about "church problems, programs and is- sues." It's quite another thing to be expected to provide Biblical pastoral care to a group of individual believers who aren't much different than yourself, altogether frail sinners who are only in Christ by grace. Who is up to such a task?

The only way an elder can keep his bearings in the face of such great responsibility is to keep his mind on his assigned *purpose*. He must be clear in his own mind about God's purpose for having elders in the first place. After all, God moved the Apostle Paul and Barnabas to "appoint elders in every city" (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). It is clear that He wants to care for His people in this way.

Yet in most churches when an elder is ordained to office he faces an array of duties that are at best confusing and at worst completely unrelated to God's pastoral purposes both for him and for the flock. He spends much time in meetings, hears reports from the preachers and other program staff members, is placed on several committees, or may even be asked to serve in some public relations or fund-raising position. Seldom these days is he asked or assigned to pastor people, to become involved personally and deeply in their life struggles and joys.

The reason for this, I'm afraid, is that we often confuse ministry *style* with pastoral *purpose*. In fact, this confusion has been so prevalent that in many churches the various styles represent ecclesiastical "political parties" that in turn represent "voting blocs" within the congregation. Consider the following (admittedly caricatures, but certainly accurate to my years of experience):

The "Dots and Crosses" Man: Inevitably, all who serve in Christ's church will run across an elder who is consumed with details. He is the one that is often assigned to be clerk of records, because he's very fussy about taking minutes of meetings and "dotting the i's and crossing the t's" of membership records. When the eldership deals with a difficult pastoral case, he'll be the one who wonders aloud what formal step of discipline you are up to in the sequence prescribed in Matthew 18 or by the denomination's book of church order. He'll be the elder who will view his purpose as that of explaining the church's "policy" regarding public sins to someone caught up in one. His intentions are honorable. He's not "cold"; he just wants to make sure things are done properly—"decently and in good order." To him, membership in the church is a technical, organizational thing; there are rules to follow, just as in the Rotary Club. Pastoral care for the flock is to be understood as careful "regulation" of the organization.

The Law and Order Man: Another character-type of elder in many churches today is the hard-nosed disciplinarian, more evident some years back, but still around (although less vocal these days). His approach is simple and straightforward; the elders are charged with preserving the faith and keeping the faithful in line. Since the devil tries to undermine both doctrine and life-style, the only defense against his treachery is a frontal attack. This type of elder willingly goes on the tough calls, the visits made to rebuke members who are weak in doctrine and/ or living in sin, the awkward and confrontational situations. His approach in every such situation would be simple and straightforward; "you sinned, you must confess your sin and find forgiveness." Period. He's not unloving, but he is blunt and tough. To him, membership in Christ is like belonging to an army: Christ's church is at war with

the Evil One, fighting against all his treacherous schemes. The elders are there to keep the soldiers of the Lord well-disciplined. Without discipline any army will fail.

The Sympathizer: Another character-type often seen in the eldership is the sympathizer. His name comes from his remarkable ability to identify emotionally with the church member with whom he is dealing. If he visits someone suffering from depression, he is very sensitive to all the depressing details of the individual's life, and can understand completely why he or she is suffering. If he meets an adulterer, the sympathizer will be most sensitive to the troubles at home that drove the man or woman into the arms of another for support. If he must deal with a young couple pregnant prior to marriage, his focus will minimize confrontation over the sin of premarital sex, and will be directed instead to the feelings the young couple will experience as they face becoming the subject of gossip as well as the parents of a baby they probably aren't ready to raise. This elder doesn't believe for a minute he is soft on sin, but focuses his gaze on the hurts and the misery sin has caused. He considers the practice of assessing blame and responsibility to be counterproductive; he believes sensitivity and understanding will build relationships with Christ much more effectively. To the sympathizer, membership in the church is much like a horizontal human relationship with all its emotional ups and downs. To keep the relationship alive is not a technical thing, nor a legal matter. It requires sensitivity, understanding, patience and love.

DIVINE PURPOSES FOR ELDER CARE

Perhaps you've seen these character-types at work in the life of the church. Admittedly, individual elders in the local church are more likely to be amalgams of several types, but I'm sure you recognize the stereotypes. Sadly, Biblical elders aren't supposed to be representatives of voting blocs within the church, the one more tough, the other more loving, the former ecclesiastical republicans, the latter ecclesiastical democrats. They are to represent God's interests, God's assigned purposes for the care of God's precious people, the flock under His ultimate care.

Let's examine just what God's purposes are. I suggest six, each clearly set forth in Scripture.

DEFENSE

The first is the defense of the flock. Notice the priority given the work of defense in Paul's instructions in Acts 20:28-31:

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

Set against this background of expected attacks upon the flock both from the outside ("savage wolves") and from within ("from your own number..."), the work of shepherding the flock can only be appropriately understood as defense. And the practices both pre-scribed and described in the next verse serve to underscore this work: "Be on guard" and "warning."

The shepherds in Israel in Biblical times knew that defense of the flocks was of paramount purpose. They knew what the Psalmist meant when he referred to God's "rod and staff" being a comfort. Listen to this extended description of just what that meant.

Every shepherd boy, from the time he first starts to tend his father's flock, takes special pride in the selection of a rod and staff exactly suited to his own size and strength. He goes into the bush and selects a young sapling which is dug from the ground. This is carved and whittled down with great care and patience. The enlarged base of the sapling where its trunk joins the roots is shaped into a smooth, rounded head of hard wood. The sapling itself is shaped to exactly fit the owner's hand. After he completes it, the shepherd boy spends hours practicing with this club, learning how to throw it with amazing speed and accuracy. It becomes his main weapon of defense for both himself and his sheep.¹

If the rod of the shepherd boy was a tool for defense, then the "rod" given to the NT elder for the defense of the flock of God is none other than the Word of God. That's the point of Paul's apostolic "warnings" referred to in v. 31—the words of the apostles becoming the NT Scriptures for the church of today. This squares as well with the message of Eph. 6:10ff. Faced with the painful truth that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms," the apostle Paul challenges the church to "put on the full armor of God." Central to that armor is the Bible: It provides both the "belt" and the "breastplate" of truth and righteousness that prepare the man of God for the conflict; it is the "gospel of peace" that readies him for battle; it provides the protective material for the "shield of faith"; it is the "sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:14-17).

In a later chapter, we'll explore the ways in which elders must read and apply the Word in the lives of the sheep and lambs. For now it is enough to say that elders who are in tune with God's assigned purposes for their work and for His flock will be men who diligently use the defensive tools God has provided, central among them is the Word of God.

RECONCILIATION

If defense is primary among the duties assigned by God to the shepherd, reconciliation is close behind. Who can forget Jesus' gripping parable of the lost sheep?

What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost (Matt. 18:12-14).

So many elders are content to manage church programs, chair church committees and all enjoy local church stability. But an elder who will not diligently pursue the church's lost sheep is failing miserably to live up to the pattern of the Good Shepherd. Ask yourself whether you (if an elder) or the elders of your congregation are faithful in chasing down the wandering "black sheep"? That's really the measure of whether you fulfill divine purpose. Remember the closely related passage of Luke 15, in which Jesus teaches 3 related parables, all of which place the focus on seeking and finding the lost (object), and *celebrating when it is found*. That's the "punch line" of the Parable of the Lost Son (often called the "Prodigal Son"); the elder brother refuses to celebrate! Can that parable be told of you? Of your church family? God forbid!

Returning to the Matthew 18 passage, it is instructive to notice the shape of reconciliation. It is not seen as tolerance, overlooking differences or ignoring sins. It is not "peace at any price." Rather, in the section immediately following the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus launches into urgent instruction about rebuking a brother who sins. This effort unto reconciliation, seeking both to "win" a brother back to the church and

to the church's "Father in heaven," is crucial to the work of reconciliation which the elders are called to do in the name of the Lord.²

The mandate of reconciliation appears several other times in the NT, none more important than II Cor. 5. In this passage the apostle is referring to his own divine appointment when he exults:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation... And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

Some may argue that it is *only* to the work of the apostles of the early church that this passage applies, but that is an unnecessary restriction. It is clear from the passage that the mandate is the ministry of the Word of God. That, in our age, is entrusted to the church as a whole (I Tim. 3:15) and especially to her pastors and teachers (II Tim. 2:2, 4:2).³

The point must be clearly understood. The "workers with the Word" in the church of the Lord must be gripped firmly by the pastoral purpose of the Lord to "seek and to save" the lost, to bring about reconciliation. The world and all its inhabitants are at enmity with God because of sin; only by the reconciling work of Christ the "logos," proclaimed in the preaching of the Word ("logos") of the NT church, can and will they be reconciled, that is, receive re-birth, new hope, new life and a new covenant in His blood.⁴ The elders must keep in mind this purpose. They are not merely to "solve problems," if in solving that problem they do not seek to bring the person into intimate fellowship with the Living God. In fact, the contrary is often true. Frequently an individual's problems (like marital problems or other family difficulties, depression, financial stress, or any one of a number of other such immediate crises) are circumstances that drive the person to their knees, and ultimately to the Lord. Such is the powerful teaching of both Psalm 32 and I Cor. 10:11ff.

RESTORATION

Close on the heels of reconciliation is the divine purpose to restore repentant and forgiven sinners to fruitful service within the Lord's church and world. Several passages make the point poignantly. Consider first of all John 21, where the thrice-denying Peter is not only forgiven by the Lord Jesus, but is *restored* to a position of trust and great pastoral responsibility in the wonderful and touching story that unfolds on the shores of Galilee and is recorded in vv. 15-17. He who denied thrice is now asked *twice* "do you love me unconditionally."⁵ To each query, Peter answers in the affirmative, but with a twist; each time he declares his love, but uses a different word, the Greek word "phileo," a less-intensive form of love that word books often render as "affection."⁶ Only after this exchange does Jesus change His question, asking the *third time* only "do you have affection for me." Yet, even though thoroughly-humbled Peter can only pledge a lesser form of loving commitment (gone is the brash assurance that "even if all fall away on account of you, I never will!" Matt. 26:33), nonetheless he is restored with the thrice-repeated commission "feed my lambs," "take care of my sheep," "feed my sheep."

Look next at Acts 9, the marvelous account of Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus. Don't stop in your reading however with what God did *to* him and *in* him. Read on to note carefully what God was to do *through* him. Listen:

But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel' (vv. 15-16).

Not only did God save Saul; not only did God forgive the sin of his stubborn-hearted and cruel persecution of the church; God *restored* Saul to a ministry of great responsibility. I often wonder how quickly we'd do the same? I know of godly and mature men and women who sinned, some grievously, in their lives. All of them dealt with their sin Biblically, that is, through genuine repentance and humility before God and others. Yet what characterizes the way their local churches have dealt with them is determined more by their past sin than by their status as forgiven and restored in Christ. Some of these dear people are never allowed any position of trust and responsibility, as if we who bear the legacy of the Reformation still believed and practiced the assignment of penance for sin! This ought not to be. God's purpose and goal is restoration to service!

The third passage to which I direct your attention is Philemon, Paul's little letter to his friend in Colossae. Sent along with Tychicus and the letter we know as *Colossians* (Col. 4:7-9), Paul returns run-away slave Onesimus to Philemon with a declaration and with a charge. The declaration is that, since Onesimus has now become converted to Christ, he is now "useful both to you and to me" (v. 11).⁷ The charge is to restore, rather than to punish this new brother: "Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good--no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother...welcome him as you would welcome me" (vv. 15-17).

I trust the point is clear. Elders must follow this NT pattern set by the Lord in both His earthly ministry and through His apostolic instruction. Those whom the Lord forgives, the Lord restores to fruitful service and ministry in His church. So must elders endeavor to do. Challenge people with their sin? Of course. Rebuke and call them to repentance? Absolutely! But never to stop there, the elders must seek to restore these now-transformed people into ministers of God! Such is God's purpose.

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

If those who are reconciled to God are to be restored, then those who are restored are to be "equipped for ministry." That is the teaching of Eph. 4:11-12, and is the next in the list of divine purposes God establishes for the work of the NT pastoral elder. The passage says: "And he himself (Christ) gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..." (Eph. 4:11-12 NKJV).

I would make several observations about this important passage. First, this text is often used to argue against the unbiblical practice of separating clergy from laity, thus establishing firmly the principle of the "priesthood of all believers." The real weight of the passage is to be found in recognizing that, while all of God's people are to exercise and utilize the "grace" given to each (v. 7), it is assigned to the special office-bearers known as "apostles... prophets... evangelists... pastors and teachers" to "*prepare* (equip) God's people for works of service." Often overlooked in the verse is that "pastors" in these verses is the same word used to describe "elders" in Acts 20 and I Peter 5.

This is to say that elders are given by God to train His people for their own work in the Kingdom of God. The work of elders enables and equips the works of the saints. It is a shameful indictment of most churches that the "80-20" rule is an accurate description of their deployment of the gifts of the Spirit: 80 % of the work is done by 20% of the people. The purpose of God in and through the eldership is precisely the opposite: the few assigned the duty of preparing and training the many for the ministry of all!

EDIFICATION

One of the most powerful images of the Old Testament--the central place and function of the Temple in the lives of the people of God--carries over and is developed in the New,

and serves as the fifth purpose to which we give our attention. In Christ, the temple changes from a place to a people (I Cor. 3:16). Yet, in several passages in the NT, the development, strengthening and cultivation of the church is referred to as the work of "edification." In Ephesians 4:12b, on the heels of the expression of God's desire that His people be equipped for ministry, we read of yet another purpose: "...so that the body of Christ may be built up..." Connected to the previous, it is nonetheless a distinct point. Here the Greek word connotes construction, the building of an edifice. When seen in connection with other Scriptures like I Peter 2:5 and II Tim. 2:15⁸ it becomes clear that the pastoral work assigned to the elders of the church aims to build God's people into a towering edifice of faith, a temple within which God delights to make His dwelling, a people/place of holiness and worship 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And once again, the construction method to be employed is that of the pastoral ministry of the Word. People are built by the Word.

Interestingly, and seldom acknowledged, are the corollaries of upbuilding. In Eph. 4:13, three are expressly identified. They are *unity*, *knowledge* and *maturity*.

In the *first* place, when the elders of the church are pastorally faithful in building up the church through the truth of the Word of God, pastorally faithful in equipping the membership for its ministry-service to Christ, the church and her members will and must exhibit dynamic *unity*. This unity will not be superficial, but will run deep into the bedrock of both commitment to Truth and shoulder-to-shoulder striving for Christ. This must serve as a pastoral goal for the local church, and one that is often overlooked by elders. So often, in the pursuit of the "truth" (sometimes only a term used for the self-justification of proving that one was "right") the local elders would allow for the breaking up of the body of believers. Those whose pastoral strategy seeks God's purpose will seek instead a faithfulness to the Truth that is evidenced by unity, not by division.

In the *second* place, the church will reach the *knowledge* of the Son of God. This is a profound notion, far beyond the mere knowledge of the text of Scripture (although certainly including it!). This knowledge reflects the intimacy between the believer and the Lord, about which the writer to the Ephesians wrote a couple of chapters earlier when he used compound words to describe vividly the believer's unity with Christ: "made-us-alive-with-Christ," "raised-us-up-with-Christ," "seated-us-with-him." The pastoral strategy for the local elders that best reflects the divine purpose for the church is a strategy that sees the people of God becoming truly and passionately pious, in the most intimate sense of that term.

And in the *third* place, the church that is properly equipped and built up will be a church that exhibits *maturity*, defined here (v. 13) as "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." The concept of mature manhood is best understood when contrasted with the "infant" behavior of the next verse. The mature will stand firm in Biblical doctrine and will not be blown about by distortions and new teachings; the mature will speak the truth lovingly and will not bite and devour each other verbally; the mature will participate in mutual encouragement and upbuilding and not in tearing down and the pursuit of individual aggrandizement.

HOLY LIVING

Finally, one cannot conclude any discussion of God's purposes for His church and her members without mentioning the primacy given to the goal of "holiness." Remember the words of Heb. 12:14, which reminds us that "without holiness no one will see the Lord." And as a careful study of the Old Testament roots of the concept will reveal, holiness embraces twin emphases: first, *separation* from sin and moral corruption, and second, *consecration* to the Lord's devoted service. Elders who are pursuing God's purposes will always aim to develop genuinely holy living among God's people. That

means confronting sin and calling for repentance of course. But it means more. It means teaching the high yet rewarding demands of service to a High and Exalted King. It means insisting that the profession of faith that people make with their mouths must be matched by the expression of faith revealed in their day- to-day existence. It means following up instruction with specific application that works out the details of the radical distinction between the citizens of the Kingdom of God and the citizens of this world.

