

Elder Training Manual: Some Suggestions for Recruiting and Training Elders

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We live in a day of an abundance of Christian training materials. But in my 35 years, serving as a Reformed pastor, the material I have heard the most need for is for selecting and training of qualified men for the office of ruling elder. It has been my experience that many small and sometimes struggling Reformed churches have had the same two or three ruling elders serving for ten or twenty or more years, with no additions in all that time. The pastors lament that there are simply no qualified men willing to serve. Thus a fixed oligarchy is established that is unhealthy for both the session and the congregation.

I believe this stagnant situation is the outcome of a number of unbiblical assumptions:

1. The pastor is called to “run the church” with some assistance from his elders. I believe many pastors labor under the false understanding that the New Testament Church is composed of three tiers: a) the pastor, b) the ruling elders, who operate as a board of directors to run things, c) the congregation, who are served, who serve on committees, teach Sunday School, and give money.
2. The foregoing leads to the idea that the only real “training” that the pastor is to do is preparing elders for office from among the men of the congregation, who show some spiritual maturity, particularly in Reformed convictions. Rather, I believe one of the chief responsibilities of a pastor is the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11-16) and this should always be taking place. Male leadership should always be emerging.
3. Training a man to be an elder is seen as primarily taking him through the Westminster Standards and the Form of Government, to prepare him for an exam. If he passes this intellectual exam, he is seen as qualified to serve as a ruling elder. Knowing and believing our Reformed standards is critical and is a major part of the necessary training. But it is *not* the only training needed for equipping a man to serve as a ruling elder. A ruling elder is a *pastor*, as I intend to show, and must be trained to shepherd the flock.

I planted Columbia Presbyterian Church (Orthodox Presbyterian) in 1978, in Columbia, MD. We started with twenty five people from a mother O.P. Church down the road. When I left in 2011, there were about twenty five elders and deacons.

One of the first things I did when I got there was to begin to train elders. *New Horizons* magazine, the denominational magazine for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, published an article I wrote on my elder training program in October, 1986. I have expanded and refined, and hopefully improved it significantly since then. I am still seeking to improve it and would welcome any feedback from you who look through it, and especially from you who try it. Note that it is copyrighted, so please do not reproduce it, even in modified form, without permission from

Allen Harris, 130 Pilgrim Spring Road, Wellfleet, MA 02667
<allenhpilgrim@gmail.com>

My 1986 training program was divided into three areas: Character, Intellect, Ministry (called the CIM training program). It is still divided into those three areas.

This is the manual I developed in my ministry for training elders. I do not claim that it is the definitive training manual for training elders. I am sure it could be greatly improved. But I offer it as something God was graciously pleased to bless in our church. I hope it might be useful to you.

The manual is a combination of objective principles and suggestions for how to recruit and train elders. It is also a record of how I personally did it. I have always immensely enjoyed this aspect of pastoral ministry and have given a lot of thought to it. The principles and personal are blended together because I wanted to be specific on the particulars. Obviously I do not expect you to use the same books I did for the elders to read, or have the same schedule I did in my training. It is offered simply for you to use as a help in your own training of elders for your church.

The first part of this manual describes the roles and responsibilities of elders as I see them laid out in Scripture. Especially I will focus on the pattern of leadership roles and congregational ministry that I see Paul laying out in Ephesians 4:1-16. The second part describes the qualifications for being an elder (the CIM), and the training to develop those qualifications, a typical schedule of meetings and activities that involve the elder candidate(s) and the mentors who work with him/them during the training. The second and third parts of this manual describe a simple course of training. It can be done with one candidate, or with several. The last time I did it was with seven men as a class. All seven were elected to office by the congregation (by unanimous or nearly unanimous vote in every case) and ordained. The course usually takes one to two years. It is flexible in its schedule so that no man is put before the congregation before he is ready. The seven men came before the congregation at two or three different times.

Part I. THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ELDERS

Timothy Witmer, professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia has written an excellent book on the roles and responsibilities of elders, called *The Shepherd Leader* (P & R Pub, 2010). He says on page 2 of this book, “The simple thesis of this book is, 'The fundamental responsibility of church leaders is to shepherd God's flock.' After all, the word 'pastor' comes from the Latin word meaning 'shepherd.' However, as you will see, the shepherding is not merely the responsibility of those who are called to be pastors but also of those who are called to be elders or its equivalent in our churches. In fact, you will see that 'shepherding' is at the very heart of the biblical picture of leadership. Unfortunately this emphasis is missing in many of our churches.”

Witmer then traces the idea of “shepherd” in the Old Testament in chapter one, then Jesus as the true Shepherd, and the apostolic imperative for elders as shepherds in chapter two. Let me combine my own studies with his insights in the following brief summary of this material as a biblical basis for what we are seeking to produce in the elders of our churches. A thorough study of this metaphor in Scripture can be found in Timothy S. Laniak's book, *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (Inter-Varsity, 2006).

A. Old Testament Background

1. God is many times called the Shepherd of His people. Probably the best known and beloved example is Psalm 23.
2. The first mention of the idea of elders is in the creation of the office of “judges” in Exodus 18. These men were assistants to help Moses teach the people how to live by God’s ways.

3. Moses and David were literal shepherds who were called from shepherding sheep to shepherding God's people. David is called the “shepherd of God’s flock” in II Samuel 5:2; 7:7; Psalm 78:70-72. But David showed himself to be a very deficient shepherd, as the prophet Nathan pointed out to him after his selfish sins with Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah (II Sam 12:1-4).

4. Ezekiel 34 indicts the false shepherds (kings, rulers, prophets (compare Isaiah 56:10-11)) and contrasts God as the true Shepherd, Who will send a descendent of David, a human who will be the eternal Shepherd (37:24-28) to tend His people forever. The picture is of the tender care given in Psalm 23: to direct His sheep to rich pastures and quiet waters; to protect and nourish them. This is the Shepherd who is to come.

B. New Testament Background

1. Jesus is the
 - a) **Good Shepherd** who lays down His life for the sheep, (John 10:11)
 - b) **Great Shepherd** Who rose from the dead to lead His sheep into pleasant pastures forever (Hebrews 13:20-21)
 - c) **Chief Shepherd** Who will take all your anxiety because He cares for you and will return to take you to Glory (I Peter 5:1-4, 7)

2. Peter and Paul both speak of elders as primarily **shepherds** who care for God's sheep on behalf of the Chief Shepherd.
 - a) **Peter**, as a fellow elder, calls on the elders of Christ's Church to “**shepherd the flock of God that is among you**” (I Peter 5:1-2), as “**examples to the flock**” (v3), anticipating the reward of the Chief Shepherd Whom they have served freely (v2, 4).
 - b) **Paul** admonishes the elders of the Church of Ephesus to “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 *NIV*). Notice that “overseers” (episkopous: bishops), “elders” (presbyteros(v17)), and “shepherds” (poimen: pastors (v28)) all refer to the same office.

3. “Overseers/bishops” highlight the elders' authority to **lead & direct**. “Shepherds/pastors” highlights their tenderness to **feed & protect**. Putting that together means that the summary of the elder's mission is to **lead & feed**, or to **direct & protect**.

We see this in I Timothy 5:17, where Paul says, “The elders who **direct the affairs** of the church well are worthy of double honor...” (NIV). The Greek word translated “direct the affairs” in the NIV, and “rule” in the ESV is *proestotes* from *prohistemi*, and simply means to “**go first**.” I would submit that it is the most basic one word job description of an elder. He goes first to **direct** in the sense of leading the congregation, and he goes first in the sense of **protecting** the sheep from evil (eg Acts 20:29). Verse 17 goes on to say that some elders labor in preaching and teaching. But all use God's Word as the foundation of their directing and protecting, and all engage in prayer (Acts 6:1-4; 20:27).

