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INSTITUTE**  
*for Church Ministry*

# **A Guide to Elder Covenants of Conduct**

Resources for the relationships  
between elders and congregations

Compiled in September 2016 by the  
Siburt Institute for Church Ministry

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Equipping and serving church leaders and other Christ-followers  
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## **The Ministry of an Elder**

Drawn from biblical texts and the best practices of congregational leadership this outline reflects the critical, essential ministry of elders for the spiritual maturation of a church and the church's witness to the world.

### **Scripture and Context:**

**In the absence of apostolic leaders in local churches, leadership emerged in each community.**

1. In Paul's earliest letter, I Thessalonians, he refers to "those who labor among you, are over you, and admonish you" (5:12).
  - i. This is one group with separate functions.
  - ii. The fact that Paul uses participles rather than nouns/titles indicates that function preceded title.
2. Leadership was "dialectical" --tasks were not reserved for the leaders (others admonished, cf. I Thess. 5:14).
3. I Corinthians does not refer to elders, but to "administrators" (12:28 = "those who steer a ship"); these were numbered along with other gifts within the church.
4. In Philippians, elders and deacons are identified.
5. In Romans, leaders of house churches are identified.
6. Etc.

### **The New Testament knows a variety of terms for its leaders.**

1. Elder (presbyteros) designated an older man, although all older men were not elders (cf, Titus 1:6-10; 1 Tim. 5:1, 17).
2. Bishop (episkopos) was the common secular word for "supervisor" or "overseer."
3. Shepherd—1 Peter 5.1-5
4. Steward (Titus 1.7)
5. Leader (hegoumenoi) is a term used in Hebrews 13:7, 17.

### **The setting for local leadership was the ancient house church.**

1. Leadership normally developed around patriarchal figures who "managed a household" and could exercise hospitality.
2. In this context, churches had neither buildings nor budgets.
3. The elders in the ancient churches did not have a located minister.
4. As in many societies in the non-western world today, leadership emerges among older "patriarchal" figures whose wisdom and experience are valued. Churches in our post-industrial society have a major challenge in transferring the leadership models of the ancient society to our own.
5. Just as in ancient societies leadership reflected practices within that culture, our understandings of leadership reflect our own experiences.
6. Many naturally think in terms of our own structures: representative democracy, checks and balances, etc.

**Despite the differences between antiquity and the present, we see the need for ideas of leadership that transcend our cultural differences.** The major concern of the qualifications for elders in I Tim. 3 and Titus 1 is that we find those who exemplify virtues for both insiders and outsiders.

**Although the New Testament does not say very much about the tasks of elders, the most consistent theme is that elders know the Christian faith and serve as teachers.**

1. “Apt to teach” (I Tim. 3:2)
2. “Those who labor in preaching and teaching” (I Tim. 5:17).
3. The elders in Titus are the bulwark against dangerous teachings (1:6-10).
  - a. In Titus 1:7, the elders is a “steward” of God’s word.
  - b. In Titus 1:9, the elder is who holds to good teaching and encourages others in healthy instruction.
4. The “shepherd” image describes the task of the elder.
  - a. One should note the significance of the shepherd image in the Bible; cf Ps. 23 and other passages in the OT.
  - b. The shepherd protects the church from wolves that threaten it (Acts 20:28ff).
  - c. According to I Peter 5:1-5, the shepherd’s task is to “feed” the flock of God; i.e., to ensure good nutrition for the flock.
5. Hebrews mentions “leaders” who “taught the word of God” (Heb. 13:7).

**The elders’ role cannot be separated from their authority.**

1. One can be authoritative without being “authoritarian” (“lording it over them” I Pet. 3:3).
2. The term “those who are over you” in I Thess. 5:12 is used also in I Tim. 3:4-5 and 5:17. It is a paternal word, signifying “caring authority” and “authoritative care.”
3. The household context indicates that the authority resembles that of a father figure, who “cares for” those under his care.

**The modern church, like the ancient church, requires the leadership of those who exemplify the Christian life, teach the Christian faith, and guide the church in its future.**

- a. The church is not a representative democracy.
- b. Although elders do not necessarily “micromanage” every aspect of the church, they guide the church in every aspect of its life.
- c. The elders gain authority by attaining the credibility that is rooted in acts of service.