I began by observing that many confuse eldership style with pastoral purpose. I caricatured common styles of elder work as “Dots and Crosses,” “Law and Order,” and the “Sympathizer,” and noted that when the focus of attention is laid instead on the divinely-ordained pastoral *purpose* of the elder’s task, questions of style fade into secondary or even tertiary priority. In Biblical metaphor, the elder is not a microscope; his vision must never be limited to narrow confines of a very specific and immediate problem, isolated on the glass slide placed beneath the lens of his examination. The elder is not a hammer: his purpose is not limited to striking hard and clean on the nail head of a specific sinner and his sin. Nor is the elder only an ear: his task is not just to listen sympathetically to the emotional cries of a believer in difficult circumstances. The elder is a shepherd, nothing more, nothing less. As shepherd, his work and his purpose must be guided by nothing other than the purposes of the Good Shepherd for the care and tending of His sheep. When those purposes are kept in mind, the elder will be a faithful shepherd; when those purposes are lost, the elder will be unfaithful, and open to the withering judgment of God pronounced over all who fail the flock.

1. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, p.93.

2. Although commentators differ in interpreting just who is meant by “the church” in v. 17, since Jesus’ words in this passage predate the church after Pentecost and thus predate the institution of elders and deacons, it is fair to assume that by “the church” is meant more than the aggregate gathering of believers. Key to the passage is the role of legal witnesses--the “two or three” mentioned in v. 16--on the basis of whose testimony God promises to act from His heavenly judgment seat. At the very least the passage suggests formal and official representatives operative within the church, which in the later NT pastoral teachings embrace the eldership (See e.g. I Tim. 3:5).

3. The NIV rendering “*message* of reconciliation” is a translation of the Greek word “logos” or “word.” The theological importance of that word is well understood to refer both to the Word-made-flesh in John 1 and to the Word-inscripturated that the NT church preaches and teaches. The ministers of the Word, originally the apostles but later to include the pastors and teachers of the church, are none other than “workers with the Word” (II Tim. 2:15). It is to them that the “ministry of reconciliation” is entrusted in our age.

4. Notice the inseparable connection between the Word preached on the one hand and spiritual rebirth and faith on the other, reflected in Romans 10:14-17 and I Peter 1:23-25.

5. The Greek word used by Jesus in the first two questions is the word “agape,” meaning self-denying, self-sacrificing, unconditional love.

6. s.v. “phileo” in Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957).

7. The name Onesimus means “useful”; before he was in Christ, he was more of a problem than a help to his master Philemon.

8. I Peter 2:5 explicitly describes the members of the Lord’s church as the “living stones” of the temple, who are also the priests of that temple, and whose lives are the spiritual sacrifices offered to the Lord. II Tim. 2:15, on the other hand, is more implicit, employing the imagery of the brick mason to describe the men who work with the Word.

CHAPTER 3

GIVING YOURSELF AN EKG

In the previous chapters, I argued for a pastoral definition and understanding of the office of elder, pointing to Acts 20, I Peter 5, and Eph. 4:11-12 for a clear and Biblical understanding of the role and purpose of the elder in the care of the flock. At the same time, it is important to note that the *first* assignment given by the Apostle Paul to the elders of the local church is *not* that of pastoral care of the flock, but oversight of one's self! Acts 20:28 begins: "*Keep watch over yourselves....*"

This is no accident. The Apostle Paul, who in Romans 7:7ff would painfully but incisively describe the powerful role of sin in the life of every believer, allows the local elder no room for self-deception. He knows full well sin's ability to cloud one's self-assessment. He knows well the Psalmist's prayer, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24). He knows that unless God grants us insight into our sins, we will delude ourselves with the pretense of self-righteousness. That is true of elders as it is of any other sinner before the face of God.

It is especially urgent for elders to see themselves correctly, to view themselves as God sees them, and that for several reasons. *First*, if the elder does not see himself with spiritual accuracy, he risks spiritual arrogance, and the flock suffers. Arrogance in the shepherd leads to a despising of the sheep and lambs, an attitude of superiority that allows no room for genuine loving care, no place for patience, no desire for forgiveness or restoration. *Second*, if the elder does not test himself rigorously, he falls under some of the most frightful curses of God to appear on the pages of Scripture. When God tests the false shepherds in the time of the prophet Ezekiel, He finds that they "did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock." God then declares, "I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock" (Ezek. 34:9-10). That is a frightening word, one that every shepherding elder in our generation will do well to take to heart.

How does an elder see himself correctly? There are many Scriptural diagnostic tools. One could, for example, use Colossians 3 to assess whether he has his mind "on things above," as opposed to being mired on earthly things. He could use I Timothy 3 or Titus 1 as the standard by which to judge his own spiritual maturity. If he does not find himself sufficiently mature to meet God's criteria for the eldership, he has reason to fall on his knees in repentance and confession and to plead for God's mercy and grace. He could assess his own spiritual gifts and his use of them according to the standard of Romans 12:3: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

Each of these passages and countless others provide spiritual tools with which to test one's own heart. All of them are worthy of careful and humble study and application.

Yet, some passages of Scripture speak directly and specifically to and about the heart of the pastor, the heart of the shepherd. They drive us inexorably to the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ. They also provide the standard for both shaping and ultimately judging the heart of those who shepherd His flock in His name. In the next pages, then, you must do your own work, you must give yourself a spiritual EKG. It will not do for me merely to explain what the many passages say; you must hold your own heart and life under the light of God's words so as to subject yourself to the thorough and unyielding scrutiny of God's own eye. Testing yourself in the light of these passages will reveal clearly to you whether you have a *shepherd's heart*.

So, take out your Bible, sharpen your pencil, and get to work. But before you do, pray that God will keep your heart humble, your mind teachable, your spirit malleable under the workmanship of the Potter whose clay you are.

MATERIALS FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Individual Study #1:

LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. Throughout Scripture, God uses metaphors to reveal His heart for His people, His way of dealing with them. Think of the well-known imagery of Father or of Judge. From early in the history of God's people, the picture of God as Shepherd has been crucial to the understanding of His heart and to the pattern of His care.

Read Genesis 48:15 and 49:24 in context. From these passages, describe what it means that God is Israel's shepherd.

2. After Moses brought God's salvation from Egypt (a powerful picture of the coming "exodus" from sin through Jesus Christ for all who believe), God appointed Joshua to provide leadership and care for His people. Again, Scripture uses the image of shepherd.

Read Numbers 27:15-23. What is the reason given for Joshua's appointment? What does Jesus' use of the same phrase in Mark 6:34 tell you about God's heart-concern for His church in every age?

3. The Bible calls David the "man after God's own heart." It is no coincidence that David grew up as a shepherd boy, nor that his background equipped him to be a shepherd-king whose responsibility to the nation was that of a shepherd looking after his flock. In fact, the shepherd image came to define what a godly king in Israel was to be!

Read all of the passages in context and answer the following questions:

- II Samuel 5:2 - How is the kingship defined?
- II Samuel 7:7-8 - What is kingly leadership called? How is the servant-leadership described in these verses different from the totalitarian authority of the typical ruler of that day?
- II Samuel 12:1-6 - How does Nathan the prophet describe Bathsheba, with whom

David sinned? How does the picture used in these verses describe the nature of David's sin?

- I Kings 22:17 - What does Micaiah prophesy will be the result of King Ahab's death?

- Psalm 23 - David, the shepherd-king, penned these words. How do they reveal God's heart? How should they shape a leader's heart and ways?

- Psalm 28:9 - To whom does David cry for help? Why?

- Psalm 78:71-72; Psalm 80:1 - How do these verses describe both the Lord and the Lord's chosen leaders? What lesson is there in these words for the church in our age?

4. From what you've just read, you know that the "heart of the Shepherd" was the standard God would use to test the faithfulness of the leaders of His people. Faithful leaders were faithful shepherds. Unfaithful shepherds fell under the stern indictment of the prophets, whose words would test prophet, priest and king alike to see if they had the heart of God. Listen to prophet Isaiah thunder forth against all who threaten God's own flock:

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young (Isaiah 40:10- 11).

Read the following passages and answer each of the questions:

- Isaiah 56:10-12- Who is described, and what is their sin?

- Jeremiah 23:1-4 - Who is addressed, what is their sin, and what will God do about it?

- Ezekiel 34 - Read the entire chapter carefully.

- 1) verses 1-4 - What was the sin of the leaders?

- 2) verses 7-8 - What was its spiritual cause?

 - 3) verses 5-6, 11-13 - Because of the leaders' sin, what happened to the flock?

 - 4) verses 17-21 - How did the flock follow their wicked example?
- Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24- Who is promised in each of these prophecies?

 - Jeremiah 25:34-38 - What does this reveal about God's reaction to unfaithful leaders?

 - Micah 5:4 - From the context, are you able to determine when this prophecy will be fulfilled?

Individual Study #2:

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Introduction: The life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth are replete with shepherd imagery. The Gospels reveal that the heart and will of God, the Shepherd of Israel, come to complete expression in the ministry of His Son Jesus. In one of the most vivid descriptions of who He is and what He has come to do, Jesus calls Himself "The Good Shepherd"--both claiming an identity with His Father, and revealing the sharp contrast to the false leaders of God's people in that day.

Consider carefully (in context) the following passages, and answer each question:

1. Matthew 9:36 (compare Mark 6:34) - How does this passage reveal that Jesus possessed a heart like that of His Father (see Numbers 27:17)? In Mark's account, Jesus' compassion led Him to do something specific. What? Why?

2. John 10 - Read this entire chapter before proceeding.
 - Describe concretely the differences Jesus identifies between Himself and false shepherds (verses 1-10).

What do the following verses reveal about Jesus' motives?

- verse 10

- verse 11

- verse 16

- verse 18

- verses 27-30

3. Matthew 26:31 - How does this passage (and its parallel in Mark 14:27) describe Jesus' view of His upcoming death?

4. Luke 15:1-7 -What does this parable (and its 2 companion parables in chapter 15) tell you about the heart of God's shepherd?

Individual Study #3:

LESSONS FROM THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

Introduction: In the Old Testament, the Shepherd of Israel (Psalm 23:1, Psalm 80:1, etc.) appointed prophets, priests and kings who were to care for, defend and preserve the flock of Israel.

In the New Covenant, Jesus--the Good Shepherd--commissions men to represent Him and to care for His flock (the church, the new Israel--Galatians 3:29) after His ascension to heaven.

A frightening thought, I'll admit. How can sinful men, with all of the hidden motives of their heart, hope to avoid the indictment and condemnation God had heaped upon the false shepherds of the Old Covenant? No wonder that those most familiar with the work of the eldership are most burdened by the thought of being ordained to that office.

1. Study John 21:15-17 in context (especially read John 13:31-38 and John 18:15-18, 25-27).

- How does the reinstatement of Peter (boastful but thrice-denying; humble then

thrice-commissioned) give hope to your heart?

- The commission given to Peter (21:15-17) focuses his attention away from his own failure and on to something else. What is that new focus?

- What is the connection between Jesus' questions about Peter's heart-love and His commission to care for the flock?

2. After the Lord's Ascension, recorded in Acts 1, the church grew quickly as "the Word of the Lord grew." Wherever the Apostles preached, God prepared hearts to receive His Word (Acts 16:14). But the Apostles and their companions could not stay for long where they preached. They had to travel, to preach throughout the world. The book of Acts is a blur of apostolic travel, preaching, teaching, equipping...and moving on again!

That's why it is of such great importance that we read of the appointment of elders "in each church of the region" (Acts 14:23; compare Titus 1:5). The elders were necessary because the Apostles' unique work was coming to an end. Soon they would be gone, replaced by others appointed to carry on after them.

- Why are elders to be appointed "in each local church" (Acts 14:23)?

- How does Titus 1:5 and the verses following shed light on the reason for and function of locally functioning elders?

3. In Acts 20:28-35 we read *the most significant passage regarding the eldership* in all of Scripture. Nowhere else is the task and responsibility of the elder of the local church so clearly defined. In few passages are the spiritual foes so clearly identified and so graphically described as in this one.

Please note in the first place, that the Apostle is speaking to the elders of the church in the city of Ephesus (verse 17). It is these elders to whom he gives the charge, "Be shepherds..." (verse 28). No mistaking the identity or the assignment! Take care of the Good Shepherd's flock! It is elder's work.

Note second, that several names are used (verse 28) for these men. As noted in the opening chapter, these men are called "elders" (presbuteroi) in verse 17; they are called both "overseers" (often translated "bishops"--episkopous) and "shepherds" (poimein) in verse 28. Sadly, the church has often, through the ages and in many places, missed the point; elders are the bishops and (pastoral) shepherds of the flock; these are not different offices reflecting the difference between protestant and catholic or episcopal churches. Bishops are not some hierarchical authority figure in a church bureaucracy; nor are "pastors" ("shepherds," literally) an office distinct from the eldership. "In every town" elders are to oversee the lives of the flock's representatives of the heart of the

Individual Study #4:

THE HEART OF A SHEPHERD

If Acts 20:28f provides the principle set of *instructions* for the duties of the eldership, then I Peter 5:1-4 is the preeminent appeal to the *heart-motives* of those entrusted with this office. In it, the Apostle Peter, commissioned by Jesus to “feed my lambs” in John 21, now passes along to the elders in the churches the same charge: “Be shepherds of God’s flock” (I Peter 5:2). And just as Jesus had linked Peter’s commissioning to Peter’s profession of love (“Do you love me, Peter?”), so Peter in turn, addresses the heart-motives of those called to care for God’s precious people.

Read I Peter 5:1-4 (also note the context of 3:8-chapter 4), and answer the following:

1. Why does Peter list his “qualification” in verse 1? How do those words add weight to the charge to follow?
2. What motivations (attitudes) are inappropriate for a Christ-like elder? Why?
3. Why is the example of the elder’s own lifestyle so crucial to his shepherding work (verse 3)?
4. What is the promise in verse 4, and why is it so important?
5. What do these 4 verses tell us about the relationship between elders and Christ Himself in regard to the care of the church?
6. What were the church’s circumstances (see the context) in that day? How would they affect shepherding work? What lessons are contained in this truth for the church today?
7. What must be the motivation of a Christ-like elder? Why is motive so important?

Individual Study #5:

AIM AT GOD’S TARGET!

Please read and study Ephesians 4:11-16 (include a careful reading of the prior context).

As you study these words, note first of all the list of offices that appears in verse 11: "...apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers." It is important to understand that not all of these are given by Christ to the church in every age. Apostles and prophets, for example, functioned in the first generation of the church after Pentecost, but died and were not replaced. They dominate the pages of the New Testament writings and the life of the early church but were not necessary for the ongoing life of that church. For subsequent generations of the church, the office(s) of pastor and teacher are especially relevant. Hence, the "Pastoral Epistles" of I - II Timothy and Titus were written to the church specifically to equip such men.

It is also important to note historically, that the term "pastor" has often been used to refer to ordained *II* clergymen" (as distinct from laymen). This is unfortunate, unwarranted and unbiblical. The term *II* pastors" in Greek is "poimenas" and as we've seen, means *II* shepherds." The term used here is the same one used in Acts 20:28 to prescribe the work of elders.

Some have understood the phrase "pastors and teachers" in Eph. 4:11 to refer to separate offices. Calvin saw the latter as referring to "Doctors of Theology," or professors. Others view pastors and teachers to refer to two kinds of elder: "ruling" (or pastoral) elders and "teaching" elders (meaning preachers). (See also I Timothy 5:17). The important thing to remember is that God wants His church to be well cared for, and provides representatives of His own loving protection as His gracious gift. Some of these were necessary in the process of laying the foundation just after Pentecost; others during the hectic and rapid spread of the church; and others in the preaching, teaching and shepherding care of the flock ever since. In every age, the one constant is that they who serve the flock in God's Name are to be shepherds, following after the heart of the Good Shepherd Himself.

Read the previous chapter, carefully studying the various passages referred to in the discussion of the pastoral purposes for elder work and answer the following questions:

1. From Ephesians 4:12-16, identify the *purpose* for which God granted the church the gifts of the offices listed in verse 11.

2. How, according to the next verses in this text, does one evaluate whether the divinely established pastoral purposes are being achieved?

3. Based on your study of this and the other passages discussed in chapter 2, evaluate the following specific activities. Assess which of these activities are in harmony with the purposes discussed in the chapter. Of those that are, try to identify *which purpose* each activity seeks to pursue.

- visits to the homes of each church member or family

- one-on-one discipleship visits

- leading Bible Studies in your home with immature believers who wish to grow

- rebuking a member who has a long-standing habit of using coarse language

- excommunicating a woman member who is living with her boyfriend and refuses to see you despite repeated attempts

- referring a potentially difficult marital problem of members of the local church to an area psychologist (alternatively, counseling the couple yourself)

- challenging a member's involvement in a psychotherapy self-help group

- challenging a 40ish single woman's membership in a computer dating service

- defending the proposed ordination to the office of deacon of a godly man who, prior to conversion and years earlier, had been alcohol-dependent (alternatively, who had been previously married and divorced)

- assigning/ appointing members to work in various local church ministries

- mediating disputes between church members

- mediating disputes between a church member and an unbeliever

MATERIALS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

The material presented in this section is offered with a view to use in meetings of elders, or in sessions offered as preparatory for nominees to office or potential office holders. It is designed to stimulate analysis of Scripture, promote discussion among godly men, and enable the existing elders to gain a glimpse into the hearts of the trainees. Hopefully what they see there will be *shepherd's hearts!*

Group Seminar 1:

DEVELOPING A HEART FOR THE CHURCH

1. What is the Church, according to Scripture? That is a big question today, one for which many have no clear answer. It may help to wrestle with the Biblical word-pictures or metaphors that God uses to teach us. **What is the metaphor used in each of the following? How does that metaphor instruct us concerning God's view of the church and how you should view it?** (The first one is done for you as an example.)