I have taught our congregation to sum up the role of their elders by two gestures and no words. First they would stretch out their arms and point their fingers forward to indicate **directing**. Then they would spread out both arms from their sides with the palms of their hands rearward to indicate

protecting. “That,” I would say, “is how your elders serve you. They direct you as a group in the direction we see the Spirit leading Christ's church. And they protect you as shepherds who care for your souls (Heb 13:17).

C. HOW do we do this?

The Book of EPHESIANS

Ephesians is the manual. It is Paul's circulatory letter to the churches in Asia Minor. Both Romans and Ephesians are his most definitive statements of the gospel. But scholars are generally agreed that Ephesians is his most definitive statement of ecclesiology.

The letter is divided neatly into two halves. His thesis is best understood in terms of what I call “gospel grammar.” Chapters 1-3 are written in the indicative (statements of fact): who you are and what you have as a redeemed sinner in Christ, as part of the Church of Christ, brought to supernatural unity in Christ. Chapters 4-6 are written mainly in imperatives (commands): how you are to live out this new life in Christ. You can sum up the letter with the statement: BE (chs 4-6) who you ARE (chs 1-3) in Christ. Or expanded: the Christian life is nothing more or less than making true in your experience, by faith, that which is already true of you in Christ. And if you study the two halves, you will notice that *all* of the imperatives in chapters 4-6 are based on indicatives in chapters 1-3.

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

The two parts of the book are linked by 4:1, where Paul calls on us literally to “walk in equilibrium with the calling we have received.” The word *axios* means, in its root, not “worthy,” but to “bring the balance of a scale into equilibrium.” Paul is saying that we are to bring the weight of our living into equilibrium with the weight of our calling and new identity in the gospel. It is all by grace! What a powerful statement that abolishes all the saved by grace, sanctified by works thinking that is all too common in the Church.

And notice how Paul begins his instruction on how to live out the Christian life. 4:2-16 are all about the Church. He begins with life in the Body.

He first says that the fact that we have been constituted as one does not mean that living together in unity will be easy. This is clear from 4:2-3. He enjoins a concerted effort (imperative) based on 3 verses of indicatives: v4-6. These are the seven **unities** of **saving** grace.

Then in v7, Paul contrasts the rest of the section with a big “BUT.” “**But** grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift “ (*ESV*). Here he introduces the **diversities** of **servicing** grace, which he develops through v16. I break this down into the **4 Ps**: verses

7-10: 1. **power** for these graces from the risen and ascended Christ

11: 2. the **persons** who receive this power for the sake of the Church: apostles and prophets, which are foundational (2:20) and no longer exist. Also evangelists and pastor-teachers, which continue to this day. Note: most commentators see the “pastors and teachers” as one office because there is no article before the word “teacher.”

12-14: 3. the **purpose** of their ministry, and particularly the ministry of the pastor-teacher in the

Church today: to **equip** the saints (all God's people) for (*eis* here indicates a purpose phrase) the work of ministry (the KJV here is incorrect to put a comma after “saints,” implying that the pastor-teacher does the work of ministry). And the further purpose of this ministry (a second *eis*) of all the saints is “for building up the body of Christ” (*ESV*).

In verse 13 he then describes what a mature body looks like, and therefore what a mature Christian looks like. I see three characteristics mentioned here:

a) **convictions: know your Bible.** The “unity of the Faith” is what we believe about the gospel. The more Christians mature in their convictions, the more they agree and come to unity on essentials. Mature Christians hold much more in common in their beliefs than immature Christians.

b) **affections: cherish your Savior.** “and at a fuller knowledge of the Son of God...” The word “knowledge” here is the same word Paul used in chapter one, verse 17, where he speaks of our “knowledge of Him.” it is the word, *epignosko*, which speaks of knowledge that is much more than cognitive. It is the deep intimate knowledge that husbands and wives have for each other. In fact it can be used of sexual intimacy and has the idea of deep intimate experiential knowing. So I believe he is describing the kind of knowledge of Jesus that is deeply devotional, affectionate, even passionate. Unashamed and open.

c) **character: reflect your Lord.** “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” I believe this refers to a person that reflects Christ in their character and behavior.

Note the balance here. A mature Christian is known by what he/she believes about the gospel, what or Who he/she loves above all else, and their Christlike character, displaying His holiness to others.

See page 20 (*Developing a Shepherding Mindset*) to see how I use verse 13 as a basis for the elders to pastor their people.

These qualities are then contrasted in verse 14: what **immaturity** looks like: instability. These are children who are tossed about by the latest fads and spiritual ideas that sound so enticing. They lack the theological stability to discern gospel truth from man-centered error. They chase after the latest experience that promises a spiritual high. They lack the three qualities of v13.

15-16: 4. finally the fourth P is the **plan** for making this happen. Paul's solution is not to send them all to a good seminary! He picks up again on v12 and describes how the equipped saint ministers. He even repeats the word from v13, *oikodomain*, “building up”, in v16. And the idea of growing up into maturity, into Christ appears both v15 and v16. These are two exceedingly rich verses, but for my immediate purpose I simply point out two things. Verse 15 describes the **how** and verse 16 describes the **who**.

How: v15: “truthing in love.” Both living and speaking the truth (cf Gal 4:16), illustrated in Gal 2:11-14. Saying difficult things gently, in love, to our brother or sister to help them walk more in line with the gospel (cf Gal 2:14 and Eph 5:25, 29). He describes believers speaking truth to one another in love as the means of their growing “up in every way into him who is the head, into

Christ.”

Who: v16: “the *whole* body...*each part*... working properly...so that it builds itself up in love. Paul spares no language to be absolutely clear that it is *every member* of Christ's body, equipped by the elders, who build each other up in love.

Now let me go back to the critical verse, v12, and the critical word, **EQUIP**. This is an essential part of elders' shepherding because it multiplies the ministers in the way Paul expects in v15-16 to produce Christians characterized by v13.

Note: I am fully aware that at this point I am touching on two very controversial points in Reformed circles:

a) whether the NT teaches that there are two or three ordained offices to lead the Church. Two offices: elders and deacons. Or three offices: teaching elders, ruling elders, and deacons. The teaching elder is variously called pastor or minister, or simply teaching elder. If we can agree that there is a distinction between teaching elders and ruling elders, with the former being those particularly called to engage in preaching and teaching (I Tim 5:17), then for the purposes of this manual, we do not need to settle whether those are distinct offices.

b) whether Ephesians 4:12 teaches that the minister perfects the saints, does the work of the ministry, and edifies the body, as the KJV translates it, or whether the pastor-teacher **equips** the **saints** to do this ministry with him, as sixteen contemporary popular and scholarly translations render it. As long as we can agree that elders are shepherds, and that part of shepherding is equipping all the saints for the use of their gifts in ministry as Eph 4:7-16 clearly teaches, then we do not need to settle that question here either.

So let me elaborate on this word “equip” to show what is involved in gospel equipping of the saints by our teaching and ruling elders.

What does this word “equip” (*katartismos*) involve? Let me offer three component ideas and how they apply to the work of shepherd-elders. The Greek word for “equip” is bolded in each case:

1. RESTORE

The root meaning of the word is to mend. It is used of mending broken bones in secular Greek. Matthew 4:21 uses this word to describe James, John, and their father “mending” their fishing nets. It has the idea of restoring something torn or broken.