### **Elder Roles**

1. Forming vibrant Christian communities of witness through healthy teaching.
  - a. Hold the gospel narrative against other narratives (doctrines). (1 Tim 6:20).

- b. Promoting formation through healthy teaching (1 Tim 1.10; Titus 1.9)
  - c. Engage in preaching and teaching (1 Tim 5.17).
  - d. Nurturing others so that Christ is formed within them (Gal 4.19)
  - e. Creating/facilitating processes that enable all believers to mature in Christ (Eph 4.14, 15; Heb 6.1)
2. Shepherding the congregational flock
    - a. Protect against those who would exploit (Acts 20.28ff).
    - b. Provide good nutrition for the flock (1 Peter 5.1-5)
    - c. Managing and care for the congregation with nurturing processes (1 Tim 3.4,5; 1 Thess 5.12)
  3. Strengthen the weak
    - a. Consoling those in affliction—with the consolation that they have received from God (2 Cor 1.3ff)
    - b. Facilitate the care of the whole body of Christians through whatever system makes sense ( 1 Cor 12.25; Rom 13.8; 1 Thess 3.12; 4.9)
    - c. Yet remembering, that no shepherd can neglect the practice of care. Consider the image of nurse and father (1 Thess 2.7, 11)
    - d. Prayer, anointing with oil, and the laying on of hands are useful practices (James 4.14-15)
    - e. Facilitate reconciliation—Consider funerals, family crises, personal and interpersonal conflict as places to bind up the injured and strengthen the weak (Ezekiel 34)
  4. Providing oversight that builds congregational community that bears public witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
    - a. Building believers into a household of faith (1 Cor. 3.10-18)
    - b. Facilitating a community where “one another” is modeled (Rom 14.19; 15.7; Gal 5.13; 1 Thess 5.11, 14)
    - c. Assist and empowering believers to discover and to use their gifts for the common good and for witness to the gospel ( 1 Cor 12, 14.25).
    - d. Cultivating a community that extends hospitality (1 Pet 4.9) knowing that a warm welcome to the stranger (Heb 13.2) is foundational to gospel witness.
    - e. Nurturing a community that gracious gives testimony to the world about the hope that lies within us (1 Pet 3.15ff)
  5. Empowering others for ministry and service.
    - a. Equipping Christians for ministry and service based on their giftedness and passion (Eph 4.12ff, 1 Pet 4.10)
    - b. Enabling believers promotes maturity (Eph 4.14ff)

*The care and shepherding of a congregation in contemporary contexts cannot easily be done by elders alone. Thus elders invite and develop a staff of ministers to share in pastoral leadership. How elders and ministers share in that work is quite contextual but rests in the formal authority of elders who are charged with the care of the flock (Acts 20.28). This creates an additional dimension to matters of oversight.*

**Dimensions of an Elder’s discipleship practice:**

<b><i>A. Public Ministry Skills</i></b>
1. Teaches the faith responsibly and appropriately
2. Shepherds the flock by promoting healthy beliefs
3. Contributes to worship with meaningful pastoral prayer
<b><i>B. Personal Ministry Skills</i></b>
4. Equips and empowers others for their ministries
5. Encourages or facilitates the ministry of reconciliation
6. Shows appropriate Christian care to those in crisis or grief
<b><i>C. Leadership Strength</i></b>
7. Leads the church effectively in developing and implementing its ministry
8. Leads other leaders in ways that win their trust and increase their effectiveness
9. Functions as a leader in ways that win the trust and respect of the congregation
<b><i>D. Spiritual Maturity</i></b>
10. Demonstrates appropriate spiritual maturity in faith, life, and service
11. Models the maturity and wisdom to lead others in their spiritual formation
12. Shows congruence between character and conduct
<b><i>E. Personal Authenticity</i></b>
13. Shows love and respect for the congregation and its other leaders
14. Demonstrates a healthy respect for himself as a physical being
15. Models a healthy relationship to his spouse and family

**C. Other Notes**

1. Different elders will have different strengths, gifts, and interests.
2. Elder roles can be taught and learned.
3. The aim for elders is maturation of these roles—not perfection.
4. Remember: “The single most important lesson for the leader to learn is that he/she is first a sheep and not a shepherd; first a child and not a father or mother; first an imitator, not a model. Rather than thinking only about those biblical images that set him/her apart, the leader should reflect on the many more images that apply to him/her as fully as to any other believer.” David Bennett, *Biblical Images*, 193-94.