- Luke 8:21 (The church is a *family*. God's family is defined, not by blood, but by hearing and doing God's Word. Christ thinks of us as his brothers and sisters.)

- John 10:11ff

- I Timothy 3:15

- I Corinthians 12:12f

- Ephesians 2:19; Philippians 3:20

- I Peter 2:9-10

2. Do people in your area or congregation employ *worldly* concepts or patterns when they think of church leadership? (For example, do your people view leaders in the church as *trustees* of a Board? As *businessmen* in charge of the corporation? As *democratic representatives* of various interest groups?) How would you suggest the church combat such thinking?

What does Matthew 20:20-28 say about leaders in the church?

3. Read and discuss one of the Case Studies from the Appendix to this volume. (Suggested: Case Study 1 and 2.)

Group Seminar 2:

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S REQUIREMENTS FOR ELDER

Read once again the following passages, reprinted here for your convenience:

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (I Peter 5:2-4).

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap (I Timothy 3:2-7).

An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless--not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 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.

For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach - and that for the sake of dishonest gain (Titus 1:6-11).

1. Compile a list on a blackboard of the basic qualifications stipulated as requirements for the office of elder in these passages.

2. In what way are these qualifications *pastoral* in character? (Discuss how each qualification you have listed on the blackboard enables an elder to do the work of a shepherd, or conversely, how would the absence of each hinder shepherding work?)

3. Does *popularity* function as an (unwritten) qualification in any of these passages? How about in your church? Are there any steps that you should take to change the way your church selects elders so that the process is based on uniquely Biblical requirements? Be specific.

4. Read and discuss one or more Case Studies that appear in the Appendix to this volume. (Suggested: Case Studies # 3-5.)

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

I. The Overview of Church Discipline

A. INTRODUCTION

1. What is the Status of Church Discipline?
 - Historically
 - Today
2. Doesn't Church Discipline Contradict the Command not to Judge one another?
 - See *Matthew 7:1; John 7:24; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13*
 - Jesus and Paul teach that we *are* to judge one another in some ways, even though they do not want us to judge one another in other ways
3. Doesn't Church Discipline Contradict the Command to Love one another?
 - *2 John 6: "this is love that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment just as you've heard from the beginning that you should walk in it."*

B. WHAT IS CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

1. The Scripture – Hebrews 12:5-11

⁵My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; ⁶for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. ⁷It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. ¹¹All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

2. The Westminster Confession of Faith: **Chapter 30: Church Discipline**

(3) Church discipline is necessary for reclaiming and gaining fellow Christians who are guilty of offenses, for deterring others from committing similar offenses, for purging the leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honor of Christ and the holy profession of the gospel, and for averting the wrath of God which might justly fall on the church if it should allow his covenant and its seals to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.

(4) For the better attaining of these purposes, the officers of the church are to proceed by admonition, by suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a time, and by excommunication from the church, according to the nature of the offense and the degree of the person's guilt.

3. The Components of Church Discipline

- The Purposes of Church Discipline
- The Precepts of Church Discipline
- The Practices of Church Discipline

II. The Purposes of Church Discipline

- To Glorify God and Vindicate the Integrity/Honor of Christ (*1 Peter 1:14-16*)
- To Maintain the Peace/Purity of the Church (*Matthew 5:48*)
- To Restore and Edify the Offender (*Matthew 18:15, Galatians 6:1, 2 Timothy 2:25*)
- To Deter Others from Sin (*1 Timothy 5:20*)
- To Avoid God's Intervention (*1 John 5*)

III. The Precepts of Church Discipline

A. HOW IS CHURCH DISCIPLINE TO BE PUT INTO PRACTICE?

1. The Formative Aspect of Church Discipline
2. The Corrective Aspect of Church Discipline

B. FORMATIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

1. Preventative rather than Restorative
2. The Types of Formative Discipline:
 - *Preaching*
 - *Teaching*
 - *Modeling*
 - *Mentoring*
 - *Receiving New Members*

C. CORRECTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

1. Restorative rather than Preventative
2. The Types of Corrective Discipline:
 - *Warning*
 - *Correction*
 - *Rebuke*
 - *Admonition*
 - *Excommunication*

IV. The Practices of Church Discipline

A. WHAT ARE THE ATTITUDES AND MOTIVES FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

1. The Right Attitude for Church Discipline
 - Humility (*Galatians 6:1*)
 - Gentleness (*Galatians 6:1*)
 - Sobriety (*1 Corinthians 5:4-5*)
 - Love and Patience (*Proverbs 13:24*)
 - Sincerity (*Matthew 7:1-5*)
 - Familial Concern (*2 Thessalonians 3:15*)
2. The Wrong Motives for Church Discipline
 - Control (*Psalms 11:4*)
 - Anger (*James 1:20*)
 - Vengeance (*Romans 12:19*)
 - Self Promotion (*Psalms 138:6*)
3. The Right Motives for Church Discipline
 - Restoration (*Galatians 6:1*)
 - Salvation (*1 Corinthians 5:5*)
 - Teaching (*1 Timothy 5:20*)

B. HOW AND WHEN SHOULD CHURCH DISCIPLINE BE EXERCISED? (see Church Discipline chart)

The Scripture – Matthew 18:15-20

“If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private. If he listens to you, you’ve won your brother. If he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, that by the mouth of two or more witnesses, every fact can be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax gatherer. Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth, shall have been bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth, shall have been loosed in heaven. Again, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by my Father, who is in Heaven. For, where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst.”

1. For Private Sin and the Offender is Unrepentant
 - Private Rebuke (v. 15)
 - Plural Rebuke (v. 16) – if still Unrepentant after the Private Visitation
 - Public Rebuke (v. 17) – if still Unrepentant after the Plural Visitation
 - Excommunication (v. 17)

2. For Public Sin and the Offender is Unrepentant
 - Public Rebuke (v. 17)
 - For Serious Sin (1 Corinthians 5) – Excommunication

3. For Public Sin and the Offender is Repentant
 - For Serious Sin (Corinthians 5) - Some Disciplinary Action

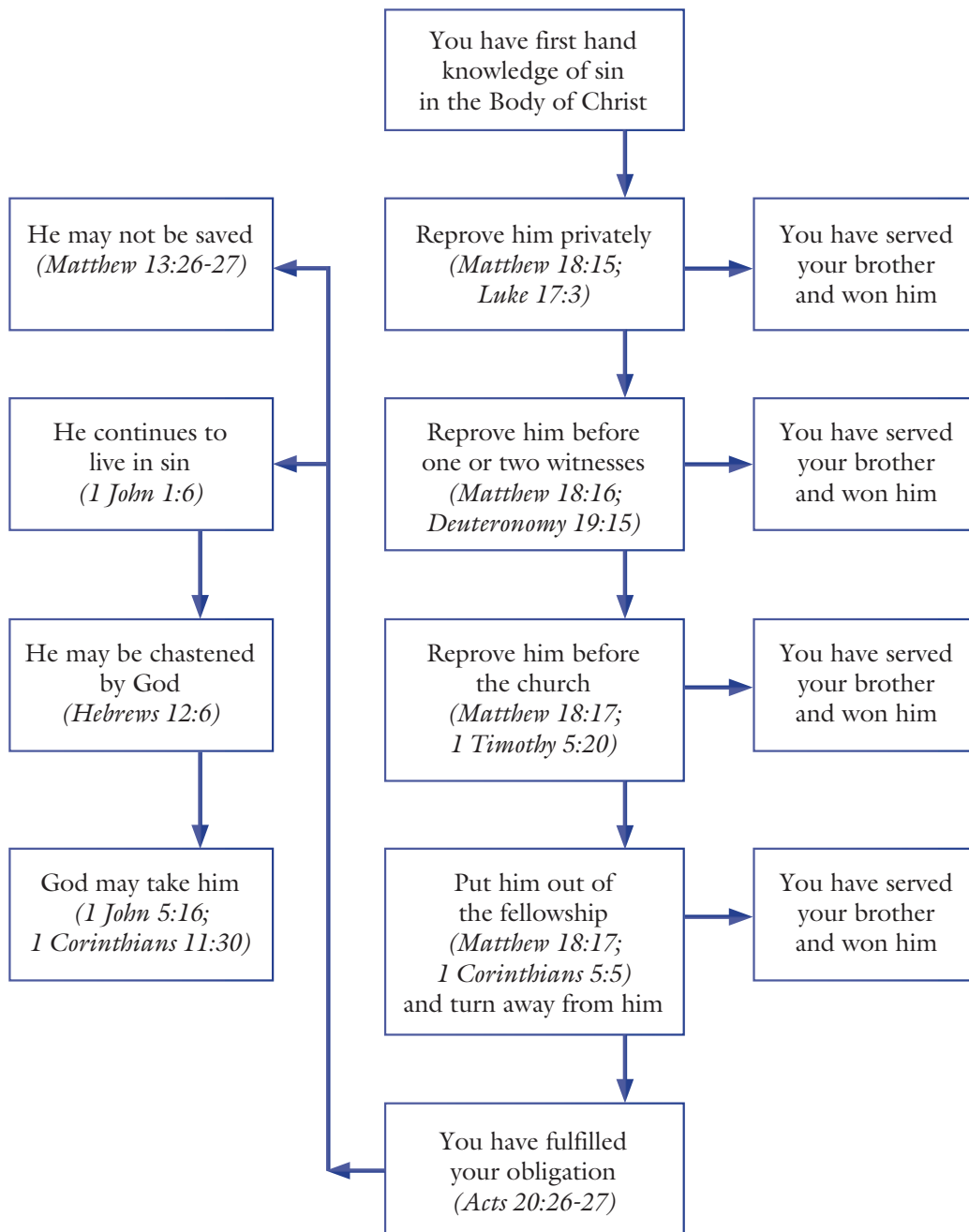
C. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS *NOT* EXERCISED?

1. The Offender continues to Sin; the Self-Deception of the Offender.
2. The Offender continues to Sin; Innocent Parties are Injured.
3. The Witness of the Church is Compromised to the World.
4. The Witness of the Church is Compromised to its Members.

D. WHY DO MOST CHURCHES *NOT* PRACTICE CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

1. Ignorance – Leaders uninformed or uneducated regarding why church discipline necessary
2. Misapplication of *Matthew 7:1* (“*Judge not, that you be not judged.*”)
3. Indifference to Sin – failure to take Sin seriously and the tendency of unsanctified mercy
4. Fear of Legal Reprisal – Leaders afraid of Lawsuits
5. Hassle – Leaders unwilling to spend the time and energy to administer church discipline
6. Declining Numbers – Leaders afraid people will leave the church
7. Fear of Man
 - *Reputation* – Leaders concerned with what people will think
 - *Popularity* – Leaders concerned with being liked by the people in their church
 - *Conflict* – Leaders concerned with avoiding the discomfort/potential disunity
 - *Misperception* – Leaders being misperceived as tyrants, heavy-handed
 - *Job Security* – Pastors afraid they will lose their jobs

Church Discipline Dealing with Sinning Christians



V. Summary

A. WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

- The Motivation – Love
- The Goal – Restoration

B. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

- For Us – God assuring us that He Loves us and that we are His Children
- For the Offender – God Restoring him to Godliness and Holiness
- For the Church – God Preserving the Peace and Purity of the Church and its Witness

ECO POLITY

I. The Overview of ECO Polity

A. WHAT IS POLITY?

- Ecclesiastical **polity** is the operational and governance structure of a **church** or of a Christian denomination.

B. WHY IS POLITY IMPORTANT?

- Polity *guards the gospel* from one generation to the next
- Polity *matures the Christian disciple*
- Polity *strengthens the whole church*, fortifies its holy integrity and witness
- Polity *equips and unifies the congregation* to better love their neighbors

II. Religions in the United States

- *See Major Religions/Denominations chart at the end of the chapter.*

III. Church Government: The 3 Primary Forms (Christendom)

A. HIERARCHICAL: episcopal or direct rule

- *See Episcopal Model chart at the end of the chapter.*

B. CONGREGATIONAL: full democracy or everyone votes

- *See Congregational Model chart at the end of the chapter.*

C. PRESBYTERIAN: representative or Elder rule

- *See Presbyterian Model chart at the end of the chapter.*

D. Which is correct? Why?

IV. ECO: Its Councils (Courts) (Denomination)

A. THE SYNOD (National Gatherings)

1. Its Purpose (3.0201)

- *The synod is the widest council of ECO giving support and guidance to the presbyteries and congregations*
- *The synod shall assess and proclaim the missional vision and theology of ECO*

2. Its Duties (3.0202)

- *Provide linkage of presbyteries to one another for mutual encouragement*
- *Correspond and connect with global mission partners, other denominations and ministry partners*
- *Maintain the Constitution and Essential Tenets of ECO*
- *Where appropriate and necessary, provide services (i.e., pension and health insurance) for ECO*

3. Its Meetings (selected 3.0203)

- *The synod commissioners shall meet at least bi-annually*
- *The meetings shall serve the purpose of encouraging presbyteries and churches in their mission as well as conducting the business necessary for the mission of ECO*
- *The Synod commissioners shall have the authority to amend and vote on proposed amendments to this Constitution submitted to the synod by at least two presbyteries*
- *Voting members of the synod are those individuals commissioned by and from their presbyteries*
- *Presbyteries shall commission an equal number of ministers and elders*
- *The synod, by its own rule, shall determine the number of commissioners from each presbytery, and each presbytery shall be entitled to at least one elder and one pastor commissioner*

B. THE PRESBYTERY

1. Its Purpose (3.0101)

- *The presbytery, as a covenant community, exercises apostolic authority by and for the nurture and benefit of its congregations, that the communities they serve may know the love and invitation of Christ*

2. Its Membership (3.0102)

- *The members of the presbytery are:*
 - *Its congregations*
 - *Pastors installed in service to member congregations*
 - *Pastors serving in validated ministries*
 - *Pastors honorably retired*

- *A presbytery shall be:*
 - *Constituted of at least 10 but no more than 20 congregations*
 - *Geographically connected*

3. Its Duties (selected 3.0103)

- *Promote the health of the covenant community*
- *Charter and receive new congregations into the presbytery*
- *Dismiss congregations to other presbyteries or denominations*
- *Exercise oversight of congregations that does not have an installed pastor, and appoint the moderator of such sessions*
- *Receive, dismiss, examine, install, provide pastoral care for, and discipline pastors*
- *Enroll, dismiss, and examine candidates and ordain them to called service*
- *Settle differences between congregations and pastors*
- *Propose and vote on amendments to the Constitution*

C. THE SESSION

1. Its Ministry (2.02)

- *Elders are given authority and responsibility, along with pastors, to oversee:*
 - *The spiritual health of the congregation*
 - *The congregation's faithfulness to God's mission*
- *1 Timothy 3:1-7 lists the Scriptural principles for the office of Ruling Elder*

D. THE ELDER

1. The OT Scriptural Basis for Elders

- *(Num 11:16-18)* So the Lord said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. **I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.**

2. The NT Scriptural Qualifications of Elders

- *(1 Tim 3:1-7)* This is a faithful saying: **If a man desires the position of an elder, he desires a good work. An elder then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know**

how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); **not a novice**, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover, he must **have a good testimony** among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

- (*Titus 1:5-9*) ... you should set in order the things that are lacking and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you: if a man is **blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination**. For an elder must be blameless, as a steward of God, **not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict**.