- **Gal 6:1:** “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should **restore** him gently.” The elders gently seek to restore a wandering sheep from his path of sin. They also seek to equip others who are “spiritual” to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15) so the immature grow to maturity (Eph 4:13-14).
- **I Pet 5:10:** “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself **restore**, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (*ESV*). The elders also restore sheep from suffering by pointing them to the One Who alone can restore their hearts. They use gospel promises and the fact of His Presence to restore their faith and joy.

2. SUPPLY

The word can also be used to refer to supplying what is lacking for something to be functioning as it should.

- **I Thessalonians 3:10**: ““Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and **supply** what is lacking in your faith.” The elders see that the small group structures, the seminars, and Sunday School classes, together with the preaching of the Word, are providing the means for weak Christians (all of us!) to grow in our faith.
- **Hebrews 13:21**: beginning at verse 20: “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, (21) **equip** you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (*ESV*). Only God can supply what we need to obey Him, to do His will, and bring glory to Jesus. The role of the elders is to point the sheep to their “great Shepherd” as the One we need in our weakness. Every day. In conversations after the worship service. In social times. To be on the lookout for the one who needs such a word. Just as we do.

3. TRAIN

Here the idea is the restoration and renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2) to become the mature disciple that is the living sacrifice to the Lord Himself, putting off the old self, and putting on the new (Eph 4:17-24, right after 4:1-16).

- **II Tim 3:17**: beginning at verse 16: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, (17) so that the man of God may be thoroughly **equipped** for every good work” (*NIV*). Verse 16 teaches this fourfold use of Scripture by all Christians, but especially by elders, so the sheep are trained in using Scripture practically for life change. Then they are “equipped” for the “good work” of speaking the truth in love with their brothers and sisters (Eph. 4:15-16). This is training through the **Word written**.
- **Luke 6:40**: the words of Jesus: “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully **trained** will be like his teacher” (*ESV*). Equipping/training is not just teaching doctrine from Scripture, as essential as that is. It is also life on life discipling. Modeling the Word so that the disciple sees what a devoted follower of Christ looks like. How he spends his time. How he spends his money. How he reacts under pressure and stress and mistreatment. How he treats his family. Elders must be also modeling the Word in discipling relationships. This is training through the **Word Incarnate**.

This kind of equipping of the saints produces the kind of ministry described in vv 12-16. It is mature Christian men who understand this and are ministering in the body that comprise the pool from which we recruit elders. We look for repenting, believing lovers of Jesus who are speaking the truth in love to their brothers and sisters.

RECRUITING POTENTIAL ELDERS

Recruiting potential elders then becomes the discovery of which men are looking like v13 and acting like vv15-16.

They may be small group leaders, which is an excellent training ground for new elders. That is if the small groups are growing disciples, not just cozy Christian huddles for expressing whatever is on one's mind to those who will listen.

In our church, the session discusses potential elders every so often, at least once a year. Each elder makes a list of men that he thinks are worth considering to approach for training as future elders. These lists are shared in the session meeting and discussed. Any elder's strong reservations will take that man off the list. Men who are approved by all are then prioritized: approach immediately, watch closely for the near future, or seek to test their qualifications further to discuss again at a future meeting.

Of course any member of the congregation can nominate a man for consideration. Their elder will then bring up that man's name for consideration. The nominator's elder is obliged to get back to them on session's disposition: either Yes, we will approach him for training and testing, or No, not at this time. The elder is not obliged to give the reason(s) for rejection. This is because the reason(s) may be of a pastoral nature requiring confidentiality. In all the years we have done this, we have never had a member press for why the man was rejected *at this time*. In a healthy church the sheep trust their undershepherds and their integrity.

II. CHARACTER, INTELLECT, MINISTRY

Men who are on the list for immediate consideration are approached by their elder and asked to consider entering into training that generally will last a year or so before they are put before the congregation for ratification. He will give him the following sheet that explains the three parts to the training: **Character, Intellect, Ministry**.

In the following CIM chart, note that I work with the elder candidate on the things in the **left** column, and his elder works with him on the things in the **right** column in the first two parts, Character and Intellect. We both do both columns under Ministry. There the left column focuses on what the trainee is doing in ministry. The right column focuses on what I, the pastor, and also his elder are doing in ministry.

Of course his elder can bring me in at any point where he feels a need or thinks my input could be helpful. This is entirely a joint effort between me and the candidate's elder. It is also a tremendous opportunity for me to further train my elder in ministry. I also learn from the elder, and we become closer in the process.

One final point: a good argument can be made for calling the second part “**Convictions**” rather than “Intellect.” That would make it CCM training instead of CIM training. I think my ego could withstand that alteration.

Elder Training: CIM

<u>What I (senior pastor) do with him</u>	<u>What his elder does with him</u>
<p>I. <u>Character</u>: the character traits an elder should exhibit</p> <p>10 Qualities I Look for in a Leader</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) yourself b) your wife c) me <p>Emphasize: 1. discrepant 2. weak</p> <p>Creative assignments to address character issues (This character development section will involve several meetings)</p>	<p>Your walk with God</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) your worship & devotional practices b) what God is teaching you of trust & obedience?
<p>II. <u>Intellectual</u> His knowledge about the Bible, Christian doctrine, church government, and the nature of people an elder should possess</p> <p>Dozen of Discipleship Write paper 1 page</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Biblical? Balanced b) How affect your life in observable way 	<p>OPC Standards</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Confession of Faith Parkinson Questionnaire b) Cf. Larger & Shorter Catechisms c) Book of Discipline <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Form of Government 2. Book of Discipline
<p>III. <u>Ministry</u> The ministry skills and experience in understanding and working with people to effectively provide the pastoral care that they need.</p>	

What you (trainee) are doing:

- a) listen: purpose-plan
actual feelings
- b) observe
- c) evaluate
- d) dream

What I (trainer) am doing

- a) discuss people & ministries
- b) come with me (Mark 3:14)
- c) evaluate
- d) dream

More on this later. If, after consulting with his wife, the man says he is willing to enter the training, the next step is for me, as senior pastor, to meet with the candidate and his wife. I give them the *Ten Qualities I Look for in an Elder* questionnaire. These qualities are based on the I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 qualifications of an elder. You could argue that the title is too personal. I might agree, but that is the title I gave it decades ago because it is more personal than a checklist. Change that too if you want.

I tell the husband and wife to each separately and independently fill out the questionnaire concerning the candidate. I also fill one out concerning him. Then a week or so later I meet with them again, this time in their home, to go over the questionnaire. at conversation will continue and include the man's wife to get her approval before we proceed any further.

TEN QUALITIES I LOOK FOR IN AN ELDER

(Based on Scripture)

Rate the candidate on a scale of 0 (absolute loser!) to 10 (Jesus) in the following categories (you can also write comments between each item). L column for pastor, middle column for candidate (**H**: husband), R column for his **W**ife.