## **Special Issues Facing Elders and Ministers—In the Relationship to Each Other**

(Adapted from Charles Siburt)

1. The roles and functions are more similar than different. The challenge is in understanding how and where accountability lies.
2. The work of ministers and elders overlap and should find complimentary ways of participating in God's work.
3. The relationship has some predictable stages.
4. Whatever the issues or the language, the real interests "below the line" are power, control, and ego.
5. The "Child" in both gets in the way of an "Adult-Adult" relationship.
6. Both elders and ministers can slip into the "box of self-deception."
7. Personal leadership style differences can contribute to tension between elders and ministers.
8. Differing conflict management styles also add to the tension.
9. Both elders and ministers struggle with their own anxiety and insecurity.
10. Both elders and ministers struggle with the "trust vs. distrust" tension.
11. Elders and ministers are constantly in jeopardy of being "triangled" against each other.

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## How To Behave When We Disagree

With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:2,3).

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters...that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose (1 Corinthians 1:10).

...I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment...(Romans 12:3). Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:10). Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are (Romans 12:16). We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves...For Christ did not please himself (Romans 15:1-3).

Be of the same mind...Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...(Philippians 2:2-5).

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up...Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:29-32)

...Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:12-14).

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace (James 3:13-18).

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matthew 18: 15-17).

# Congregational Behavioral Covenant: Expressions of our Fruits of Repentance

## Introduction

The purpose for creating a set of commitments relating to our interactive behavior is to provide guidelines for the Opinion Leader team as we discuss issues related to managing conflict, and to establish a culture of peacemaking. The group believes that it is important to readily address conflict within the church, not only to retain and strengthen relationships but to embrace it as an opportunity for communication. The reason these guidelines were created was to ensure a truthful, respectful, and loving exchange as we discussed situations and details of specific areas of conflict. These norms are guidelines only and not offered as a set of rules or doctrinal criteria. While functioning for its specific purpose, the Opinion Leader team will use these recommendations for addressing conflict. The church may also prayerfully consider use of these recommendations for managing conflict in relationships.

### A. Conflicts regarding Biblical disagreements

1. We will expect disagreements about our views of the Bible and we will demonstrate Biblical love when these occur. **Romans 14**
2. We recognize the Bible as the ultimate authority and will prioritize issues based upon its Greatest Commands. **Mark 12:28-31, John 13:34-35; Romans 14:13-14**

### B. "Fighting" to retain/enhance Christian Relationships

1. Because our relationships are more important than our differences with each other, we will foster an environment of love and respect in which disagreement will be an expression of our relationship as fallible human beings rather than as an act of rebellion or disunity. **Ephesians 4:2-3**
2. When differences become a threat to a relationship, we will refuse to spread false or slanderous statements or allow anyone to belittle another person, but will show respect and love while working to understand the other's thoughts. **Matthew 7:12**
3. Realizing that we are all created in God's image but not in His perfection, we will love and believe in each other by caring for the feelings and reputation of others, seeking to understand and to heal wounds even in disagreement. **Ephesians 4:29-32**
4. We will not place "winning" an argument above our relationship, but will work to have a heart-felt, forgiving attitude that will save the relationship. We will not leave the fellowship of Northeast to avoid working on the issue. **Philippians 2:2-5; Romans 12:3**

### C. Guidelines for Reconciliation and Forgiveness

1. We will either drop issues we have with others or engage them following the examples in Matthew 18. **Matthew 18; Romans 14**
2. We will build relationships so that sincere forgiveness is offered and accepted. **Matthew 18:21-22**

D. Negative behaviors that should not be encouraged

1. We will not support refusal to discuss, ignoring, or retreating from disagreement with brothers/sisters.  
**Matthew 18:5**
2. We will not escalate conflict by encouraging exaggeration of issues by others.
3. We will not give anonymous critics credibility or a hearing.
4. We will not allow resurrection of conflicts that have been dropped. **I Corinthians 13: 5b**
5. We will not listen to disparaging talk regarding brothers/sisters. **James 3:5-6**