3. The NT Scriptural Role of Elders

- (*1 Peter 5:1-4*) The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a **witness** of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd the flock** of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but **being examples to the flock**; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

4. The Summary of the Role of Elders

- **Teach**
- **Lead**
- **Model**
- **Pray**

V. Greenville First Presbyterian Church: Its Councils (Courts) (Particular Church)

A. THE SESSION

1. Its Purpose & Composition (1.0601)

- *Every congregation is governed by its session*
- *The session consists of the elders elected by the congregation & the pastors*
- *The congregation shall determine the number of elders, their length of service, and the ordering of the session*
- *There shall be a minimum three active elders, plus the moderator*

2. Its Responsibilities (selected from 1.0603)

- ***Govern the congregation and guide its mission for Christ in the world***
- *Ensure that the **marks of the true church** are maintained:*
 - *The proclamation of the Word*
 - *The proper administration of the Sacraments*
 - *The exercise of discipline*
- *Oversee the **spiritual life** of the congregation:*
 - *Provide for the **worship and educational life** of the congregation*
 - *Provide for the regular **preaching of the Word***
 - *Lead the congregation in **ministries of evangelism and compassion***
 - *Provide for the regular **celebration of the Lord's Supper***
 - *Authorize the **administration of Baptism***
- *Oversee the **spiritual growth** of the congregation:*
 - *Provide means of **discipleship** for the congregation and new believers*
 - ***Provide for and nurture (shepherd) the common life** of the congregation*
 - *Receive and dismiss members*
- *Oversee the **administrative operation** of the congregation:*
 - *Exercise **oversight of all programs and finances** of the congregation*
 - *Train, examine, ordain and install those men and women chosen to serve as **elders and deacons***
 - *Lead and teach the congregation in matters of **stewardship and Christian living***
 - *Direct the **ministry of deacons, trustees, and all other organizations** of the congregation*
 - *Maintain a **Roll of Covenant Partners (members) and a Roll of Baptisms***
 - ***Bear witness against error in doctrine and practice***
 - *Serve in **judicial matters** pertaining to the congregation as specified in the **Rules of Discipline***
- *Involvement in **denominational matters** for the congregation:*
 - *Elect **elder commissioners** to the presbytery*
 - *Propose to the presbytery matters of **common interest or concern***
 - *Proposals to **amend this Constitution***
 - *The **maximum number of elder commissioners** which the session may elect shall be equal to the number of **pastors** serving the congregation*

3. The Current Members of the Session

See **The Session** list at the end of the chapter.

B. THE DIACONATE

1. The Scriptural Basis & Qualifications of Deacons (*1 Tim 3:8-13*)

- Likewise, deacons must be **reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith** with a pure conscience. But let these also first **be tested**; then let them serve as deacons, being found **blameless**. Likewise, their **wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful** in all things. Let deacons be **the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well**. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

2. Its Ministry (2.02)

- *Deacons lead ministries that nurture fellowship and caregiving within and beyond the congregation*
- *The session shall oversee and direct the ministry of the deacons*

3. Its Responsibilities

- 1 Timothy 3:8-13 lists the Scriptural principles for the office of Deacon
- Deacons may also be asked to preach and teach
- The congregation shall determine the manner in which they are to serve

4. The Current Members of the Diaconate

- *See **The Diaconate** list at the end of the chapter.*

C. THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

1. Its Purpose

- The care, custody, control, and management of the real and personal property of First Presbyterian Church as may be assigned by the Session

2. Its Responsibilities

- Matters dealing with **Real Estate** (Sale or Transfer)
- Matters dealing with **Risk Management** (Safety, Insurance, Security)
- Matters dealing with **Financial Oversight** (Capital Projects, Audit, etc.)

3. The Current Members of the Board of Directors

- *See **The Board of Directors** list at the end of the chapter.*

D. THE FPC FOUNDATION

1. Its Purpose

- The creation, expansion, and sustaining of Christian ministries at First Presbyterian Church

2. Its Responsibilities

- To encourage, manage, and disburse special gifts and bequests made by individuals for the purposes of the Foundation

3. The Current Members of the FPC Foundation

- See **The FPC Foundation** list at the end of the chapter.

VI. The Congregation (Membership)

A. ITS NATURE AND PURPOSE (selected 1.0101)

- *The Church is visible whenever two or more are gathered in Jesus' name*
- *The congregation is composed of members of the body of Christ who have covenanted together to engage in the mission of God in their particular context, with Jesus Christ as Head*
- *Congregations exist in a variety of forms yet have these ends in common: sharing the Good News of reconciliation to God in and through Jesus Christ, gathering people for divine worship and nurturing relationships for spiritual accountability and mutual ministry, all the while preparing disciples to be the sent people of God in the world*

B. BAPTISM AND MEMBERSHIP (selected 1.0301)

- *Through baptism an individual is joined to the Church universal, the body of Christ*
- *Through the covenant of membership an individual is joined to the local congregation, and is able to be fully involved in its mission to the local community and the world*

C. MEMBERSHIP IN A PARTICULAR CHURCH (selected 1.0303)

- *After completing a meaningful preparation process those who wish to embrace the congregation's covenantal expectations may become members by action of the session after hearing testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior*
- *For those not previously baptized, the Sacrament of Baptism is to be provided for these new members and offered to children under their care*
- *Individuals may testify to their faith in one of the following ways:*
 - *Public profession of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, after the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit yields personal faith in Christ*
 - *Reaffirmation of faith, for those previously professing faith publicly and already baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*
 - *If they are members of another congregation, this transfer of membership shall be communicated to the former congregation*

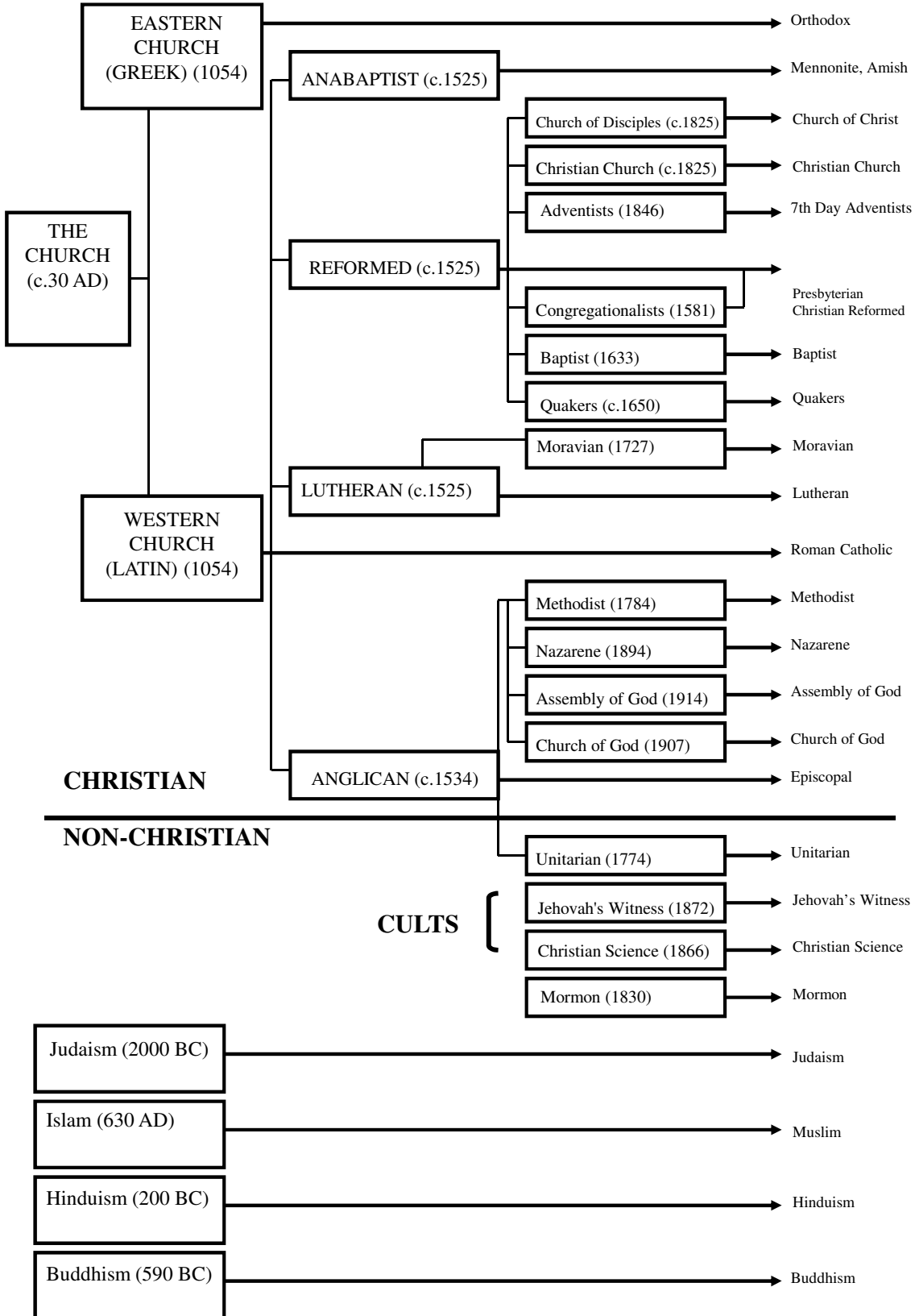
D. MEMBERSHIP EXPECTATIONS (selected 1.0305)

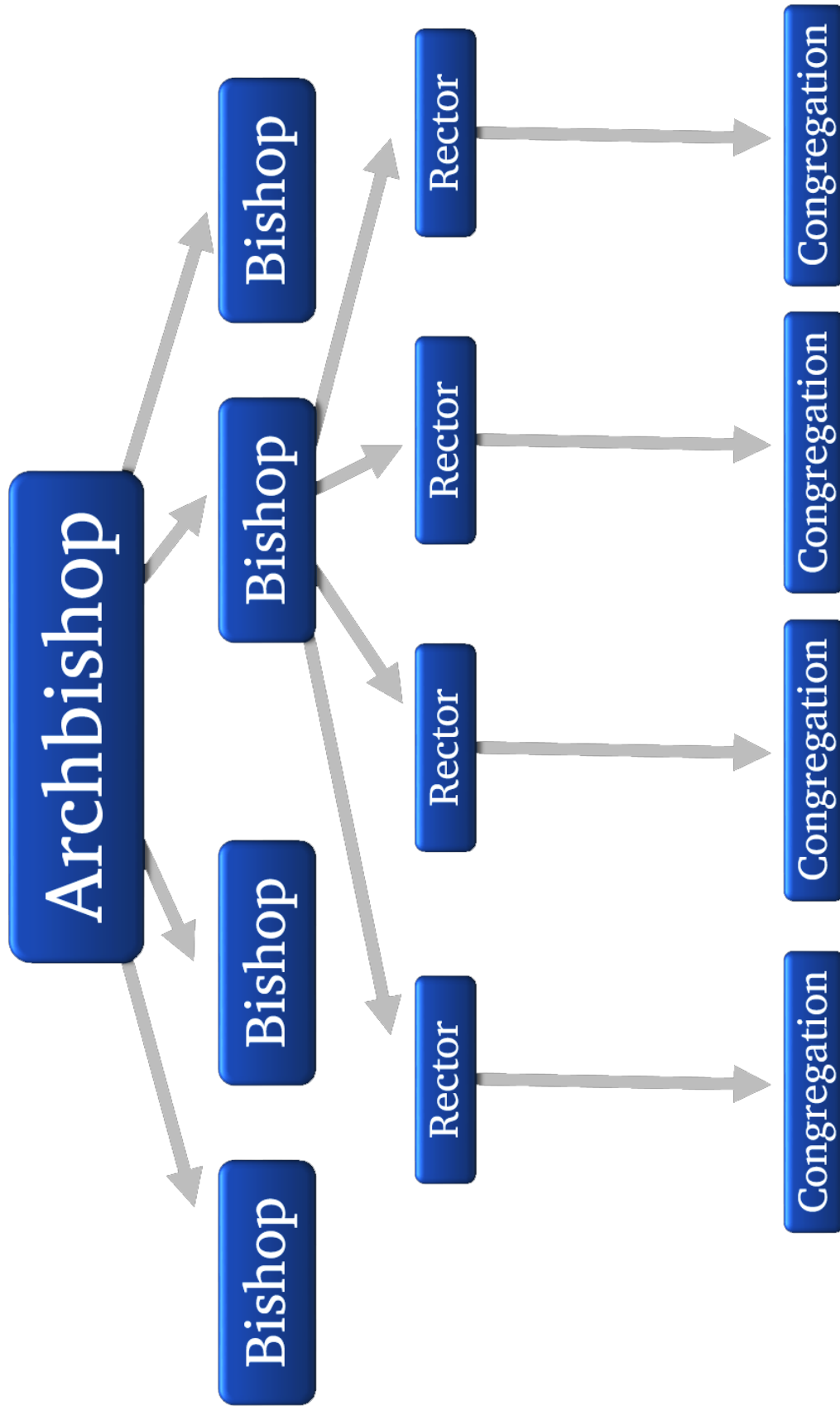
- *Each member shall strive to be faithful to Christ by participating in the congregation's worship, fellowship, and service on an ongoing basis*
- *Faithfulness in Christ involves each member's dedication of time and talents for the congregation's mission and ministry*
- *Faithfulness involves the stewardship of finances*

E. CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS (selected 1.0503)

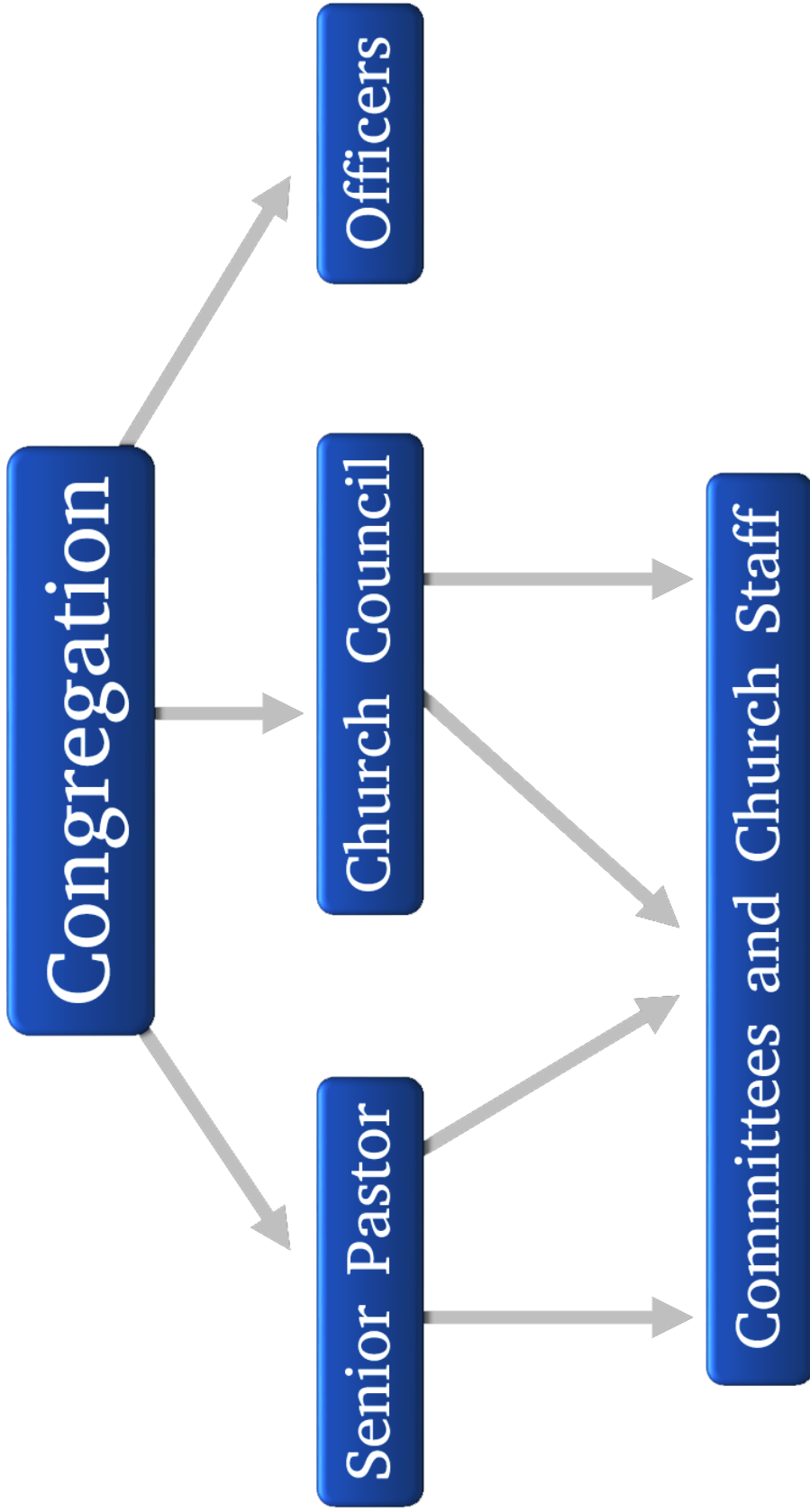
- *The following business items must be conducted at a congregational meeting:*
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 - *Buying, mortgaging, transferring, or selling real property*
 - *Requesting presbytery to dismiss the congregation to another presbytery of ECO*
 - *Requesting presbytery to dismiss the congregation to another Reformed body*
 - *Approving any amendments to the congregation's articles of incorporation, etc.*

THE MAJOR RELIGIONS / DENOMINATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES				
(Pre -1000 AD)	The Church Splits (1000 -1500 AD)	The Protestant Reformation (1500 -1550)	Various Denominations Created (1550 -1920)	Major Denominations of Today