Pastor H W

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| <p>1. Man of the WORD
 The way he thinks is <u>molded</u> and <u>shaped</u> by Scripture.
 Spends part of each day meditating on it.
 Matthew 4:4; Psalm 1&119; Joshua 1:7-8 ; II Timothy 3:14-17</p> | <p>— — —</p> |
| <p>2. Man of PRAYER
 <u>Worship</u> is a part of his daily routine because he <u>loves</u> the living God.
 Supernaturalist, who trusts God to do <u>beyond</u> what he knows he can accomplish on his own.
 <u>Depends</u> on God in evident ways, and sees prayers answered regularly.
 Luke 11:13, 18:1; I Timothy 2:1-2,8; Psalm 116:1-2; Philippians 4:6-7</p> | <p>— — —</p> |
| <p>3. SHEPHERD’S HEART
 Loves people and takes time for them
 Is <i>currently</i> shepherding people and making disciples
 Has fruit in discipleship: people whose lives bear the mark of his influence, who would say he has helped them to grow spiritually and know Christ better
 Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11-12; I Peter 5:2-4; Matt 28:18-19; II Timothy 2:2
 I Timothy 3:2 & Titus 1:8 (hospitable); Philippians 2:19-22</p> | <p>— — —</p> |
| <p>4. TEAM MINDED
 Not an Independent spirit
 Can give and take; can submit for consensus
 I Timothy 3:3; Philippians 2:2-3; James 3:17-18</p> | <p>— — —</p> |
| <p>5. His FAMILY is spiritually healthy
 Good relationship with his wife; she is basically content
 His kids respectful, submissive, content
 Credible professions
 I Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6; Ephesians 5:25-30</p> | <p>— — —</p> |

6. WILLING to be FULL TIME elder if the church called him
 Sees serving as an elder as a high calling, not peripheral
 Sees ordination as for life
 I Peter 5:5-4; I Timothy 3:3 (not a lover of money); Ezekiel 34:7-16
7. Motive of a SERVANT
 Not seeking to gain status through the recognition of others
 Secure in who he is without recognition
 Seeks the office simply as a means of more effective service
 I Peter 5:2-3; John 13:12-17; II Timothy 2:24-26
8. No glaring NEEDS or SINS
 Respected by the church and the world
 Man of integrity
 I Timothy 3:2,7; 4:16; Titus 1:6-7
9. DICIPLINED in lifestyle
 In time, in body, in habits
 Discipleship requires discipline, especially for a leader
 Examples of discipleship
 I Timothy 3:2; Titus1:8; I Corinthians 9:24-27; 4:16; Philippians 3:17; 4:9
10. Balance of REFORMED CONVICTIONS & BIBLICAL PRIORTIES
 Genuinely embrace (not simply tolerate) our Reformed standards (the Westminster Standards) as his own convictions.
 Able also to discern what is of primary, and what is of secondary importance in the Kingdom
 Convictions with humility and love
 I Timothy 3:2 (able to teach) and 3 (not quarrelsome); 4:16; Titus 1:9; 2:1; 3:9-11 II Timothy 2:24-26

That is the end of the survey. A couple of comments on how to use it.

1. *I **always** ask the wife 3 questions at the beginning:*
 - 1) *Would you want this man to be **your** elder? Why or why not?*
 - 2) *Do you believe God has called him to be an elder? How enthusiastic are you about his being an elder?*
 - 3) *Have you talked to any other wives of elders to see how it affected their lives? Are you ready for that?*

Any of these could be show stoppers, at least until they are resolved. An elder with a reluctant or resentful wife will ruin his ministry and put a big dent in yours!
2. *Take time going through the ten questions. It has usually taken me about 2 hours, but a bond is formed in the process that is precious.*
3. *Note on #6: this serves as an attitude check, to demonstrate that the office of elder is not an honorary position to make him feel important.*
4. *If you are hesitant on any matter, have the courage to say, "I think we should all pray about this and discuss it further before we proceed. How about meeting on [a couple of weeks hence]?"*
5. *You report the results back to the session at the next meeting and answer any questions. You should have already assigned the elder who will work with you in training before that time. In our case, each elder is assigned to a group of families as his sheep, and he would be the elder to work with me in training the candidate.*
6. *When all are in agreement for him to enter into the training, then I, the pastor, would begin to meet regularly with him. I give him a taste of what it means to be discipled and shepherded, by spending time on the area that got the lowest scores in his Qualifications sheet. I have him make some goals for improvement in that area, that are realistic in the next few months. We then begin each meeting by talking about progress he is making in, for example, his prayer life (#2). We also talk about ministry, using the papers below, and he attends at least a couple of session meetings, which we then discuss.*

Now let us consider the training in each part of the CIM: Character, Intellect, Ministry.

1. Character

Our work together on #6, immediately above, constitutes the training in the area of character. I look for his teachability, his growth in grace, and his humility as we work on agreed areas of weakness. He can also teach and challenge me!

2. Intellect (the candidate's convictions)

We divide this into the areas on the left and right sides of the CIM chart.

I. **RULING ELDER.** The elder who is the primary elder for the candidate and his family is assigned to go through the

a) **Westminster Confession of Faith** (together with some time in the **Larger** and **Shorter Catechisms**) with the candidate, over several meetings, until the candidate can honestly say he understands all its teachings and can subscribe to them. Having his elder do this gives him contact with another elder with whom to talk about what it means to be an elder. It also sharpens the elder's theology by forcing him to teach another. I am brought in any time there is an issue they cannot resolve.

b) The **Book of Church Order**, so he knows how the OPC functions and agrees to abide by it.

II. **TEACHING ELDER.** I do the things with him in the left column. One of the first things I do with the candidate is to assign the **Dozen for Discipleship**. This list of basic Christian literature for maturing Christians is always changing, but I never allow it to go beyond twelve to choose from. Feel free to make up your own list (as if you wouldn't if I didn't say that!)

Note: he is not expected to read *all* the books on the list! This is not a seminary course. He is to read three books:

a) Any **two** from the list, which he has not read. Also they should be in an **area** that he has not read much in. We discuss and together decide on the two books he will read. Some of the books are more theological, others more application of theology. I want to stretch him to read what he normally will not choose on his own.

What he is to do is written at the top of the list.

b) Tim Witmer's book, **The Shepherd Leader**. This book is an excellent survey of Scripture, history, and practical suggestions for how elders are to function. I recommend that every session read and discuss its application to their situation. You will not agree with everything he says, but it is all worth considering. Hopefully he has seen much of it operating in our church, so there are no surprises, but it will show him why we do what we do.

Here is the current list I am using:

LEADERSHIP TRAINING READING PROGRAM

Two standard questions to answer on one page typed:

1. Does the book express Biblical truth?
Is it balanced? Any distortions?
2. How will this book affect my own life and ministry in an observable way?

DOZEN FOR DISCIPLESHIP:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. <u>Knowing God</u> | J. I. Packer |
| 2. <u>The Transforming Power of the Gospel</u> | Jerry Bridges |
| 3. <u>A Praying Life</u> | Paul Miller |
| 4. <u>Redemption Accomplished and Applied</u> | John Murray |
| 5. <u>A Theology of the Holy Spirit</u> | Frederick Dale Bruner |
| 6. <u>Pursuit of God</u> | A.W. Tozer |
| 7. <u>Pilgrim's Progress</u> | John Bunyan |
| 8. <u>Desiring God</u> | John Piper |
| 9. <u>The Presence of the Future or</u>
<u>Studies in the Covenant of Grace</u> | E. Ladd or
D. Neilands |
| 10. <u>Spiritual Leadership</u> | J. Oswald Sanders |
| 11. <u>Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands</u> | Paul David Tripp |
| 12. <u>The Trellis and the Vine</u> | Colin Marshall & Tony Payne |

We meet together as soon as possible after he has given me his two papers. We discuss his papers: what he has learned, how he will apply it, and his critique.

We also discuss Tim Witmer's book: what he has learned, how he would apply it, how he thinks it would change the way our session functions for the better. I want to know how he plans to shepherd his people after reading this book.

These discussions help us to get to know each other better, and hopefully deepen his practical knowledge of God and His Word.