E. Positive behaviors that should be promoted.

1. We will place as much or more importance on how people disagree as we place on what they disagree about.
2. We will expect members to occasionally disagree with the elders/ministers but to do so in ways that model healthy engagement. **Galatians 2:11-14**
3. We will engage any behavior that threatens relationships before it becomes a major issues. If we feel that we can't talk with someone when we have a disagreement, we will ask one or more mature, non-partial Christians to mediate the discussion, thus utilizing God's wisdom and power that he bestows on the larger church. **Matthew 18**
4. We recognize that the timing, or knowing when to address a conflict, is important, but it should never be used to avoid the conflict. **Acts 15:36-41; I Timothy 4:11**
5. We will seek to resolve problems rather than trying to change personalities. **I Corinthians 9:19-23; Romans 12:6**
6. We will envision the best possible outcome for all parties involved in any conflict and will verbalize our ideas and support for those ideas, to accomplish those outcomes. **Mark 12:31; Matthew 7:12; Philippians 2:4; I Corinthians 13:4-5**

## **Code of Conduct for Shepherds**

March 01, 2002

**The Christian Chronicle -**

**Sunday, August 22, 1999**

All shepherds have agreed to the following stipulations. Their purpose is to lay the ground rules for the interaction of the shepherds for the benefit of the congregation and the eldership. By signing this statement, I agree to abide by these policies.

1. Although I am a shepherd of the Trenton Church of Christ, I am also part of the flock within the eldership and I will submit to the eldership as I expect every other member to have a submissive spirit. If I am asked to resign by the eldership, I will do so immediately without questioning their judgment.
2. Decisions made by the eldership are made by majority vote, not by minority rule.
3. If I am not present for a vote, I will not bring up any issue decided upon in my absence for the purpose of reversing that decision.
4. Once the eldership has decided an issue, I will support it even if I did not agree with the decision.
5. I will refrain from making major decisions on my own realizing that I have no authority as an individual elder. Authority resides in the eldership as a whole.
6. I will treat my fellow elders with respect and as an equal.
7. I will not engage in derogatory discussions about any elder or the eldership, any deacon or staff member. I will at all times speak positively about the leadership or I will not speak at all.

Having read this code of conduct, I pledge to abide by it and count it a privilege to serve as a shepherd at the Trenton Church of Christ.

# Covenant for Shepherding

Church of Christ  
Revised May 2016

It is a “noble task” (1 Timothy 3:1), an honor, and a privilege to serve as an elder at the Church of Christ. Throughout its history, elders have demonstrated bold and courageous leadership and visionary thinking. New elders are called out and serving elders are reaffirmed at intervals discerned by the leading of the Holy Spirit. These elders are asked to shoulder the responsibility for the spiritual growth and welfare of each and every member at

## Community

This covenant guides us as a community: in sharing of information, discerning, setting priorities, making decisions, addressing complaints, and resolving conflict. We consider every elder, regardless of their period of service, to be of equal status as a shepherd of this church. There are no “junior” or “senior” elders. From the first day of service, each elder has full co-responsibility with the other elders for the shepherding and oversight of

We believe each elder is subject to the oversight of fellow elders and the collective wisdom of the entire group is worthy of our trust and respect. We serve and shepherd the Church of Christ with humility, aware that our mutually submissive attitudes and dependence on God’s Word, prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit are at the very core of our existence.

The role of the elder’s spouse is also very important. For that reason, we believe that it is essential for elders’ spouses to be active, involved members of the Church of Christ who support the decisions of the eldership. As partners in their spouse’s shepherding responsibilities and activities, they help positively reflect the spirit of unity, camaraderie, and leadership the elders strive to attain in their lives of service to Christ.

## Decisions

All decisions of policy pertaining to the life of this church will be made by the entire group. To facilitate the work done in large group meetings, special assignments can be delegated to an individual or ministry team to evaluate, take action, or develop alternative suggestions or approaches to an issue.

We are entitled to express a point of view personally, but unless or until it is affirmed by the elders as a group, that point of view should be clearly identified as one’s personal point of view. However, an elder should not express a personal point of view outside of the eldership that is in opposition to a decision previously made by the eldership where such expression signals the individual elder’s lack of support for that decision.