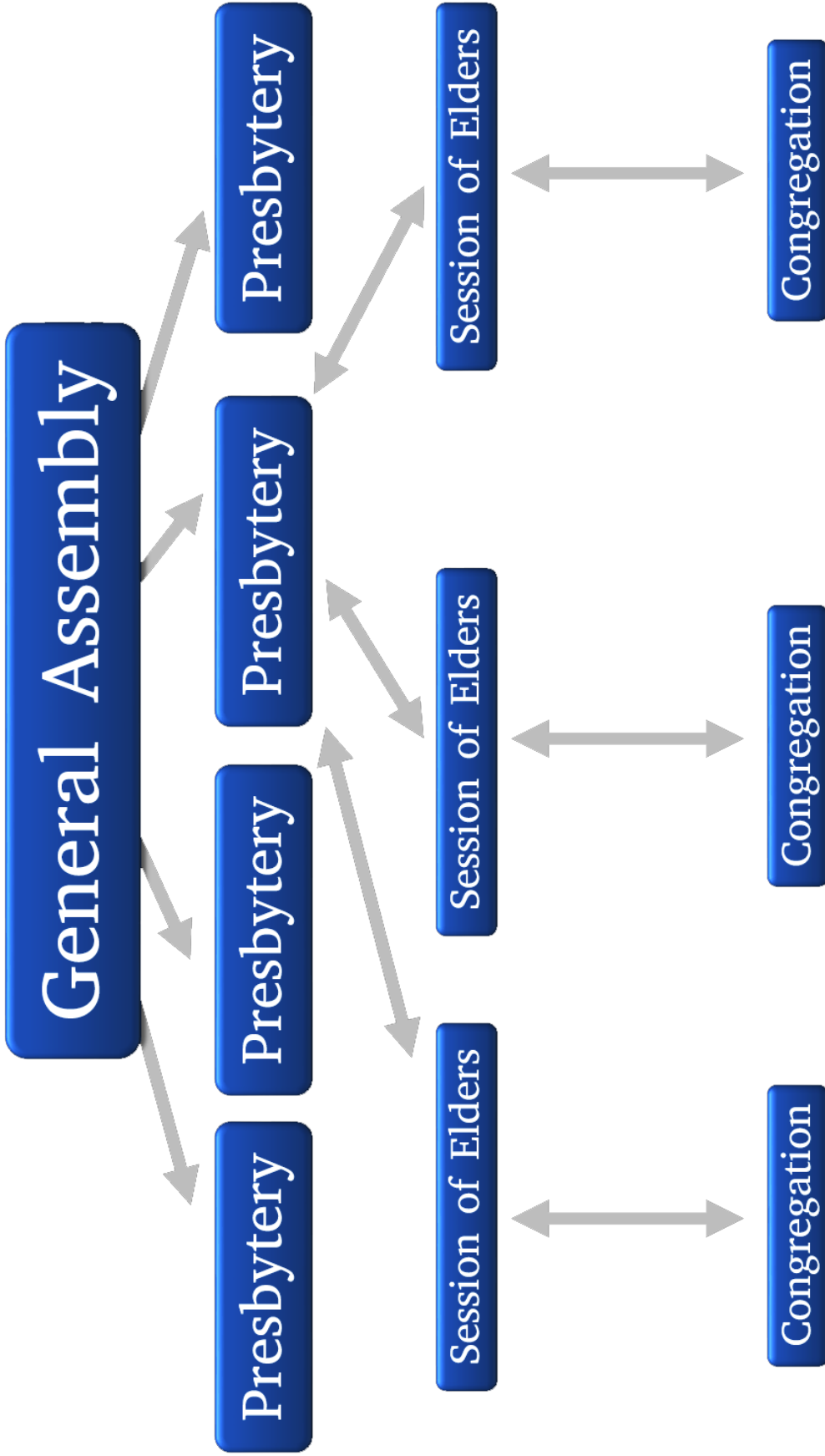




Episcopal Model



Congregational Model



Presbyterian Model

THE SESSION

ELDERS Class of 2018



JOEL CORLEY



LEE DIXON



RUSSELL
GUEST



ROB HASSOLD



BJ PATE



ROSS PLYLER



DOROTHY
RAMSEUR



GILL ROBISON



A.B. STEWART



RICK STURGIS



LISA
VAN RIPER



THOMAS
WILLCOX

ELDERS Class of 2019



ANNE BAILEY



BOB CARTER



NANCY
CAUDEL



MARK CLARY



DIXON
CUNNINGHAM



STEVE FINCH



BOB HOFFMAN



ERIN
LAUDERDALE



RICHY
MILLIGAN



BLAKE MYERS



DON NICKELL



JOHN
SATTERTHWAITE

ELDERS
Class of 2020



JOHN BRUCH



JIM CHILDS



DAVID DIXON



DAVE FORRY



RANDY
FOWLER



CARLTON
MANLEY



MARK
MASSINGILL



ALEX MCNAIR



JIM PRIVETTE



TED QUANTZ



MACK WARD

THE DIACONATE

DEACONS

Class of 2018



CLAY BROWN



JOSH
COPELAND



CATHERINE
CULLER



SAM HOWARD



BUTCH
MILLER



DAVID SEAVER



JOY STURGIS



JOHN TAYLOR



ANNA TEASLEY



JASON TERRY



JOE
THOMASON

DEACONS

Class of 2019



BOB AUGUST



JOHN BOMAR



ERIN
BRACKBILL



JAMES BRICE



COTY BRIGGS



TERRY
BRUNER



CAL HURST



DEBBIE
MARTIN



JOHN PARKER



DOUG STOKES

DEACONS
Class of 2020



CHAD BROWN



KEN CHAPMAN



JAMIE DANIEL



MARGARET
DIXON



CARL EVANS



BEN LANZ



LEE MILLER



ROGER
STODDARD



TREY SUGGS



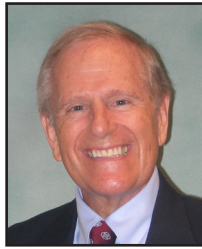
JIMMY SWIGER



NANCY
THOMAS

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Class of
2018



JIM CHILDERS



STEVE FINCH



DAVID
WEBSTER

Class of
2019



HARRY BOLICK



LANG CHEVES



JIM WOODSIDE

Class of
2020



ANNE BAILEY



DON NICKELL



JOY STURGIS

THE FPC FOUNDATION

Class of
2018



DIXON
CUNNINGHAM



BILL SYKES



RICHARD TAPP

Class of
2019



BERNIE ELLIS



WHIT JORDAN



SCOTT
MELZER

Class of
2020



CHRISTINE
BRUNER



CHUCK
SIMMONS



HARRY USSERY

ECO

Polity

and DISCIPLINE



ECO

A Covenant Order
of Evangelical
Presbyterians

CHAPTER ONE

Congregations and Their Covenant Partners

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

— *Matthew 28:18–20 (NIV)*

1.01 The Congregation

1.0101 Nature and Purpose

The Church is visible whenever two or more are gathered in Jesus' name. The congregation is composed of members of the body of Christ who have covenanted together to engage in the mission of God in their particular context, with Jesus Christ as Head. Each congregation should strive to be a tangible, if provisional, demonstration of the Kingdom of God. Congregations exist in a variety of forms yet have these ends in common: sharing the Good News of reconciliation to God in and through Jesus Christ, gathering people for divine worship and nurturing relationships for spiritual accountability and mutual ministry, all the while preparing disciples to be the sent people of God in the world.

1.0102 Covenants of Accountability

While believers experience their membership in Christ's body in spontaneous and unstructured gatherings, they fulfill the Lord's purposes best when they covenant to fulfill the biblical vision of membership in particular congregations. These covenantal relationships provide the real-life context for the Holy Spirit's ongoing transformation of believers into spiritual maturity, with the belief that these strong relationships nurture understanding, encouragement, correction, and discipleship-in-mission.

Similarly, though congregations discover that the Holy Spirit leads them to network with a variety of other congregations in order to fulfill the Lord's purposes, they covenant with congregations to form a distinct expression of the Church universal. These covenantal relationships provide the context for the Holy Spirit's continual reformation of the Church into more faithful and effective participation in God's mission. By submitting to the spiritual authority of their colleagues, leaders of congregations honor Christ as the Lord of the Church, and welcome the opportunity for renewal and refinement.

1.0103 Accountability to the Councils of ECO

A "congregation," as used in this *polity*, refers to a formally organized community which is chartered and recognized by a presbytery as provided in this *Constitution*, and which is governed by this *Constitution* pursuant to a membership agreement entered into between such community and the presbytery. In becoming covenant partners (also called members) of the congregation, Christ-followers put themselves under the spiritual leadership of the session and wider councils.

1.0104 Accountability within Mission Affinity Groups

A congregation shall also be a part of a Mission Affinity Group in order to increase accountability and encouragement and in order to spur one another on toward love and good deeds. These Mission Affinity Groups are ordinarily between 3-5 congregations organized around similar ministry settings and contexts. These contexts can include but are not limited to: size, geographic location, cultural or demographic similarities, or future ministry goals.

Mission Affinity Groups consist of session-to-session relationships. They shall meet together face-to-face at least once a year. They are also encouraged to find ways to connect through the year. In the annual meetings, each session should have at least 1/3 of the current elders in attendance. Mission Affinity Groups shall begin with the questions provided in the Narrative on the Health of Congregations, but may appropriately individualize those questions for their particular context.

Mission Affinity Groups may be formed beyond presbytery boundaries. It is the responsibility of the presbytery to ensure that all congregations within its jurisdiction are appropriately participating in these groups.

1.02 The Organizing of a Congregation

A congregation in ECO can be organized only by the authority of a presbytery and shall function under the provisions of this *Constitution*. When a group of Christ-followers discern that the Holy Spirit is leading them to become a congregation, they shall craft a covenant which reflects their desire to be bound to Christ and one another as a part of the body of Christ according to the government of ECO. After receiving this covenant and its signatures, it shall be the sole discretion of the presbytery to declare them an organized congregation, after which the congregation and the presbytery shall enter into a membership agreement. After receiving the presbytery's approval of these initial candidates, the congregation shall then proceed to elect its pastor(s), elders, and (if utilized) deacons. The presbytery shall prepare, examine, ordain, and install these newly elected individuals in this new congregation.

1.03 The Membership of a Congregation

1.0301 Baptism and Membership

Through baptism an individual is joined to the Church universal, the body of Christ. Through the covenant of membership an individual is joined to the local congregation, and is able to be fully involved in its mission to the local community and the world.

1.0302 Openness to All

The congregation's fellowship shall be open to all who seek to explore spiritual life by participating in the fellowship of the risen Lord. The congregation shall be gracious in providing pastoral care to all who consider themselves a part of the congregation, in the hope that these spiritual friends might become members of Christ's body. All who put their trust in Jesus Christ are welcomed to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

1.0303 Entry into Membership as Covenant Partners

After completing a meaningful preparation process as determined by the session, those who wish to embrace the congregation's covenantal expectations may become covenant partners (members) by action of the session after hearing testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. For those not previously baptized, the Sacrament of Baptism is to be provided for these new members and offered to children under their care. Individuals may testify to their faith in one of the following ways:

- a. Public profession of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, after the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit yields personal faith in Christ.
- b. Reaffirmation of faith, for those previously professing faith publicly and already baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. If they are members of another congregation, this transfer of membership shall be communicated to the former congregation.

1.0304 The Benefits of Covenantal Partnership

Becoming a covenant partner (member) is important not only to the congregation but even more importantly for the covenant partner (member), as they are positioned to receive encouragement, support, and correction that the Lord promises to those who share spiritual fellowship. In committing to the cause of a life lived in and through Jesus Christ, members grow in Christian community together to become more Christ-like. In Christian community, we realize the fullness of life together and life in Christ, and discover our unique place in a common mission and narrative of God's work. The covenant partner (member) and the congregation are both blessed and become a great blessing as they covenant together, intentionally, in Christ's work.

1.0305 The Congregation's Expectations of Covenantal Partnership

Each covenant partner (member) shall strive to be faithful to Christ by participating in the congregation's worship, fellowship, and service on an ongoing basis. Faithfulness in Christ involves each covenant partner's dedication of time and talents for the congregation's mission and ministry, in accordance to the gifts that God has bestowed upon him or her. Faithfulness also involves the stewardship of finances. As each covenant partner grows in the grace of giving, financial support of the congregation's mission and ministry should grow, along with tangible support for other ministries that advance God's Kingdom. Faithfulness to Christ also involves each covenant partner's dedication of time and talents for the congregation's mission and ministry. Those who are invited to take significant leadership roles in the congregation shall be spiritually mature, agree with the *Essential Tenets* of ECO, be carefully selected, be trained and/or mentored, and be supervised, and should ordinarily be members for at least a year. Covenant partners (members) of the congregation have differing abilities, varied spiritual gifts, and various levels of commitment. The session shall strive to create an effective disciple-making, ministry-discernment process, and equip covenant partners (members) to be missional Christians, being faithful to nurture covenant partners (members) into spiritual maturity and significant ministry.

1.04 Categories of Membership

The membership of a congregation of ECO includes baptized members and covenant partners.

1.0401 Baptized Member

A baptized member is a person who has received the Sacrament of Baptism, but has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

1.0402 Covenant Partner

A covenant partner is a person who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into the membership of the church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of this church, and participates in the church's worship and work. Covenant partners are eligible to vote in congregational meetings.

1.05 Meetings of the Congregation

Meetings of the congregation shall be governed by the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, unless by its own rule the congregation has adopted other procedures and practices.

1.0501 Quorum

The congregation shall hold an annual meeting and special meetings, as needed, with a quorum of ten percent of the covenant partners (members), unless the congregation, by its own rule, decides to alter the quorum requirement. Only those covenant partners (members) present may vote in a congregational meeting.

1.0502 Calling Meetings

Meetings of the congregation may be called by the session, by the presbytery, or by the session when requested in writing by one-fourth of the covenant partners (members). Adequate notice of

the meeting shall be given including announcement in worship a minimum of two Sundays prior, as well as the congregation's other avenues of communication.

1.0503 Business that must be conducted at a Congregational Meeting

The following business items must be conducted at a congregational meeting, but not necessarily at every congregational meeting; nor are congregational meetings limited to just the following:

- a. Electing elders and trustees (as well as deacons, if the congregation chooses (*see 2.03*)).
- b. Calling a pastor/head of staff, associate pastor, or to request the dissolution of such a calls.
- c. Buying, mortgaging, transferring, or selling real property.
- d. Requesting that presbytery dismiss the congregation to another presbytery of ECO, or requesting that the presbytery dismiss the congregation to another Reformed body. (Either requires a super-majority of two-thirds of the covenant partners (members) present).
- e. Approving any amendments to the congregation's articles of incorporation, bylaws or other corporate governing documents and dissolution, merger and any other corporate action requiring voting member approval.

Whenever permitted by law, both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be conducted at the same congregational meeting.

1.0504 Moderator

The pastor/head of staff shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the congregation. If it is impractical, or if considering actions pertaining to the pastor/head of staff, the pastor may ask another pastor or elder to preside with the session's approval.

1.0505 Secretary and Minutes

The clerk of session shall ordinarily serve as secretary for all meetings of the congregation. If it is impractical, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that meeting. The session shall review and approve the final form of the minutes.

1.06 The Session

1.0601 Purpose and Composition

Every congregation is governed by its session. The session consists of the elders duly elected by and from the covenant partners (members) of the congregation, along with the congregation's installed pastors and associate pastors. By its own rule, the congregation shall determine the number of elders, their length of service, and the ordering of the session. The minimum number shall be three active elders plus the moderator.

1.0602 Meetings of the Session

The pastor shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the session. If it is impractical, the pastor may ask another pastor or an elder to preside, with the session's approval.

Meetings of the session, including its quorum, shall be governed by the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, unless by their own rule a congregation has adopted other procedures and practices.

The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly, and shall meet at the call of the moderator, at the request of two or more elders, or at the request of the presbytery. Full minutes of the

meetings and actions of the session shall be maintained and shall be available to any covenant partner (member) of the congregation or at the request of the presbytery.