3. Ministry (done with pastor and elder – involves multiple meetings and activities).

Both I, the teaching elder, and also his ruling elder, do both A & B below.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>A. What he (the candidate) is doing in ministry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Listen to his purpose-plan-feelings about any ministry he is involved in (such as leading a small group) b. Observe his ministry activity with people c. Evaluate his efforts d. Dream kingdom dreams for our church together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 3:14) (eg. pastoral visit, or sitting in on Discuss people and ministries | <p>B. What you (the trainer) are doing. Come with me (Mark 3:14)
Eg. Pastoral visit, or sitting in on counseling*)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Evaluate what I do c. Dream (share my dreams and vision as pastor or elder) <p>* Note: if the trainee is quiet and in the background, and the session is not too heavy, this can often work</p> |
|--|--|

Part III. TRAINING SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

As I said before, training of a candidate for the office of elder can be done one to one, or in a class. One of my most satisfying and enjoyable times was when I trained a class of seven wonderful men at once. All were eventually put before the congregation and overwhelmingly elected and ordained. The session, in a matter of a few months, went from around ten to seventeen. Fresh enthusiasm and zeal energized the whole session and this had its effect on the whole congregation.

I met with the group of seven for nearly two years before all were ordained. Some were finished at eighteen months. It is important to not set a timetable in advance. Each candidate is unique and must proceed at his own pace without pressure to “keep up” and be ready at the same time as others. Some men come into the process with a rich background of Reformed teaching and Presbyterian polity. Others are new to the

Reformed Faith and Presbyterianism. Some may be strong candidates; others are borderline in their pastoral gifts and need to be tested and trained for a longer period of time. Sometimes we have terminated a candidate's training because we have seen a weakness or something that gave us (the session) pause. It could be something in the family situation. Because the congregation does not know who is in training, a man can withdraw without embarrassment. This has proven to be very beneficial to the man and his family. It has enabled him and the family to continue in our church. Perhaps at a later time the man can resume his training and become ordained when he is fully qualified and ready.

Following are agendas from the last three meetings with the class of seven. They show what had been done in previous meetings. Each of these meetings was for a couple of hours on a Saturday morning every other month. They were busy doing assignments in between meetings and alternate months proved to be a good pace. I invited and encouraged all our elders to come to these meetings so they would be familiar with the men and my training. I particularly urged the pastoral staff and the elders of the candidates to be in attendance. A danger in bringing on several elders at once is that you have two factions: the old guard who are suspicious of the new young Turks, and the new guard who feel they need to pour all their fresh enthusiasm into the stodgy old conservatives.

Once when I briefly pastored a church in Northern Ireland, I first met the older long time elders. They were very concerned that somehow some younger men had gotten on the session who were not converted! They accused them of being man-centered in their thinking and trying to take the church in a perilous direction. Then I met these "unconverted" newer elders. They told me they were deeply concerned that somehow the church had a group of older elders who were formalists who were not even converted! They only cared about maintaining the old Irish traditions and did not evidence a passion for Christ and a heart for the lost. I loved and appreciated both groups as devout men of God, and when they saw that, they began to listen to each other and see how they needed each other. So in my training I want to make sure that **trust** is nourished throughout the process. This is accomplished by:

- a) elders involved in the training of any candidates in their "undershepherd group"
- b) elders attending the bi-monthly Saturday meetings where I am training the the new men
- c) candidates attending session meetings as guests, and occasionally sharing ideas and prayer requests.

Elders-in-Training Meeting #5

5 April

- #1: Mar. Intro. Roles & Responsibilities of Elders: shepherding.
- #2: June. Our church's Vision statement. Build deeper ownership and readiness to sacrifice to see it accomplished
- Summer Dinners of 2 candidates and their wives at a time with pastor & his wife in our home (I pay close attention to what my wife thinks about each man's potential for elder).
- #3: Oct. Review history of our denomination and its current vision for ministry. Show denominational video and discuss.
- #4: Jan. Review current (new year) vision for ministry for the congregation. How would you, as an elder, fit in?
- #5: Apr. Go around circle and each man shares his sense of progress in the training process. Feedback and encouragement from others. Many spoke of the tremendous value of this and how it built a sense of team and fellowship. See more on exactly what we did under #2 below.
Introduce papers: **Developing a Shepherding Mindset**
Pastoral Visits (These papers reproduced below)
- #6: Jun. Review process to ordination. Review Shepherding and Pastoral Visits. Discuss *the church's ministry strategy*.
- #7: Nov
1. Books on elder ministry: return (I put out several books on Reformed ministry for men to borrow and return for others to read)
Group discuss: What one or two things have been most helpful to you in these training sessions? What was not very helpful?
 2. Go around: Brief update on where are you in the process of becoming an elder:
 - Going thru and subscribing to the doctrinal standards
 - Shepherding
 - Visiting session meetings (at least two)
 - Paper on book you chose from Dozen for Discipleship
 - Review your elder's reports on your study of the theology and church government material; can you knowledgeably subscribe?
 - Review your statement on shepherding and philosophy of ministry, and your paper on the book you read.
 - You write answers to 3 introduction Qs for the bulletin: **copy of the Qs**
 - Session exam: church government in a committee of session; theology and philosophy of ministry before whole session (elder board).
 3. PRAYER in the LIFE of an ELDER.
 - JE Orr: "The Role of Prayer in Spiritual Awakening" (a powerful talk from 1976 but still available in DVD from Campus Crusade for about \$5. Go to their website. After the video we simply prayed)
 - Discuss: Prayer in the life of the church: how to increase our prayer base?

4. Developing a Shepherding Mindset (see the paper below)
 - Do you have a couple of people you have applied this to in a self-conscious way?
 - How was the paper helpful?
 - What would it be more helpful?

5. Pastoral Visits (see the paper below)
 - Can you see yourself doing this?
 - What Qs did it raise for you?

DEVELOPING A SHEPHERDING MINDSET

Ephesians 4:11-16

A Christian friend shares his/her life, including problems, frustrations, woes. He/she seems to be coasting spiritually.

Ask yourself: what do I suspect that the Holy Spirit wants to do in his/her life to mature him in Christ, in, say, the next 3 years?

What would be the priorities?

Think in terms of the 3 categories of v13 (see page 5 where this was explained):

1. **Convictions** (growing "unity in the Faith")
2. **Affections** ("[intimate] knowledge of the Son of God" cf. 1:17)
3. **Character** ("mature...the whole measure of the fullness of Christ")

What would change in each of these 3 areas:

1. Convictions: what Scriptural truth, what convictions about the Gospel, what theology does he need to grasp and believe? How does his view of the Kingdom need to be enlarged?

2. Affections: what idols are supplanting his intimacy and affection for Jesus?

3. Character: where is he compromising in his obedience to Christ? Where does he need to step out on faith?

What can I do to help him see these things, respond in faith and obedience so he is at a different place 3 years from now?

What are the order of priorities?

(Note: as you do this, you will also raise the same Qs about your own life! It is not just about him, but the two of you together (v15-16).

Broader result: you will begin to think more purposefully about the lives of the people you interact with.

Sometimes you will share the plan with them and hold them accountable.

You may also do it jointly.

Or you may keep it to yourself but use it to

- a) pray for him with more focus and expectation
- b) use it to ask him Qs and lovingly raise issues

Note: you can also do this as a group where

- a) each person shares their own 1-3 year plan
- b) the group gives input and feedback for revision and encouragement

Colossians 1:28 (cf. Matt 28:18-20)

Elders in Training: **PASTORAL VISITS**

Problem: People in the congregation not feel cared for
Esp hospital visits or minor health crisis

Our church's Philosophy of ministry

Elders are primarily shepherds (Elder Retreat paper)

But the typical congregant wants *paid* pastors—especially the senior pastor's attention, to communicate that they and their problem are important.
Or give a *real* prayer that is more likely to be heard by God. (I am not kidding; I heard this many times)

You men are pastors!