The Executive Minister is responsible for the oversight of the church’s ministerial and support staff. Personnel management and changes will be processed with the Elder Leadership Team - ELT. The ELT will coordinate and create appropriate processes for hiring new personnel. Each process will be shaped based on the open position and current circumstances. The Executive Minister will lead the process determined by the ELT and after the process will make a recommendation to the ELT for final hiring approval. The Executive Minister will also bring recommendations to the ELT regarding dismissal of an employee. The ELT will decide to approve or disapprove the recommendation, as well as work out the transition process for the employee in the case of a dismissal. The hiring or dismissal of the Preaching Minister or the Executive Minister will always require the approval of the full eldership.

Elder meetings are open to all members of the \_\_\_\_\_ Church of Christ, except for special meetings that deal with sensitive or confidential matters. The Chair of the Elders (also the Chair of the ELT) shall preside over the elder meetings, but may designate another elder to preside in their absence. The Chair of the Elders may designate “Executive Sessions - Elders Only” meetings to allow for discussions of confidential matters. The \_\_\_\_\_ ministerial staff will be included and are encouraged to participate in all elder meetings, except where “elders only” confidentiality has been requested or when personnel matters are to be discussed.

All meetings are important, and, unless otherwise specified, all elders are expected to attend elder meetings. In our meetings no one shall dominate the proceedings. One may speak only after having been recognized by the chairman.

Decisions by the elders will typically be to get a “sense of the room.” When an issue needs to be decided by a majority vote, one more than half of the elders must be present. A majority vote of those present is considered to have approved or disapproved a motion. Anyone not present at a meeting is considered to have voted with the majority on any motion. On matters of opinion, all elders agree to support the decision of the group as if the vote had been unanimous.

### **Confidentiality**

It is forbidden to talk to anyone outside the meeting about how anyone voted on an issue. Should a matter be decided which an elder cannot support for reasons of conscience, there are at least two alternatives. One can ask for the matter to be reconsidered, providing more time to clarify the point. If this does not remedy the situation and the majority decision is sustained, the option is to resign as an elder, still expected to adhere to the principles above regarding support of the decision and talking to others outside the meeting.

At all times confidentiality must be respected. This means there will be sensitive matters that will be considered by the elders, such as personnel issues, personal relationship issues, behavioral issues, and other specific requests for confidentiality. These matters are not to be discussed with others. Any violation of this will be considered highly inappropriate and known violators will be confronted in the spirit of Galatians 6:1.

### **Communication**

The \_\_\_\_\_ elders, both individually and collectively, strongly desire to be people who are “above reproach” (1 Timothy 3:2). In this regard, we recognize the need for clear and effective communication with each other and with the congregation. Our goal is to communicate openly and honestly about decisions that have been reached as we set the course for the spiritual direction for this church family.

We avoid communicating with others in any manner so as to represent our personal point of view as being that of the \_\_\_\_\_ elders. Exceptions include:

- When directed by the elders to communicate a message on their behalf, or
- When repeating a decision of the elders which has previously been made public.

Our prayer is from Ezekiel 34. May God bless the shepherds at \_\_\_\_\_; we strive to:

- take care of the flock,
- strengthen the weak,
- heal the sick,
- bind up the injured,
- bring back the strays,
- search for the lost, and
- serve the church with gentleness, humility and love.

**Elders' Commitment**  
**Church of Christ**  
Adopted 11/2005

**Biblical Foundations: Roles**

As we consider the teaching of Scripture about the role that elders are called to assume in the life of the church and we perceive the direction that God is leading \_\_\_\_\_ we conclude:

1. That as leaders/guides (bishops) our delight is to keep the vision of Christ in the forefront of the life of the family. It is our responsibility to call the church to our basic values and mission (hospitality, family, nurturing faith, and making disciples). Moreover, we recognize the imperative to listen to the desires of the congregation's sense of mission and ministry, and to encourage those chosen expressions of service. Individual members of \_\_\_\_\_ have differing gifts, and we will value those gifts that glorify God, but our larger goal is the unity of the whole congregation. It is our calling to spend our energies to ensure \_\_\_\_\_ a healthy and vital church for God's purposes. I Tim. 3:1, 4-5; Acts 20:28; I TIMOTHY 5:17; Eph. 4:11.
2. That we are charged with the task of holding fast to the truth of the Scripture (Titus 3:9). Thus we pledge, as pastors and teachers, to be students of the Bible, earnest in the study of Scripture. We believe we have a responsibility to ensure that Scripture is faithfully taught among the \_\_\_\_\_ congregation. Upholding the concept of congregational autonomy we recognize that each congregation will take on a unique character as it seeks to honor God, and that this unique character will change from time to time as \_\_\_\_\_. As elders we commit to take the lead in setting the posture that \_\_\_\_\_ takes in teaching and practicing of the faith. Though respecting our traditions, the Bible will be our sure and trustworthy guide. Titus 1:9; I Tim 5:17.
3. That the clear metaphor of Scripture describing the leadership of elders is the metaphor of shepherd. We care about the flock. Anything that detracts from that, anything that takes our focus off the flock, for praying and pasturing, is a distraction. Fundamental to all that we do is the conviction that this church will be best nurtured and led by the Biblical model of one who cares for the sheep with love and mercy. We recognize that the best way to lead this church is by our example. We take seriously the model of the "Chief Shepherd" who knows his sheep. We seek and accept forgiveness for our weaknesses and failings, and we desire to do our part so that "we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:15-16). I Pet 5:1-4; Ezek: 1-24; Acts 20:28.
4. That we have been entrusted with the life and resources of the \_\_\_\_\_ church by its members. That we will faithfully use and protect those resources in all ways, including as Trustees of the corporation created under the laws of the state, or in promoting the delegation of those duties to other faithful servants as Trustees if that is the will of that congregation in the future.

### **Biblical Foundations: The Practice of Shepherding**

The life and spirit of the eldership is of vital importance to the health of the congregation. The spirit and tenor of the elders in their connected life sets the tone for the congregation. Thus, the elders practice the qualities of deference, fellowship, and love in their relationships with each other. As led by God through Scripture and through our daily walk with Him in prayer and study, we are committed to the following:

1. Unity. Though various opinions and views occur, brother elders stand together and united for the sake of the church's mission and vision.
2. Consensus Development. We will constantly strive toward a collective voice in establishing vision, encouraging service and in making decisions.
3. Honor. Differences of opinion will and do occur. However, we will honor each other and uphold each other, in prayer and in public action—even when differences may tempt us to withhold that honor.
4. Trust. We will practice trust toward each other in the tasks and pastoral duties that a fellow elder may be assigned. We will hold each other accountable in the context of trust and love. Additionally, we affirm the ministers chosen by \_\_\_\_\_ and will practice trust and accountability toward them, valuing them as partners in furthering the mission and ministry of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Confidentiality. Sensitive issues are often a part of leadership conversation. Thus we will practice confidentiality in our relationships with our flock and with each other.

These values guide our collective efforts to serve \_\_\_\_\_. However, we must be clear that though we serve the people of \_\_\_\_\_, the congregation is not the master. As elders, called to this divine charge, our service is to the Master, the Chief Shepherd. Our allegiance is to Him and no other. We pray that we will pursue our roles with love and compassion, so that we can hear the Master say "Well Done, My Good and Faithful Servant"!

### **Elders's Policies and Procedures**

#### **I. Meeting Procedures**

- A. We will seek consensus on all matters. However, if consensus cannot be reached, then any issue will be decided by a majority vote.
- B. At least one more than one-half of the elders currently serving must be present in order to have a quorum for making decisions for the body of elders. In the case of an odd number of current elders, we will round up to the nearest whole number.
- C. On matters of opinion, all elders agree to support the decision of the group as if the vote had been unanimous.
- D. We will not reveal to others the individual vote of any elder.
- E. We will not reveal to others any personal point of view of a fellow elder.
- F. Meetings of the elders will usually be facilitated by the Senior Minister when appropriate, or by an elder serving on the EEC. The Senior Minister will not have a vote in matters requiring a vote, but rather will function as a facilitator when included in discussions. If an elder is facilitating the meeting, then the Senior Minister or any other minister, may be invited to serve as advisors. In any matter

where the Senior Minister has a conflict of interest, an elder will chair the meeting.