1.0603 The Responsibilities of the Session

The session has responsibility and authority for governing the congregation and guiding its mission for Christ in the world. In the Reformed tradition the marks of the church are the proclamation of the Word, the Sacraments rightly celebrated, and the exercise of discipline. Therefore, the session shall:

- a. Provide for the worship and educational life of the congregation; provide a place where the congregation may regularly worship; provide for the regular preaching of the Word by persons properly approved; oversee the planning and the ordering of the worship services of the congregation; lead the congregation in ministries of evangelism, compassion, and justice; and develop and nurture relations with other congregations.
- b. Authorize and provide for the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper; authorize the administration of Baptism; exercise due care and provide sufficient education to the congregation and to new believers that the Sacraments may be rightly received as means of grace.
- c. Plan for and provide means of discipleship for the congregation and new believers; provide for and nurture the common life of the congregation; receive and dismiss members; exercise oversight of all programs and finances of the congregation; train, examine, ordain and install those men and women chosen to serve as elders and deacons; lead and teach the congregation in matters of stewardship and Christian living; direct the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all other organizations of the congregation; bear witness against error in doctrine and practice; and serve in judicial matters pertaining to the congregation as specified in the *Rules of Discipline*.
- d. Elect elder commissioners to the presbytery and may propose to the presbytery matters of common interest or concern as well as proposals to amend this *Constitution*. The maximum number of elder commissioners which the session may elect shall be equal to the number of pastors with voting authority as set forth in Section 2.0401 serving the congregation. The session is encouraged in its selection of elder commissioners to promote representation in areas of difference recognized as the basis of discrimination and inequality in church and society, namely race, ethnicity, gender, ability/disability, and age.
- e. Maintain a Roll of Covenant Partners (members) and a Roll of Baptisms. The session may by its own rule grant affiliate status to members of a congregation in another Christian denomination.
- f. The session shall adopt and administer an annual budget and shall publish it to the congregation. The session shall purchase appropriate casualty and liability insurance for the program and property. The session shall arrange for the congregation to participate in the synod's plan of health and welfare benefits and program of assistance and relief covering the congregation's pastors and full-time lay employees, as such plan is described in the membership agreement (unless the congregation and the synod agree to an alternative plan providing comparable coverage).
- g. Arrange for an independent financial review annually, and shall publish the report to the congregation and to the presbytery.
- h. Evaluate the congregation's ministry and mission and report to the presbytery for reasons of mutual accountability and the sharing of best practices.

CHAPTER TWO

Ordained and Commissioned Ministry

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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.

— *Ephesians 2:10, 4:11 – 13 (NIV)*

2.01 God's mission requires ordered leadership

Before the foundation of the world, God set a plan of mission to reconcile the world to Himself and chose to use the Church as His instrument of reconciliation. It is incumbent upon all members of the body of Christ to participate in the work of building one another up in Christ and be deployed for His work in the world. To that end, excellent leadership is critical in the Church today, and that is not limited to ordained leaders. God calls some individuals to exercise specific formal leadership, which is modeled after the mind of Christ. The Church should strive to develop strong leaders in every area of life and ministry who lead in the way of Jesus. While pastors, elders, and deacons have unique roles in the structure of the Church, we recognize the importance of ordained and lay leadership at every level.

While the specific offices recognized in ECO are elder, deacon, and pastor, ECO acknowledges that additional lay leadership is needed for effective ministry.

2.0101 Qualifications of officers

Elders and deacons are ordained and installed by the session. Pastors are ordained and installed by the presbyteries. Ordaining bodies must ensure that all officers adhere to the *Essential Tenets* of ECO. Failure of officers to continue to adhere to these standards is grounds for a session or presbytery to remove an officer from service according to the *Rules of Discipline* in this *Constitution*.

2.0102 Preparation and ordination of officers

Ordaining bodies shall determine the appropriate course of preparation, ensuring that candidates for ordination meet all the requirements in this Form of Government. After demonstrating their readiness for service through an examination process, the candidates shall affirm their vows and be ordained by representatives of that ordaining body in a service of public worship.

2.0103 Ordination vows

- a. Do you believe in One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and do you boldly declare Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and acknowledge Him Lord of all and Head of the Church?
- b. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the unique witness to Jesus Christ and the authority for Christian faith and life?

- c. Will you receive, adopt, and be bound by the *Essential Tenets* of ECO as a reliable exposition of what Scripture teaches us to do and to believe, and will you be guided by them in your life and ministry?
- d. Relying on the Holy Spirit, do you humbly submit to God's call on your life, committing yourself to God's mission, and fulfilling your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture and guided by our confessions?
- e. Will you be governed by ECO's polity and discipline? And will you be accountable to your fellow elders, deacons, and pastors as you lead?
- f. Do you promise to be faithful in maintaining the truth of the Gospel and the peace, unity, and purity of the Church?
- g. Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- h. (1) (for elder) Will you be a faithful elder, watching over the people in their worship, nurture, and service to God?

(2) (for deacon) Will you be a faithful deacon, serving the people, urging concern and directing the people's help to those in need?

(3) (for pastor) Will you be a faithful minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the good news, teaching the faith, showing the people God's mission, and caring for the people?

2.0104 Questions to the congregation

- a. (for elders/deacons) Do we, the covenant partners of this congregation, accept (names) as elders or deacons, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the *Constitution* of ECO?

Do we agree to pray for them, to encourage them, to respect their decisions, and to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?

Having answered these questions in the affirmative, those to be ordained shall kneel, if able, for prayer and the laying on of hands by other ordained officers.

The Moderator will say to the ordained: You are now elders or deacons in the Church and for this congregation. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Amen.

- b. (for pastor) Do we, the covenant partners of this congregation, accept (name) as our pastor (associate pastor, assistant pastor), chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ, according to the Word of God and the *Constitution* of ECO?

Do we agree to pray for him (her), to encourage him (her), to respect his (her) decisions and to follow as he (she) guides us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?

Do we agree to pay him (her) fairly and provide for his (her) welfare as he (she) works among us?

Will we listen to the word he (she) preaches, welcome his (her) pastoral care, and honor his (her) servant leadership and authority as he (she) seeks to honor Jesus Christ?

Having answered these questions in the affirmative, the candidate to be ordained and/or installed shall kneel, if able, and the presbytery shall, with prayer and the laying on of hands, ordain the candidate to the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and install him (her) to the particular pastoral responsibility. The presbytery will invite other ordained pastors and elders to join in the laying on of hands.

The presiding member of the presbytery will say: You are now a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a pastor (associate pastor, assistant pastor) for this congregation. Whatever you do, in word and deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Amen.

2.02 The Ministry of Elders

Elders are given authority and responsibility, along with pastors, to oversee the spiritual health of the congregation as well as the congregation's faithfulness to God's mission. Elders shall be elected by the congregation.

2.03 The Ministry of Deacons

Ordinarily, the biblical office of deacon shall be utilized by the congregation. Deacons lead ministries that nurture fellowship and caregiving within and beyond the congregation. Deacons may also be asked to preach and teach. The congregation shall determine the manner in which they are selected for service. The session shall oversee and direct the ministry of the deacons.

2.04 The Ministry of Pastors

Pastors are to use the spiritual gifts for ministry, with a particular emphasis on the gifts of teaching and leadership. A pastor is to nurture the spiritual health and maturity of the body of Christ in order that the body may be equipped to partner with God in His redemptive work in the world. In addition to adherence to the *Essential Tenets*, presbyteries shall ensure that candidates for ministry are adequately trained for their task. Training shall include a bachelor's degree (or equivalent) and ordinarily a master's degree from an accredited theological seminary in biblical or theological studies, as well as appropriate hands-on ministry experience and mentoring. Candidates for ministry must demonstrate significant theological and biblical competence as well as the necessary skills for pastoral ministry. All pastors (Pastor/Head of Staff, Associate Pastor, and Assistant Pastors) serving an ECO congregation must hold their ordination in ECO or be received as affiliate pastors by the presbytery of jurisdiction.

2.0401 Categories and responsibilities of pastors

Pastors are members of the presbytery. Thus, their ministry and calling is confirmed by the presbytery or its authorized committee that is responsible for examining and credentialing pastors. All members of the presbytery have voice in its deliberations; the right to vote is given to those serving in a pastoral capacity in a congregation. In order to ensure maximum deployment for the kingdom of God, as well as ensuring the core integrity of theology and ministry, categories and responsibilities of pastors are as follows:

- a. *Pastor/Head of Staff* – Pastors/Heads of Staff or Co-Pastors/Heads of Staff are called by the congregation and installed by the presbytery and shall have the responsibility to moderate session and congregational meetings. They are members of presbytery with voice and vote.
- b. *Associate Pastor* – Associate pastors are called by the congregation and installed by the presbytery upon recommendation of the session. They are members of presbytery with voice and vote.
- c. *Assistant Pastor* – Assistant pastors are called by the session or pastor/head of staff according to rule of the session. The session, acting as a pastor nominating committee, may propose to the congregation that an assistant pastor be called as an associate pastor. Assistant pastors are members of presbytery with voice and vote.

- d. *Transitional Pastor* – Transitional pastors are called by the session and may be used in times of transition when a congregation is without a pastor/head of staff. Transitional pastors shall have the same responsibilities and privileges in presbytery as pastors/heads of staff.
- e. *Pastor in a Validated Ministry* – Pastors may be authorized to serve in validated ministries outside a local congregation. Validated ministries might include service in a presbytery, educational institution, hospital, or a variety of mission fields. The presbytery shall validate and annually review the pastor’s ministry. Ordinarily, pastors in validated ministry will also be expected to take part in the life and ministry of a local ECO congregation. Pastors in validated ministries have voice and may be granted the right to vote if serving as a part-time assistant pastor.
- f. *Affiliate Pastor* – A pastor may be ordained in a different body and may become an affiliate member of ECO. Affiliate pastors must adhere to the *Essential Tenets* of ECO. The presbytery shall determine the suitability of an affiliate pastor. If an affiliate pastor serves as pastor/head of staff of a non-union ECO congregation, then the affiliate pastor shall have voice and vote in presbytery; otherwise the affiliate pastor shall just have voice.
- g. *Honorably Retired Pastor* – Pastors may request the status of honorably retired. Honorably retired pastors will have voice but no vote in presbytery unless they are serving as an assistant or transitional pastor. Otherwise each honorably retired pastor is encouraged to become a covenant partner of a congregation, with voice and vote.

2.0402 Pastoral Covenant Groups

Pastors and ministries are healthier when there are opportunities for mutually supportive relationships. Therefore, pastors shall participate in a pastoral covenant group with other pastors. The purpose of this group is to coach, encourage, and pray for one another as they strive for greater missional effectiveness. This pastoral covenant group shall:

- a. Explore the health of each other’s current ministry.
- b. Explore the future objectives of each other’s ministry.
- c. Address challenges and obstacles to meeting those objectives.
- d. Share best practices and insights.
- e. Explore each other’s physical, spiritual, relational, and emotional health.

These pastoral covenant groups are self-selective. Under its Committee on Ministry, the presbytery shall ensure that all pastors are participating in a pastoral covenant group.

2.05 Commissioning for particular service

2.0501 Deployment of officers for greater missional ministry

In order to better facilitate the mission and ministry of a presbytery and its congregations, as well as to maximize the gifts of the totality of the body of Christ, it is often advantageous to commission elders and deacons to more extensive levels of service than ordinarily afforded these offices. There are two general ways in which officers may be commissioned to provide pastoral leadership and administer the sacraments. First, they may serve in various ways within a congregation under the supervision of the session and a pastor/head of staff or transitional pastor. Second, an elder or deacon may be commissioned to serve in the role of pastor/head of staff for a congregation or a new church development. It is appropriate to refer to individuals serving in either capacity as “lay pastor.” The session shall pre-authorize the administration of the sacraments, and also determine the process by which pre-authorization occurs.

2.0502 Service within a congregation under the session and Pastor/Head of Staff

The Church exists wherever two or more are gathered in the name of Jesus. Therefore, it is appropriate to celebrate sacraments in these smaller units. These smaller units include, but are not limited to: small groups, missional communities, retreats, leaders of satellite congregations, and house church gatherings. If an officer has been commissioned by the session to lead these groups in mission or ministry and has been appropriately trained, he or she shall be authorized to administer the sacraments in these communities. The pastor and the session shall oversee those who are commissioned to such service within a congregation. This commission shall be for a period of twelve months and may be renewed indefinitely.

2.0503 Service within a congregation as the Pastor/Head of Staff

The presbytery, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee, may authorize an elder or deacon to be commissioned to serve in the role of pastor/head of staff of a local congregation or a new church development. With approval of the presbytery, these individuals could moderate session and congregational meetings, administer the sacraments and, where allowed by law, perform marriages. The presbytery shall ensure training to include theological education, and ministry skill development as well as continued mentorship during this commission. This commission shall be for a period of twelve months and may be renewed indefinitely. Because these officers are fulfilling the pastoral role for a congregation, they shall be enrolled as members of presbytery during their commission and be given voice and vote at presbytery meetings.

CHAPTER THREE

Councils of ECO

Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times.

— *Exodus 18:24–26 (NIV)*

3.01 Presbytery

3.0101 Purpose

The presbytery, as a covenant community, exercises apostolic authority by and for the nurture and benefit of its congregations, that the communities they serve may know the love and invitation of Christ.

3.0102 Membership

The members of the presbytery are its congregations, pastors installed in service to member congregations, pastors serving in validated ministries, and pastors honorably retired. Ordinarily, a presbytery shall be constituted of at least 10 but no more than 20 congregations, and geographically connected (affinity networks are non-geographically connected groups [see 5.0201]). A group of congregations may petition to the Synod Executive Committee to form a non-geographical presbytery for reasons of language.

3.0103 Duties

The presbytery has the authority and pastoral responsibility to:

- a. Promote the health of the covenant community to the end that its congregations and members may bear fruit for the Kingdom of God.
- b. Charter and receive new congregations into the presbytery.
- c. Dismiss congregations to other presbyteries or denominations.
- d. Exercise special care and oversight of congregations that do not have an installed pastor, and appoint the moderator of such sessions.
- e. Dissolve congregations when their mission work has ceased.
- f. Authorize the celebration of the Lord's Supper beyond particular congregations.
- g. Receive, dismiss, examine, install, provide pastoral care for, and discipline pastors.
- h. Enroll, dismiss, and examine candidates and ordain them to called service.
- i. Validate the call of ministers to service beyond a congregation.
- j. Settle differences between congregations and pastors.
- k. Propose and vote on amendments to the *Constitution*.

- l. Elect commissioners to wider councils of ECO, including the synod. In the selection of such commissioners the presbytery is encouraged to promote representation in areas of difference recognized as the basis of discrimination and inequality in church and society, namely race, ethnicity, gender, ability/disability, and age.
- m. Promote and encourage the missional effectiveness of its congregations. Each presbytery shall develop an instrument to assist its congregations in their annual review and narrative report of their ministry and mission. These annual reports shall be reviewed and discussed by the presbytery with each congregation's session.

3.0104 Meetings

The presbytery shall organize itself to accomplish these tasks and fulfill these responsibilities, and may delegate authority to elected committees and commissions. The presbytery shall hold stated meetings at least twice a year. Meetings of the presbytery, including its quorum, shall be governed by the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, unless by its own rule the presbytery has adopted other procedures and practices. Each elder commissioner elected by a member congregation shall be entitled to vote at stated meetings. In addition, member pastors with voting authority as set forth in Section 2.0401 shall also be entitled to vote at stated meetings. The voting members of the presbytery shall have the authority to elect a governing council and to vote on all matters set forth in Section 3.0103. The voting members may also delegate to the presbytery governing council authority with respect to any such matter, other than the chartering or dissolution of congregations. Each presbytery shall develop a manual of administrative operations setting forth its structures and procedures.

3.0105 Required Committees

a. Committee on Ministry

Each presbytery shall elect a Committee on Ministry which shall have broad responsibility for the pastoral relationships of the presbytery. The Committee on Ministry shall have at least eight members, all elected by the presbytery, with membership being made up of an equal number of elders and pastors. No more than two members may be from the same congregation. The Committee on Ministry shall be available to any session or pastor of the presbytery. The presbytery shall, by its own rule, delegate and determine the authority and functions of the Committee on Ministry. Included in this authority that may be delegated to the Committee on Ministry is the ability to approve ordination of candidates, transfer of pastors to and from its jurisdiction, and approve commissions for installation and ordination.

b. Permanent Judicial Committee

Each presbytery shall elect a Permanent Judicial Committee as specified in the *Rules of Discipline*.

3.0106 Presbytery Governing Council

The presbytery governing council shall consist of a number of individuals determined by the presbytery, with an equal number of elders and pastors. The presbytery council shall be responsible for the records, finances, policies, and procedures of the presbytery and shall perform any functions delegated to such council by the presbytery. The presbytery council shall have the authority to elect corporate officers (including a chief executive officer) and to hire staff to perform any such functions. The council shall review the chief executive officer's performance annually.

3.0107 Records

The presbytery shall keep full and accurate records of its proceedings and make them available on request to any session or pastor of the presbytery. Each presbytery shall annually arrange for an independent financial review and shall publish the report in its minutes.

3.0108 Finances

The presbytery may develop programs, engage staff, adopt budgets, and acquire and manage resources as it deems expedient to the mission of Christ. To support its function and ministry the presbytery may, by its own rule, apportion expenses to its congregations.

3.0109 Policies and Procedures

Each presbytery shall establish processes and procedures for recruiting, training, and encouraging candidates to the ministry.

Each presbytery shall adopt a policy for the prevention of sexual misconduct among its members. This policy shall govern the presbytery's congregations unless a particular session, with the consent of the presbytery, adopts its own policy.

3.02 Synod

3.0201 Purpose

The synod is the widest council of ECO giving support and guidance to the presbyteries and congregations. The synod shall assess and proclaim the missional vision and theology of ECO.