We paid and unpaid elders need work together as a team:

Uniqueness principle: make a priority of what you are most uniquely called and gifted to do. For the paid pastor to visit everyone who is sick or in the hospitable in a growing congregation is poor stewardship. Other "pastors" who are the ruling elders can do that as well, or better if they know the sick person better. You visit to care for them and pray with them. Counsel them in how to go to Christ with their needs. Find out if they are doing that. Read and apply appropriate Scriptures.

Communicate to congregation: a visit from your elder is a *pastoral* visit.

Better than a staff pastor who does not know you as well.

You men care for our people in ways you are equipped to do.

Frees pastoral staff to spend our time on more intense/serious/crisis things that we more able, by God's grace, to handle.

→ Q: how do you minister in a way that is perceived as a true pastoral visit?

- Begin with conversation appropriate to where they are: sometimes begin chit chat, other times get right to heart issues immediately
- Ask Qs such as: how is this trial affecting your relationship with the Lord now? What do you see Him doing in all this? What would you like me to pray for you and your family?
- **Focus** on **heart** issues, not trivia, or external circumstances (while not ignoring them)
- Have a brief time reading and discussing Scripture, such as Psalm 23
- Pray with them for their physical, spiritual, and emotional needs

Can you see yourself doing this kind of thing?

What would it take to get you there?

How can we team up together so you can do a couple of pastoral visits with the paid staff?

Elders-in-Training Meeting #6

14 June

- #1: Mar . Intro. Roles & Responsibilities of Elders: shepherding.
 #2: June . CPC Vision. Worship. Community.
 Summer dinners with 2 couples at a time.
 #3: Oct . OPC video of history.
 #4: Jan . Why is our church not growing as we would expect of a healthy church? How would you, as an elder, address that?
 #5: Apr Progress in process. Death of infants: case study in pastoring
Developing a Shepherding Mindset; Pastoral Visits

1. Books: return/borrow
2. Brief update on where are you in the process of becoming an elder
 1. Going thru and subscribing to the Confession and BOCO
 2. Shepherding
 3. Visiting session meetings (at least two): have you?
 4. Paper on book you chose from Dozen for Discipleship
 Do we have a first group and a second group to present to the congregation for election? Target date for first group to be announced to congregation?
Process:
 - Your elder reports that you are finished the theology and BOCO, and can knowledgeably subscribe
 - I report that you are ready in shepherding and philosophy of ministry, and have completed your papers on your books
 - You write answers to 3 Qs for the bulletin: **copy of the Qs** (essentially the Qs were 1) how did you come to faith in Christ? 2) how did you come to Reformed convictions? 3) what is your vision for our church, and what do you uniquely bring to move us toward that greater health?
 - Session exam: BOCO in committee; theology and philosophy of ministry before whole session
 - Congregational meeting to vote
 - Ordain at a Lord's Supper service
3. Developing a Shepherding Mindset
 Do you have a couple of people you have applied this to in a self-conscious way?
 How was the paper helpful?
 What would be more helpful?
4. Pastoral Visits
 Can you see yourself doing this?
 What Qs did it raise for you?
5. Report on the book, *Simple Church*, by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger (B&H Pub, 2006). [I only mildly recommend this book for some church leaders where life has gotten unwieldy and unfocused. It lacks theological depth and could have made its point in 30 pages.] Implications for CPC. What is our "simple process" for making disciples? How do we align our ministries along that process and move people thru it?
6. Next meeting: [date] Close in prayer

Elders-in-Training Meeting #7
8 November

- #1: Mar . Intro. Roles & Responsibilities of Elders: shepherding.
 #2: June . CPC Vision. Worship. Community.
 Summer dinners with 2 couples at a time.
 #3: Oct . OPC video of history. Our future in the OPC
 #4: Jan . Why is CPC not growing as we would expect of a healthy church? How would you, as an elder, address that?
 #5: Apr . Progress in process. Death of infants. Developing a Shepherding Mindset
Pastoral Visits
 #6: Jun . Process to ordination. Review Shepherding and Pastoral Visits. Discuss *Simple Church* and Simple Process for CPC.

1. Books: return/borrow
 What one or two things have been most helpful to you in these training sessions?
 What was not very helpful?
2. Brief update on where are you in the process of becoming an elder:
3. PRAYER in the LIFE of an ELDER.
 - JE Orr: "The Role of Prayer in Spiritual Awakening"
 - Prayer in the life of CPC: how increase our prayer base?
4. Developing a Shepherding Mindset
 Do you have a couple of people you have applied this to in a self-conscious way?
 How was the paper helpful?
 What would be more helpful?
5. Pastoral Visits
 Can you see yourself doing this?

FROM TRAINING TO ORDINATION

Finishing the Training → Session approval → Congregation election → Ordination

1. I report to session that the candidate is ready in his shepherding skills and philosophy of ministry, that he has completed his papers on his two *Dozen for Discipleship* books, and that he has attended at least two session meetings.
2. The candidate's elder reports to session that the candidate has completed his study of the secondary and tertiary standards and is ready to
 - a) “receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures,” and
 - b) “approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.”
 If you are not in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, plug in whatever your vows are for your doctrinal standards.

3. We then give the candidate his written examination questions for the meeting where session will give its final approval of him for the office of ruling elder. The candidate's examination by session has three parts to it:

I. Theology

II. Book of Church Order

III. Philosophy of Ministry and Personal Godliness

The theology exam is an open book take home exam. The other two parts are discussion with the elders. Let me explain this.

Why do we give a take home exam in theology? We found that oral exams tend to be perfunctory. So we give each candidate a list of the questions reproduced below. They take it home and write out their answers to **all** twenty-six questions. Yes, it is a bit daunting, but we tell them we want to help them. If they are discouraged or stuck, they are encouraged to call their elder or any one of us and we will meet with them to help *them* formulate *their* answers. When the candidate and his elder are satisfied that it is finished and acceptable, the elder makes his exam available to all the other elders, who go over his answers. If an elder sees an answer that disturbs him, he is encouraged to contact the candidate before the exam at the session meeting to resolve any issues. This is a great time of learning. By doing this, we are confident that when we meet with the candidate we know they have passed the examination and issues discussed at the meeting are refinements, not questions to determine whether the man is qualified. On occasion we used to experience a weak exam and it is then very awkward to tell the man, usually in front of his family, that he did not pass! At the session meeting of their exam, there is a brief time of session's feedback and encouragement. A few questions are asked by anyone who wants, to have the candidate elaborate or clarify his answers. The whole process is a very positive experience as long as the candidates know that we are *for* them.

II. Book of Church Order, and III. Philosophy of Ministry and Personal Godliness: the questions below let the candidate know what is expected of him. He can

simply make some brief notes for himself in these parts of the exam. Session assigns two elders to meet as a committee with the candidate to discuss these areas outside of session. This saves session time and is more relaxed and thorough than would be at the meeting. The elders report to session of his satisfactory completion of these parts.

4. During the time the candidate is writing his exam answers he also writes his testimony answers to 3 questions for the church bulletin:

- 1. How did you become a Christian?**
- 2. How did you come to Reformed and Presbyterian convictions?**
- 3. How has God prepared you for the office of ruling elder and what is your vision for our church?**

This is session's first announcement of who is a candidate for the office of elder. The bulletin announcement also encourages anyone who has any concerns about this man serving as an elder to talk to any member of session, especially the candidate's elder who has gone through the training process with him. Hopefully their concerns will be addressed to their satisfaction. Rarely a member may acquaint us with information about the candidate that we were unaware of. It is always possible that the man's name could be withdrawn, even at this point.

5. When the candidate is about finished his written theology exam, session then announces to the congregation the date for the exam at a session meeting. Anyone who desires may come and observe the examination. Generally at least the adult members of his family will attend.