3.0202 Duties and Authority

The synod shall:

- a. Provide linkage of presbyteries to one another for mutual encouragement.
- b. Correspond and connect with global mission partners, other denominations and ministry partners.
- c. Maintain the *Constitution* and *Essential Tenets* of ECO.
- d. Where appropriate and necessary, provide services (i.e., pension and health insurance) for ECO.

3.0203 Meetings of Synod Commissioners

The synod commissioners shall meet at least bi-annually. The meetings shall serve the purpose of encouraging presbyteries and churches in their mission as well as conducting the business necessary for the mission of ECO. Meetings of the synod, including its quorum shall be governed by the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, unless by its own rule the synod has adopted other procedures and practices. The Synod commissioners shall have the authority to elect and remove members of the synod executive committee and to amend and vote on proposed amendments to this *Constitution* submitted to the synod by at least two presbyteries. Voting members of the synod are those individuals commissioned by and from their presbyteries. Presbyteries shall commission an equal number of ministers and elders. The synod, by its own rule, shall determine the number of commissioners from each presbytery, and each presbytery shall be entitled to at least one elder and one pastor commissioner.

3.0204 Synod Executive Council

The synod executive council shall consist of between six and nine individuals, with at least three being elders and the remainder being ordained pastors. The synod executive committee shall have the power to:

- a. Constitute, divide, and dissolve presbyteries, and settle disputes between them, provided any such action is approved by two-thirds of the members of the council then in office.

- b. Receive and approve union presbyteries into ECO, provided any such action is approved by two-thirds of the members of the governing board then in office.
- c. Adopt an annual budget and may receive, hold, manage, sell and expend funds and other assets.
- d. Elect corporate officers (including a president) and hire staff.
- e. Represent ECO to ecumenical and mission partners when needed.
- f. Develop a manual of operations for its activities and functions.
- g. Own the distinctive trademarks, trade names, and other intellectual property of ECO and protect against unauthorized use thereof.
- h. Exercise all other powers of a nonprofit corporation under applicable law.

3.0205 Records

The synod shall keep full and accurate records of its proceedings and make them available on request to any member presbytery or congregation. The synod shall annually arrange for an independent financial review and shall publish the report in its minutes.

3.0206 Finances

To support its function and ministry, the synod may, by its own rule, apportion expenses to its presbyteries and/or affinity networks.

3.0207 Policies and Procedures

The synod shall develop a manual of administrative operations setting forth its structures and procedures.

CHAPTER FOUR

Civil Authority and Property

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

— *Psalm 24:1 (NIV)*

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.

— *Psalm 127:1 (NIV)*

4.01 Incorporation and Trustees

Where permitted by civil law, each congregation, each presbytery, and the synod shall cause a nonprofit corporation to be formed and maintained through which it shall act legally. If incorporation of a particular congregation or presbytery is not permitted under applicable law, individual trustees shall be elected from the congregation's membership in the same manner as for electing elders, or by rule of the presbytery for its trustees.

4.0101 *The Congregation*

The nonprofit corporation of a congregation so formed, or the individual trustees, shall have all powers of a nonprofit corporation under applicable law, including the power to:

- a. Receive, hold, encumber, manage, and transfer property, real or personal, provided that in buying, selling, and mortgaging real property, the trustees shall act only after the approval of the congregation, granted at a duly constituted meeting.
- b. Accept and execute deeds of title to such property, and hold and defend title to such property.
- c. Manage any permanent special funds for the mission of the congregation.

A congregation's session shall serve as the governing board of the nonprofit corporation of such congregation unless the corporation's governing documents provide for a separate corporate governing board, in which case such governing board shall operate under the authority of the session. The session or other governing board shall elect an elder, pastor, or staff member to serve as the chief executive officer of the corporation and may elect other corporate officers as it deems appropriate or as required by law. The powers and duties of the trustees shall not infringe upon the powers and duties of the session.

4.0102 *The Presbytery*

The corporation of a presbytery so formed, or its individual trustees, shall have the power to receive, hold, encumber, manage and transfer property, real or personal. The presbytery shall not, however, direct the use of, co-sign, or guarantee any debt instrument issued by a member congregation or any other entity (except a subsidiary of the presbytery), nor will it guarantee performance of any instrument securing such debt, be it mortgage or deed of trust or a security agreement.

A presbytery's governing council shall serve as the governing board of the corporation of such presbytery. Such governing board shall elect corporate officers as it deems appropriate or as required by applicable law.

4.0103 The Synod

The corporation of the synod so formed shall have the power to receive, hold, encumber, manage, and transfer property, real or personal, to accept and execute deeds of title to such property, and to defend title to such property.

The corporation of the synod shall have the power to manage any permanent special funds accepted by and for purposes directed by the synod.

The powers and duties of the synod corporation shall not infringe on the powers and duties of the synod, and the corporation shall in all matters be subject to the direction, review, and control of the synod exercised through the synod governing board.

The Synod's executive committee shall serve as the governing board of the corporation of the Synod. Such governing board shall elect corporate officers as it deems appropriate or as required by applicable law.

CHAPTER FIVE

Ecumenicity and Union

Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.
– 2 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV)

5.01 Ecumenicity

ECO recognizes that God calls all to one faith, one Lord, one baptism in the body of Christ, the Church. The center of this life together is based in the covenant promises of the Lord, who is known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We trust in Christ as Savior and commit to life together with Christ as our Lord. As the called people of God, we desire unity of ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit. As heirs of the Reformed tradition, we recognize that we are but one expression of that spiritual life together. We desire communication, cooperation, and partnership with other Christian groups, noting common goals where possible and conversation where core differences exist.

5.02 Reformed and Presbyterian

We cherish our common history with all expressions of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. We wish to partner in mission and ministry, while confessing the common historical biblical and orthodox faith as given to us in God's Word, our authority for faith and life.

5.0201 Union Congregations

Congregations, historically members of the PC(USA) or other Reformed denominations, who wish to maintain that membership while joining with ECO and who recognize and teach the *Essential Tenets* may request to join a presbytery of ECO after a period and process of discernment, and a two-thirds vote of the congregation at a duly called meeting. This joint witness shall be formed in communication with the presbytery or comparable governing body of each denomination. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, any mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases where the other is permissive.

5.0202 Union Presbyteries

A presbytery of ECO may unite to form a union presbytery with one or more comparable councils or governing bodies, each of which is a member of another Reformed body, with the approval of the governing body of which each is a part. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, any mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases where the other is permissive. A union presbytery shall be created by the adoption of a plan of union by two-thirds vote of each presbytery or governing body that is party to the union. The synod and/or governing body having jurisdiction over each of the uniting bodies shall approve the plan of union.

5.03 Other denominations

Out of our common Protestant heritage, partnership and joint congregational witness will be encouraged where mission, ministry, and collegiality can be coordinated and approved by the appropriate governing bodies, and where the *Constitution* and *Essential Tenets* of ECO can be followed.

CHAPTER SIX

The Constitution

6.01 Composition of the Constitution

The *Constitution* of ECO includes the *Essential Tenets*, the polity, and the *Rules of Discipline*.

6.02 Amending this Constitution

Presbyteries may overture the synod of ECO for changes in this *Constitution* as follows:

- a. Two presbyteries must concur in the proposed changes and overture the larger body with changes.
- b. The synod may amend and transmit the proposed changes to the *Constitution* to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote, and a two-thirds majority of the presbyteries shall be required for adoption.
- c. Any amendment to the *Essential Tenets* shall require an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the voting members of the synod present and voting. In addition, the affirmative vote of each presbytery for such amendment shall require an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the voting members of such presbytery present and voting.

Rules of Discipline

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

— Galatians 6:1-2

1.0 PURPOSE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

- 1.1 All human beings are sinners by nature, by influence, by choice, and by action. Sin is destructive, contagious, parasitical, polluting, and disabling. The purpose of church discipline is redemptive: to correct and restrain sin; to help the spiritual growth of people; to achieve justice and compassion for all participants involved; to correct or restrain wrongdoing in order to bring members to repentance and restoration; and to correct the weaknesses, mistakes and offenses of individuals and councils. Appropriate reasons for discipline are actions contrary to the faith and practice to which, according to Scripture, all Christians are called, or which are contrary to the *Constitution* of ECO.
- 1.2 Discipline in the church should be appropriate to the nature of the error or offense. All acts of discipline, both for individuals and councils, should be weighed carefully, keeping in mind the purpose of discipline. In all cases, the process and procedures used in church discipline shall afford all the opportunity to be heard and shall be fair and just to all participants.
- 1.3 The traditional biblical obligation to conciliate, mediate, and adjust differences without strife is not diminished by these *Rules of Discipline*. The biblical duty of church people to “come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court...” (Matthew 5:25) is not abated or diminished. It remains the duty of every church member to try (prayerfully and seriously) to bring about an adjustment or settlement of the quarrel, complaint, delinquency, or irregularity asserted.

2.0 JUDICIAL PROCESS

- 2.1 Judicial process consists of two types of cases: remedial and disciplinary. A remedial case is one in which (a) an erroneous decision or action, or (b) an omission or failure to act, may be corrected by a council with higher or wider authority. A disciplinary case is one in which a church member or officer may be censured for an offense. Church officers are pastors, elders, and deacons. An offense is any act or omission by a member or officer of the church that is contrary to Scripture or the *Constitution* of ECO.
- 2.2 The responsibility and authority for discipline in a particular church belongs to the session. The responsibility and authority for discipline of pastors and lay pastors belongs to the presbytery. The responsibility and authority for remedial cases and appeals is the presbytery and the synod.
- 2.3 Each council shall enforce and recognize the judgments, decisions, and orders of every other council acting under the provisions of the *Rules of Discipline*.
- 2.4 Judicial process ends when a church officer or a member renounces the jurisdiction of the church. Should the accused in a disciplinary case renounce the jurisdiction of the church, the clerk or stated clerk shall report to the governing body both the renunciation and the status of the matter at that time, including the name of the accused, the date and fact of renunciation during an investigation or hearing, and the charges filed.

3.0 JUDICIAL COMMISSIONS

- 3.1 Each presbytery shall elect a permanent judicial commission from the pastors and elders within the presbytery. Once five (5) presbyteries have been established, the synod shall elect a

permanent judicial commission. In the event five (5) presbyteries are not established, the synod shall elect a judicial commission to act in specific cases. Each commission shall be composed of pastors and elders in numbers as nearly equal as possible. When the commission consists of an odd number of members, the additional member may be either a pastor or an elder. The synod commission shall be composed of no fewer than five members distributed equally, insofar as possible, among the constituent presbyteries. The presbytery commission shall be composed of no fewer than five members, with no more than one of its elder members from any one of its constituent churches.

- 3.2 The term of each member of a permanent judicial commission shall be six years. Commissioners shall be elected in three classes, with no more than one half of the members to be in one class. When established for the first time, one class shall serve for two years, the second class for four years, and the third class for six years. Any vacancy due to resignation, death, or any other cause may be filled by the electing governing body, which may elect a person to fill the unexpired term.
- 3.3 No person who has served on a permanent judicial commission for a full term of six years shall be eligible for reelection until four years have elapsed after the expired six-year term. No person shall serve on more than one judicial commission at the same time.
- 3.4 The quorum of a judicial commission shall be a majority of the members. For judicial process, the session is a judicial commission and the quorum of a session for judicial process shall be the moderator of the session and a majority of the elder members.
- 3.5 When a church or council is a party to a case, members of a judicial commission who are members of that church, or of that council, or of churches within that council shall not participate in the trial or appeal of that case.
- 3.6 A judicial commission shall exercise the powers and responsibilities entrusted to it by these *Rules of Discipline*, and is authorized to deliberate upon and conclude any matters submitted to it under these Rules. A judicial commission may hold a pre-hearing conference, require the exchange of lists of witnesses and exhibits, may request written briefs from the parties, provide for reasonable discovery of evidence, set reasonable schedules for discovery, briefs, and the hearing of the case, and take such other action as may be necessary to provide for a full and fair hearing for all participants. A judicial commission shall have full authority and power to control the conduct of the hearing and of all parties, witnesses, counsel, and the public, including removal of them, to the end that proper dignity and decorum shall be maintained. Questions as to procedure, the competency of witnesses, or the admissibility of evidence arising in the course of a hearing shall be decided by the judicial commission after the parties have had an opportunity to be heard.

4.0 REMEDIAL CASES

- 4.1 A remedial case is initiated by the filing of a complaint with the stated clerk of the governing body having jurisdiction. A complaint is a written statement alleging: (a) an erroneous decision or action, or (b) an omission or failure to act. The filing of a complaint does not, by itself, stay enforcement of the decision or action.
- 4.2 The action or decision of a council or of a judicial commission may be suspended by a stay of enforcement. To seek a stay of enforcement, the complainant or appellant shall deliver to the stated clerk a copy of the complaint or notice of appeal and a request for stay containing a short statement of the basis for challenging the decision or action, and a short statement of the harm that will occur if the decision or action is not stayed. The stated clerk shall promptly transmit the request for stay to all members of the judicial commission eligible to participate in consideration of the complaint or appeal. A stay of enforcement shall be entered when it is signed by at least three of the members of the judicial commission having jurisdiction to hear the complaint or appeal on the decision or action. A stay of enforcement has no evidentiary or procedural effect on the merits of the case.
- 4.3 Remedial complaints shall be filed within ninety days. Those eligible to file such a complaint are: (a) a pastor or an elder enrolled as a member of a presbytery, against that presbytery, and the complaint is filed with the synod; (b) a session against the presbytery, and the complaint is filed

with the synod; (c) any council against any other council of the same level, and the complaint is filed with the council immediately wider than the council complained against; (d) a member of a church against the session of that church, and the complaint is filed with the presbytery.

- 4.4 A complaint shall include the following: (a) the name of the complainant and the name of the respondent; (b) the alleged erroneous decision, action, omission, or failure to act which shall include the date, place, and circumstances thereof; (c) the reasons for the remedial complaint; (d) the interest or relationship of the complainant, showing why that party has a right to file the complaint; and (e) the relief requested.
- 4.5 A copy of the complaint shall be delivered to the respondent and the complainant shall file with the stated clerk a receipt signed by the respondent or an affidavit of personal service.
- 4.6 The respondent shall file with the stated clerk a concise answer within forty-five days after receipt of the complaint, and shall furnish a copy of the answer to the complainant. The answer shall admit those facts alleged in the complaint that are true, deny those allegations that are not true or are mistakenly stated, and present other facts that may explain the situation.
- 4.7 The hearing in a remedial case shall be conducted by the judicial commission. Each of the parties in a remedial case shall be entitled to appear and may be represented by counsel, provided, however, that no person shall act as counsel who is not a member of ECO. No member of a judicial commission shall appear as counsel before that commission while a member. Counsel need not be a paid representative or an attorney-at-law.
- 4.8 A member of a judicial commission is disqualified if the member is personally interested in the case, is related by blood or marriage to any party, or has been active for or against any party. Any member of a judicial commission may be challenged by any party, and the validity of the challenge shall be determined by the remaining members of the permanent judicial commission.
- 4.9 At the hearing on a remedial complaint, the parties shall be given an opportunity to make opening statements, present evidence, and the parties shall be given an opportunity to make final statements, the complainant having the right of opening and closing the argument. The judicial commission shall then meet privately to decide the case.
- 4.10 The judicial commission shall then decide the case. If the complaint is sustained either in whole or in part, the commission shall either order such action as is appropriate or direct the lower governing body to conduct further proceedings in the matter. A written decision shall be prepared and shall become the final decision when a copy of the written decision is signed by the moderator of the judicial commission. A copy of the written decision shall be delivered to the parties to the case. The decision shall be filed with the stated clerk of the governing body that appointed the judicial commission.

5.0 DISCIPLINARY CASES

- 5.1 A disciplinary case is initiated by submitting a written statement of an alleged offense to the clerk of session or the stated clerk of the presbytery. The statement shall give a clear narrative and allege facts with supporting information, that, if proven true, would likely result in disciplinary action.
- 5.2 Upon receipt of a written statement of an alleged offense, the clerk of session or the stated clerk of presbytery, without undertaking further inquiry, shall report to the council only that an offense has been alleged without naming the accused or the nature of the alleged offense, and refer the statement immediately to an investigating committee. A session shall not grant a certificate of transfer to a member, nor shall a presbytery grant a certificate of transfer to a minister, while an inquiry or charges are pending.
- 5.3 When a written statement of an alleged offense of sexual abuse toward any person under the age of eighteen, or who it is alleged lacked the mental capacity to consent, has been received against a pastor, the stated clerk receiving the allegation shall immediately communicate the allegation to the judicial commission. The moderator of the judicial commission shall within three days

designate two members of presbytery (who shall not be members of the investigating committee) to determine whether the accused shall be placed on a paid administrative leave during the resolution of the matter. The cost of such shall be borne by the employing entity whenever possible or be shared by the presbytery as necessary. While administrative leave is in effect, the pastor may not perform any pastoral, administrative, educational, or supervisory duties, and may not officiate at any functions such as Baptisms, funerals, or weddings.

- 5.4 Upon receiving a written allegation of an offense, the council having jurisdiction over the accused member shall appoint an investigating committee to determine whether charges should be filed. An investigating committee shall have no more than five but no less than three members. A session shall not appoint members of the session as members of the investigating committee. A presbytery may provide by rule for appointment of an investigating committee.
- 5.5 The investigating committee shall: (a) provide the accused with a copy of the statement of alleged offense; (b) make a thorough inquiry into the facts and circumstances of the alleged offense; (c) examine all relevant papers, documents, and records available to it; (d) ascertain all available witnesses and inquire of them; (e) determine whether there are probable grounds or cause to believe that an offense was committed by the accused; (f) decide whether the charge(s) filed can reasonably be proved, having due regard for the character, availability, and credibility of the witnesses and evidence available; (g) report to the governing body having jurisdiction over the accused only whether or not it will file charges; and (h) if charges are to be filed, prepare and file them and designate one or more persons (to be known as the prosecuting committee) from among its membership to prosecute the case.
- 5.6 The investigating committee, prior to filing charges against an accused, may initiate alternative forms of resolution to determine if agreement can be reached among all parties involved concerning any charges which may be filed. If such agreement is reached, the investigating committee shall report it to the judicial commission for its approval.
- 5.7 If the investigating committee decides to file charges, it shall inform the accused in writing of the charges it will make, including a summary of the facts it expects to prove at the hearing to support those charges. It shall ask the accused if that person wishes to plead guilty to the charges to avoid a full hearing and indicate the censure it will recommend to the judicial commission.
- 5.8 If no charges are filed, the investigating committee shall file a written report of that fact alone with the clerk of session or stated clerk of the presbytery, and notify the person who submitted the written statement. If no charges are filed, the disposition of the investigating committee's records shall be in accordance with session or presbytery policy.
- 5.9 No charges shall be filed later than three years from the time of the commission of the alleged offense, nor later than one year from the date the investigating committee was formed, whichever occurs first, except as follows. For instances of sexual abuse of another person, the three year time limit shall not apply. Charges may be brought regardless of the date on which an offense is alleged to have occurred. Sexual abuse of another person is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to: (a) any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone over the age of eighteen years without the mental capacity to consent; or (b) any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of office or position.
- 5.10 All disciplinary cases shall be filed and prosecuted by a governing body through an investigating committee and a prosecuting committee. The prosecuting committee is the representative of the church and, as such, has all of the rights of the appropriate governing body in the case. Each charge shall be numbered and set forth the conduct that constituted the offense. Each charge shall state (as far as possible) the time, place, and circumstances of the commission of the alleged conduct. Each charge shall also be accompanied by a list of the names and addresses of the witnesses for the prosecution and a description of the records and documents to be cited for its support. Every charge shall be prepared in writing and filed with the clerk of session or stated clerk of the presbytery. Upon receipt of a charge, the clerk of a session shall present the charge to the session at its next meeting. Upon receipt of a charge, the stated clerk of the presbytery shall immediately forward it to the judicial commission of that presbytery.

- 5.11 The hearing in a disciplinary case shall be conducted by a judicial commission. Each of the parties in a disciplinary case shall be entitled to appear and may be represented by counsel, provided, however, that no person shall act as counsel who is not a member of ECO. No member of a judicial commission shall appear as counsel before that commission while a member. If the accused in a disciplinary case is unable to secure counsel, the judicial commission shall appoint counsel for the accused. Reasonable expenses for defense shall be authorized and reimbursed by the governing body in which the case originated. Counsel need not be a paid representative or attorney-at-law.
- 5.12 A member of a judicial commission is disqualified if the member is personally interested in the case, is related by blood or marriage to any party, or has been active for or against any party. Any member of a judicial commission may be challenged by any party, and the validity of the challenge shall be determined by the remaining members of the judicial commission.
- 5.13 The proceedings shall ordinarily be conducted in open session; however, at the request of any party, or on its own initiative, the judicial commission may determine at any stage of the proceedings, by a vote of two-thirds of the members present, to exclude persons other than the parties and their counsel.
- 5.14 The accused in a disciplinary case is presumed to be innocent until the contrary is proved, and unless guilt is established beyond a reasonable doubt, the accused is entitled to be found not guilty.
- 5.15 The judicial commission shall determine all preliminary objections and any other objection affecting the order or regularity of the proceedings. It may dismiss the case or permit amendments to the charges in the furtherance of justice, provided that such amendments do not change the substance of the charges or prejudice the accused. If the proceedings are found to be in order, and the charges are considered sufficient, the accused shall be called upon to plead 'guilty' or 'not guilty' to each charge. The plea shall be entered on the record. If the accused declines to answer or pleads 'not guilty,' a plea of 'not guilty' shall be entered on the record and the hearing shall proceed. If the accused pleads 'guilty,' the council shall proceed to hear evidence of harm, mitigation, rehabilitation, and redemption, and to determine the degree of censure to be imposed.
- 5.16 If a plea of not guilty is entered on the record, the parties shall then be given an opportunity to make opening statements. The prosecuting committee shall present its evidence in support of the charges, subject to objection and cross-examination by the accused. The accused shall have the opportunity to present evidence, subject to objection and cross-examination by the prosecuting committee. The prosecuting committee then may introduce additional evidence, but only to rebut evidence introduced on behalf of the accused. This additional evidence is subject to objection and cross-examination by the accused. The parties shall be given an opportunity to make final statements. The prosecuting committee shall have the right of opening and closing the argument.
- 5.17 The judicial commission shall then meet privately. All persons not members of the session or permanent judicial commission shall be excluded. After careful deliberation, the judicial commission shall vote on each charge separately and record the vote in its minutes. In order to find the accused guilty of a charge, the judicial commission must find that the pertinent facts within that charge have been proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Proof beyond a reasonable doubt occurs when the comparison and consideration of all the evidence compels an abiding conviction that the material facts necessary to prove the charge are true. No judgment of guilt may be found on a charge unless at least two-thirds of the members of the judicial commission eligible to vote agree on the judgment. When a judicial commission has arrived at a decision, the moderator shall, in open meeting, announce the verdict for each charge separately.
- 5.18 If the accused is found guilty or after a guilty plea, the judicial commission shall permit the parties to present evidence as to the extent of the injury suffered, mitigation, rehabilitation, and redemption. This evidence may be offered by either party or the original accuser or that person's representative. The person who was directly harmed by the offense may submit a victim impact statement. That statement shall not be subject to cross-examination. The judicial commission shall then meet privately to determine the degree of censure to be imposed. Following such determination and in an open meeting, the moderator of the judicial commission shall then

pronounce the censure. A written decision stating the judgment on each charge and the determination of the degree of censure, if any, shall be prepared. It shall become the final decision when signed by the moderator of the judicial commission, and shall be filed with the clerk or stated clerk of the council. The clerk or stated clerk of the council shall deliver a copy of the decision to each party named in the decision.

6.0 CENSURE AND RESTORATION IN A DISCIPLINARY CASE

- 6.1 The degrees of church censure are rebuke, rebuke with supervised rehabilitation, temporary exclusion from exercise of ordained office or membership, and removal from ordained office or membership. Rebuke is the lowest degree of censure for an offense and is completed when pronounced. It consists of setting forth publicly the character of the offense, together with reproof.
- 6.2 Rebuke with supervised rehabilitation is the next to lowest degree of censure. It consists of setting forth the character of the offense, together with reproof and mandating a period of supervised rehabilitation imposed by the judicial commission. The judicial commission shall formally communicate to the supervising entity and the person censured the goals of the rehabilitation and the specific authority conferred on the supervisor(s). The description of the rehabilitation program shall include a clear statement of how progress will be evaluated and how it will be determined when and if the supervised rehabilitation has been satisfactorily completed.
- 6.3 Temporary exclusion from the exercise of ordained office or membership is a higher degree of censure for a more aggravated offense and shall be for a definite period of time, or for a period defined by completion of supervised rehabilitation imposed by the judicial commission. If the period of temporary exclusion is defined by completion of supervised rehabilitation, the judicial commission shall formally communicate to the supervising entity and the person found guilty the specific authority conferred on the supervisor. During the period of temporary exclusion from ordained office, the person found guilty shall refrain from the exercise of any function of ordained office. During the period of temporary exclusion from membership, the person found guilty shall refrain from participating and voting in meetings and from holding or exercising any office. If a pastor is temporarily excluded from the exercise of the office of ordained minister, the presbytery may, if no appeal from the case is pending, declare the pastoral relationship dissolved. A person under the censure of temporary exclusion shall apply in writing to the council, through the clerk of session or stated clerk, for restoration upon the expiration of the time of exclusion or completion of the supervised rehabilitation pronounced. The council that imposed the censure shall approve the restoration when the time of exclusion has expired or when the council is fully satisfied that the supervised rehabilitation pronounced has been completed. A person under the censure of temporary exclusion from the exercise of ordained office or from membership may apply in writing to the council that imposed the censure (through its clerk) to be restored prior to the expiration of the time of exclusion or the completion of the supervised rehabilitation fixed in the censure. The council may approve such a restoration when it is fully satisfied that the action is justified.
- 6.4 Removal from office or membership is the highest degree of censure. Removal from office is the censure by which the ordination and election of the person found guilty are set aside, and the person is removed from all offices without removal from membership. Removal from membership is the censure by which the membership of the person found guilty is terminated, the person is removed from all rolls, and the person's ordination and election to all offices are set aside. If a pastor is removed from office without removal from membership, the presbytery shall give the pastor a certificate of membership to a church of the pastor's choice. Any pastoral relationship is automatically dissolved by the censure.

7.0 APPEAL

- 7.1 An appeal of a remedial or disciplinary case is the transfer to the next wider council of a case in which a decision has been rendered in a smaller council, for the purpose of obtaining a review of the proceedings and decision to correct, modify, set aside, or reverse the decision. Either party may initiate an appeal by the filing of a written notice of appeal.

- 7.2 In a remedial case, the notice of appeal shall not suspend any further action implementing the decision being appealed unless a stay of enforcement has been obtained in accordance with the provisions of 4.2 above.
- 7.3 In a disciplinary case, the notice of appeal, if properly and timely filed, shall suspend further proceedings by lower councils, except that, in the instance of temporary exclusion from exercise of ordained office or membership or removal from office or membership, the person against whom the judgment has been pronounced shall refrain from the exercise of office or from participating and voting in meetings until the appeal is finally decided.
- 7.4 On application, the judicial commission of the wider council may grant a petition for withdrawal of an appeal. The judicial commission shall deny a petition if its approval would defeat the ends of justice.
- 7.5 The grounds for appeal are: (a) irregularity in the proceedings; (b) refusing a party reasonable opportunity to be heard or to obtain or present evidence; (c) receiving improper, or declining to receive proper, evidence or testimony; (d) hastening to a decision before the evidence or testimony is fully received; (e) manifestation of prejudice in the conduct of the case; (f) injustice in the process or decision; (g) error in constitutional interpretation; and (h) in an appeal by a person found guilty, undue severity of censure.
- 7.6 A written notice of appeal shall be filed within forty-five days after a copy of the decision has been delivered to the party appealing. The written notice of appeal shall be filed with the clerk or stated clerk of the lower governing body that elected the judicial commission from whose decision the appeal is taken. The party appealing shall provide a copy of the notice of appeal to each of the other parties and to the stated clerk of the governing body that will hear the appeal. The written notice of appeal shall include the following: (a) the name of the party or parties filing the appeal, called the appellant or appellants, and their counsel if any; (b) the name of the other party or parties, called the appellee or appellees, and their counsel if any; (c) the governing body from whose decision the appeal is taken; (d) the decision, and date and place thereof, from which the appeal is taken (enclose a copy of the decision with the notice of appeal); and (e) a statement of the alleged errors of the judicial commission which conducted the hearing that are the grounds for appeal.
- 7.7 A copy of the notice of appeal shall be delivered to each of the other parties and the appellant(s) shall file with the stated clerk a receipt signed by the other parties or an affidavit of personal service.
- 7.8 Within forty-five days after the receipt of a written notice of appeal, the clerk of session or stated clerk of the lower governing body shall list in writing to the parties all of the papers and other materials that constitute the record of the case. Within fifteen days thereafter, any party may file with the stated clerk of the lower council a written statement challenging the accuracy or completeness of the record of the case as listed by the stated clerk. The written challenge shall state specifically the item or items which are claimed to be omitted from the record of the case.
- 7.9 The stated clerk of the lower council shall certify and file the record of the case, which may include authenticated copies of parts of the record, and shall include any written challenges disputing the completeness or accuracy of the record, with the stated clerk of the wider council. If anything material to either party is omitted from the record by error or accident or is misstated therein, the omission or misstatement may be corrected. The parties may stipulate to the correction, or the judicial commission of the lower council may certify and transmit a supplemental record. All other questions as to the form and content of the record shall be presented to the judicial commission of the higher governing body.
- 7.10 Within thirty days after the date of the filing of the record on appeal, the appellant shall file with the stated clerk of the wider council a written brief containing specifications of the errors alleged in the notice of appeal and arguments, reasons, and citations of authorities in support of the appellant's contentions as to the alleged errors specified. The brief shall be accompanied by a certification that a copy has been furnished to the other party or parties. For good cause shown, the stated clerk of the wider council may extend this time limit for a reasonable period. Failure of

appellant to file a brief within the time allowed, without good cause, shall be deemed by the judicial commission an abandonment of the appeal.

- 7.11 Within thirty days after the filing of appellant's brief, the appellee shall file with the stated clerk of the wider council a written brief responding to the appellant's brief. The brief shall be accompanied by a certification that a copy has been furnished to the other party or parties. For good cause shown, the stated clerk of the higher governing body may extend this time limit for a reasonable period. Failure by appellee to file a brief within the time allowed, without good cause, shall constitute waiver of the rights to file a brief, to appear, and to be heard.
- 7.12 Upon receipt of the record and the briefs, or upon the expiration of the time for filing them, the stated clerk of the wider council shall transmit the record and briefs to the judicial commission. At any time after an appeal is received by a judicial commission, the commission may direct the parties or their counsel, if any, to attend a prehearing conference, to seek agreement on any of the disputed issues in the appeal, and to take other action which might reasonably and impartially narrow the dispute and expedite its resolution.
- 7.13 The moderator of the judicial commission shall notify the parties of the date when they may appear in person or by counsel before the judicial commission to present the appeal. Failure of a party to appear in person or by counsel shall constitute a waiver of participation in the hearing on appeal.
- 7.14 At the hearing, the judicial commission shall determine whether to receive newly discovered evidence; and give opportunity to be heard on the grounds of the appeal to those parties who have not waived that right, the appellant having the right of opening and closing the argument.
- 7.15 After the hearing and after deliberation, the judicial commission shall vote separately on each specification of error alleged. The vote shall be on the question, "Shall the specification of error be sustained?" The minutes shall record the numerical vote on each specification of error. If none of the specifications of error is sustained, and no other error is found, the decision of the lower governing body shall be affirmed. If one or more errors are found, the judicial commission shall determine whether the decision of the lower council shall be affirmed, set aside, reversed, modified, or the case remanded for a new hearing.
- 7.16 A written decision shall be prepared, and shall become the final decision when a copy of the written decision is signed by the moderator of the commission. The decision shall be filed with the stated clerk of the council that appointed the judicial commission and delivered to the parties to the case.



The mission of
The Fellowship of Presbyterians
is to build *flourishing churches*
that make *disciples of Jesus Christ*.

OUR VALUES

Jesus-Shaped Identity

We believe Jesus Christ must be at the center of our lives and making disciples of Jesus at the core of our ministry.

Biblical Integrity

We believe the Bible is the unique and authoritative Word of God, that teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. The prominence of God's Word over our lives shapes our priorities, and the unrivaled authority of the Bible directs our actions to be in concert with Christ's very best for our lives.

Thoughtful Theology

We believe in theological education, constant learning, and the life of the mind; celebrating this as one of the treasures of our Reformed heritage.

Accountable Community

We believe guidance is a corporate spiritual experience. We want to connect leaders to one another in healthy relationships of accountability, synergy, and care.

Egalitarian Ministry

We believe in unleashing the ministry gifts of women, men, and every ethnic group.

Missional Centrality

We believe in living out the whole of the Great Commission — including evangelism, spiritual formation, compassion, and redemptive justice — in our communities and around the world.

Center-Focused Spirituality

We believe in calling people to the core of what it means to be followers of Jesus — what "mere Christianity" is and does — and not fixate on the boundaries.

Leadership Velocity

We believe the work of identifying and developing gospel-centered leaders is critical for the church, and a great leadership culture is risk-taking, innovative, and organic.

Kingdom Vitality

We believe congregations should vigorously reproduce new missional communities to expand the Kingdom of God.