I have presented this final procedure as if there is only one candidate. But let me note that if I am training more than one, in a class, the men will usually be ready at different times. So in the case where there was a class of seven, we divided the announcements and exams into two separate sets of dates. Three were ready for a December meeting with session, and four were ready the following February.

6. Congregational meetings are tentatively set, and announced, for the congregational vote, pending successful completion of the examinations:

Dec__?? Feb__??

The Form of Government XX:4 does not state what level of majority is required for a man to be elected. I would urge much more than a bare 51% majority, but there is latitude in this, so I will not pose a particular percentage required.

7. We ordain our elders and deacons at the monthly evening Lord's Supper service following the vote.

Here is the examination.

EXAMINATION OF ELDER CANDIDATES

I. BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

A. Summary

1. Do you agree with the system of doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and catechisms?
2. If there are points of disagreement, what are they?

B. Specific Doctrines

1. State your doctrine of the authority of Scripture (include a discussion of inerrancy).
2. What is the difference between God's secret and revealed will? Why is this important?
3. a) What is the doctrine of predestination? How does it relate to free will? Where do you see it in Scripture?
b) When a tragedy occurs, do we say God "let" that happen, or did He cause it in the ultimate sense? Include the idea of mystery.
4. If God is the source of all things, is He necessarily the source of evil?
5. What do you understand by the "days" of creation? What are the allowable positions that you can live at peace with?
6. Did God use a pre-existent living being to create man? Why is that theologically significant? Interact with Romans 5 and I Corinthians 15.
7. How many basic covenants are there in Scripture? What are they, and with whom did God make them?
8. Are humans sinners because they sin, or do they sin because they are sinners? Explain.
9. What is the doctrine of justification? How is it related to sanctification?
10. Can a person be a Christian and not have Jesus as Lord of their lives?
11. What is regeneration? Does it follow or precede faith and repentance?
12. What is double imputation? Why is it important? (Hallelujah!)
13. What are the five points of Calvinism? Briefly explain each. Do you have trouble with any of them?

14. Why must Christ's death only be for the elect if it is to actually *save* us, not just make salvation possible if we fulfill some condition on our own?
15. What is the importance of the resurrection in the daily Christian life (hint: read Romans 6)?
16. What are the "means of grace"? What is the fourth one Harris says the Reformers missed? (see I Pet 4:10-11)
17. What are the biblical grounds for divorce?
18. Who is to be baptized? Give biblical grounds for infant baptism.
19. Why do we sprinkle rather than immerse? Would you urge the teaching elders to immerse someone who preferred that?
20. a) Is the Lord's Supper anything more than simply a memorial to remind us of Jesus' death? b) Why do we celebrate it? c) Who should celebrate it? d) When should we celebrate it?
21. What is the present relevance of the fourth commandment?
22. What is your view of the place of speaking in tongues in a Christian's life? What would you counsel someone who practices that?
23. Is homosexuality a sin, a predisposition, or both? Explain. What about alcoholism?
24. Briefly, what is your view of the Millennium?
25. Could Jesus return today? How does your hope affect your life?

II. BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT, THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE AND THE DIRECTORY FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP.

A. The Form of Government

1. Distinguish between the Presbyterian form of government and other forms.
2. Describe what you consider to be the duties of a ruling elder.
3. What should a church member do if he/she believes the session has made an unscriptural rule or in some other way has acted contrary to the Bible?
4. What is the significance of ordination?

B. The Book of Discipline

1. What are the reasons for administering discipline in the church?
2. Describe the process to be followed in transferring a member of one congregation to another.
3. Outline the steps to be followed in judicial process.
4. What are the degrees of censure?
5. Should the church ever excommunicate anyone?
6. What kind of informal discipline should normally precede formal discipline? How are you involved in "informal discipline"?

C. The Directory of Worship

1. How should the Lord's Day be sanctified? What will you say to a person who mentions he/she is going shopping for groceries after the service?
2. What is the purpose of public worship and what are some matters to be considered in trying to fulfill that purpose?
3. To whom should Baptism be administered? What will you say to one who says baptism is the same as dedication? What will you say to the one who confuses infant baptism with baptismal regeneration?
4. To whom should the Lord's Supper be administered?
5. Philosophy of ministry and church membership:
 - a. How do we prepare people for membership?

- b. What do we require of people for membership?
- c. How does a session minister to church members? What are you doing to equip members for ministry?
- d. What should be expected of members?

III. BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR PERSONAL PIETY

- A. Describe your present practice in regard to Bible study.
- B. Describe your present practice in regard to prayer.
- C. Describe your present efforts in the area of witnessing.
- D. Do you and your wife agree in basic matters of faith and practice?

CONTINUING ED

After the man is ordained to the office of elder, that does not complete his training, anymore than graduating from seminary completed mine. As we minister together through the years, we all influence each other and seek to grow in godliness as well as skills of shepherding. But there are two ways in particular that I have sought to continue the training process of my men.

I. ONE TO ONE

I **meet with each one of them regularly**, usually at the place of their employment, so it is convenient for them, and I also get to be in “their world” for a bit. That helps me to know them better I get out of my office, where I am the “expert,” and learn more about what it is like for them to be a Christian where they are not recognized as an elder in an OP (or whatever) Church.

I seek to meet with them as frequently as possible. When our session was smaller, I tried for monthly, then as we grew, it had to be every six weeks, and then finally I had to divide it with other staff pastors and I could only meet every other month. I hated to give up on monthly meetings with each man because those times were so precious.

There are generally three parts to each 90 minute meeting: a) personal, b) discussing their sheep, c) discussing issues that the session was currently grappling with on a personal level, and doing some dreaming about the future.

a) **Personal**: I always keep notes of my meetings, which include things to pray for each elder. I generally start by asking him how things are going in an area we have been praying about. Recently one of the elders in the church I pastored for 33 years called me to encourage me and thank me for my ministry in his life. I thanked him and told him how much his call meant to me. Then I asked him if anything stood out as particularly helpful in how I had ministered to him (I told him I had this book in mind!). He thought for a minute and said he especially appreciated how I held him accountable for things he had asked me to pray for each time we met. He said it made a difference to know that someone was going to take him seriously in talking about things he wanted to accomplish, or see God accomplish in his life. He said it made a significant difference in his growth in grace, and his role as a husband, a father, and an elder. I am move to tears even as I write this.

I early on thought of five areas that I wanted to cycle through, one each meeting, to ask in the lives of each of my elders. For years I tried to come up with a clever mnemonic device to keep them in mind. I finally gave up and settled for the silly non-word, “DOWME.”

D: devotions: what are you reading in Scripture these days and how is it speaking to you?

O: obedience: how is God stretching your faith and obedience recently?

W: wife and children: how is your family doing? How is your relationship with your wife these days?

M: ministry: how is your ministry going in the lives of people your care for? If you are leading a small group, how is it going?

E: evangelism: who have you been sharing Christ with recently? How is it going? How can I pray for that person(s)?

Actually *all* of these five questions lead to prayer requests. So I am not just interested in how he serves our church, but *first*, how do I serve him by entering his world and concerns, so that when he thinks of our meetings, what first comes to his mind is not business and burdens, but that someone who cares deeply for him is going to listen to him. There have been times, not a few, where we never got off this first point because he was hurting and needed someone to care. It also, incidentally, is modeling for him how to be an elder.

b) **His sheep.** Each elder in our church has a subset of our congregational families and singles to care for. He is their elder in particular, their first line of pastoral care. These subsets are called “undershepherd groups.”

Let me observe here what I consider to be an important fact about the office of elder. The NT uses three primary terms to refer to this office. There is the generic term **elder** (*presbyteros*). Then there are two other words that refer to the same office, but focus on its two different functions. **Bishop**, or **Overseer**, refers to the leading and administrative functions. **Shepherd**, or **Pastor**, refer to the feeding and shepherding functions. I would frequently tell my congregation, Elders lead and feed. They direct and protect.

I Timothy 5:17 has both these ideas included in the word *proestotes*, from *prohistemi*: literally, with the root meaning of “to go first” (Kittel, VI, p700ff). The elders go first in the double sense of directing (the bishop who leads the way) and protecting (the shepherd who goes out front to guard the sheep).

From my study of Scripture and my years of pastoral experience, I believe that some excellent elders are much stronger in shepherding than leading. All they want to talk about is how to care for hurting people. Administration and setting the direction of the church are burdensome and their eyes glaze over in session meetings about vision and the Big Picture. Other equally excellent elders are more bishops in their inclinations. They care for people, but are usually the first to volunteer for overseeing a new ministry and light up in session discussions about the direction the church ought to take.

So I early learned to not think all elders ought to operate with the same responsibilities in ministry to the same degree. Therefore some elders have “undershepherd groups” that are twice the size of others. Other elders oversee much more of the congregation's ministries than the shepherding types. All must be able to do both. But we need to play to our elders' strengths, not force them to be the same.

The point here is that when I meet with my elders, there will be some men that I spend twice the time talking about their sheep, and others where we will focus our time more on what he is overseeing.

Let me say a word here about how we shepherd. The traditional Reformed way is the home meeting. That can still have a lot of merit if there is a purpose, rather than it being

simply an annual perfunctory tradition where no one is really honest. See the paper, *Pastoral Visits*, on pages 28-29 for suggestions for a productive home visit.

Tim Witmer, in his excellent book, *The Shepherd Leader*, suggests making phone visits. There is much to commend this, with its main strength being that you can do many more “visits” in any given span of time, and therefore do them more frequently. But I am not persuaded that such conversations by phone will accomplish a great deal unless there is already a significant relationship. You talk meaningfully by phone with your close friends, but not with casual acquaintances.

We do two things: 1) we hold six congregational meetings per year. Three are plenary at the church facility. These enable the session to communicate where we were going as a church to everyone at once and people can ask questions. These are generally very productive. But only people comfortable in large groups will speak. So, 2) the other three meetings are “undershepherd group” meetings held in the homes of the elders. This allows much more give and take. I produce an agenda for all the elders to use, so they do not have to prepare one. I go over it at the session meeting prior to the “Elder Home Meetings” so everyone has a feel for what we are trying to accomplish. These meetings accomplish a number of things. First, people get to know their elder up close and personal in the his home, with his wife and kids. They can easily get into conversation with him and feel more comfortable with him. Secondly, they hear about some of the future plans of the church and can easily interact in a non-threatening situation. I believe many sessions need to do much better at communicating with their congregations what they are thinking. We were constantly needing to improve on this. Thirdly, with this background, the elder can email his people and ask for prayer requests. Those who offer requests open the door to deeper conversations. It seems to work better than anything else we have tried, but admittedly there are always some people who are reluctant to be known.

Note: it only works when the elder emails and calls each of his families to invite them to come to his meeting. A simple announcement in the bulletin will *not* bring many people out. But it does get easier as people come and have fun. They then look forward to the next Home meeting in four months.

c) **Agenda issues and dreams.** I also early discovered that much more would be accomplished in our session meetings if I discussed a thorny pastoral or policy issue with a man who had a particular interest or insights into that agenda item. I also discovered that certain men would take up session time on certain issues by probing all its implications while others were checking their smart phones. It was better to discuss a new idea one to one with these men before it came to session. Many breakthroughs occurred at these one to one lunch meetings.

I am tempted here to go off on a tangent about how to hold productive session meetings that are collegial, pastoral, and productive, focused on Kingdom priorities. But I will forbear, for this little manual is already outgrowing its original intended dimensions. Let me just say that it is worth giving a lot of thought to the purpose of session meetings, and

how they can be productive and efficient, especially with today's communications technologies. It always thrilled my little heart whenever I heard a man say he *enjoyed* our session meetings. Especially when I knew he was not being sarcastic! I also want to spend some time dreaming with my men. I think we spend too much time focusing on problems and not enough on thinking of creative ways to extend the Kingdom in our city. Doing this one to one sometimes generated exciting new ideas that bore much fruit.

This relates to a question I am often asked: how do your elders manage to serve meaningfully while holding down jobs that may require fifty or sixty hours a week, especially if they must travel a fair amount? I will not lie; it is very difficult to balance home, occupation as a conscientious Christian, and serving as an elder. I will offer just a few thoughts.

1. While our church sees ordination to the office of elder as a lifetime proposition, we do offer time off when a man needs it. He can be relieved of some or all of his responsibilities for a limited period of time. He usually, but not always, initiates this, with a guess as to how long he might need, and then reports back at that time (six months? A year?) as to whether he is ready to return on session, or whether he needs more time. We even encourage men to take off coming to session meetings for a year every four or five years, so he can be rejuvenated. He keeps his undershepherd groups during that time, for pastoral continuity.
2. Steward your elders' times carefully. Use email when it will substitute for an extra meeting. Extra meetings wear men down quickly. Make sure the session meetings are productive, so the men go home able to tell their wives why it was valuable to be out that night.
3. I have found that when men see that they are making a difference for Jesus Christ in their service as an elder, when they see people's lives being changed, and some coming to Christ, they are willing to sacrifice. It is when they do not see that what they are doing makes any difference, that they begin to "burn out." Occasionally in my one to one meetings with my elders, I would ask the question, "Are you still enjoying being an elder?" That can be a scary question that we want to avoid, but it is better to know early when a man is feeling more burden than delight. At least you can address it before his heart is gone, or he resents the church.

II. SESSION RETREATS

The second way I continued to train my elders was at twice a year **session retreats**. These retreats were held in January or February and the second one in June. The winter retreat generally focused on large picture thinking about the future. The summer retreat might do some evaluation of the past year. Or it could be a more relaxed fellowship time. Retreats were generally 8am to 5pm, sometimes ending with dinner with our wives. Sometimes we would present to them what we had discussed that day, particularly if it

concerned a new policy or direction for the church. We would have to explain it so it made sense to them and then they would give us their feedback! Those were some humbling times. “What were you guys thinking?!”

The summer retreats at times were the elders and their wives for a Friday evening and all day Saturday. One elder and his wife were very good at getting cheap rates on nice hotels, often in a scenic or historic place of interest. Friday evening was a fun time together. Then Saturday the men met for business while the wives did together whatever they had planned, sometimes serious, sometimes fun.

We always began with a time in the Word, first privately with questions one elder had prepared, then time in the Word together on that same passage. This was usually followed by a time of personal sharing and prayer for one another. We tried to do that on a monthly basis, but often did not succeed as we had hoped, so this gave us a time to catch up on each other.

Then we would discuss the issue or two of the day in a more concentrated way than possible at the monthly Tuesday evening meetings (occasionally we needed to meet twice a month). Sometimes we had all read a book on ministry (such as Tim Witmer's book, *The Shepherd Leader*) and at the retreat we would discuss it and apply it to our church.

CONCLUSION

That's it.

I pray this manual will be helpful to you as you seek to recruit and train men for the office of ruling elder.

Please give me feedback at the email or address listed at the beginning of this manual.

All praise to Jesus, the good Shepherd, the great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd. May He enable us to do a better job of training the elders He has called to shepherd His sheep. “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28, ESV).