- G. Any elder will be graciously allowed the privilege upon request, without need for explanation, to take a leave of absence for an indefinite period of time, and will be relieved from all responsibilities. At the discretion of any such elder, he will be welcomed back when he determines that the time is appropriate.

## **II. Matters of Dissent With the Majority**

- A. It is proper and expected that an individual elder will hold differing opinions that are decided by the majority, but it is expected that he will give his support for a majority opinion.
- B. In many issues discussed in meetings, complete confidentiality is not required. However, discretion is critical when discussing process and any vote of the elders in order to preserve the respect and trust of the congregation in the deliberative process and judgment of the current elders.
- C. Should a matter be decided in which an elder cannot be supportive, the following alternatives will be considered:
  - 1. Any such elder can ask for reconsideration of the matter, providing more time for prayer, study and persuasion.
  - 2. Any such elder can choose to exercise his trust in his fellow elders, and defer to the decision despite his objection.
  - 3. Any such elder can choose to resign from his role as an elder if his conscience does not allow him to actively support or quietly acquiesce to any such decision.

## **III. Areas of Responsibility**

- A. Elders shall make all final decisions concerning the employment of ministers, considering the opinions and judgment of others
- B. Ministries shall be led by either staff ministers or appropriate ministry leaders, and careful consideration shall be given to empower those persons to carry out their roles effectively.
- C. Each elder shall act as a liaison to one or more areas of the life of the church. As a liaison, the elder shall act as an advisor, encourager, and advocate for that ministry. Direct leadership of and responsibility for various areas of the life of the church shall be delegated to staff ministers or ministry leaders.
- D. Oversight of Resources
  - 1. The elders shall give final approval to the annual budget presented by the finance ministry each year.
  - 2. Each ministry area shall develop a spending budget that, once approved, is used as their authorized limit for expenditures for the year.
  - 3. The financial operating results are to be reviewed quarterly by the finance ministry, and a summary review offered to the elders. The purpose of this review is to make any necessary budget adjustments to account for changes in revenues or ministerial focus.
  - 4. All expenditures above the approved spending limit by ministry leaders shall be reviewed and approved by the finance ministry and the minister

or ministry leader involved in any such ministry. If they are unable to reach agreement, then the elder liaison to the finance ministry will assist in resolution.

5. We acknowledge that God may lead \_\_\_\_\_ in different directions, and that He is not bound by calendar years, so all considerations will be made with prayerful consideration for His will to reign in our church life.
- E. The elders shall promote policies and visions that pertain to the overall life and vision of the congregation.
- F. To protect the role of shepherding, the elders will use task forces (committees, ministry leaders, staff, or any other group of \_\_\_\_\_ members) to accomplish tasks in "church management."
- G. In order that ministry and work can be done effectively, each staff member, ministry leader, committee or other group shall be given the appropriate authority and trust to carry out the task assigned.

#### **IV. An Elders Relationship to Other Elders**

- A. Every elder, no matter what age or term of service, is to have equal status. There are no junior or senior elders. Each elder is accountable to each other elder.
- B. Each elder will defer to fellow elders with love, respect and honor.
- C. If a majority of other elders confronts an individual about some inappropriate or unacceptable matter in his life, that elder will respond receptively and respectfully, and submit to their guidance with prayer and study, trusting that the collective action of the group represents the will of God.
- D. If a majority of the other elders ask an individual elder to resign, with or without apparent cause, he will do so without resistance or rancor. Each elder will accept the judgment of the majority of the other elders concerning disability to serve as an elder.

#### **V. Elders Expediting Committee**

- A. In order to free the full body of elders to focus on the vital work of shepherding (Act. 6:4) three elders shall serve on a sub-committee designated as the Elders Expediting Committee (EEC) in staggered, rotating terms of three years.
- B. The EEC shall partner with the Senior Minister to address all matters of administration and ministry that require the attention of the eldership.
- C. The EEC and the Senior Minister function as a team and are empowered to act on matters that are urgent or have relatively small consequence, or other matters determined by the elders as appropriate.
- D. The EEC and the Senior Minister shall call meetings on a regular basis, or as needed, to address the matters that require the discernment and deliberation of all of the elders.
- E. Any member of the EEC or the Senior Minister shall call meetings, and may facilitate any such meeting when appropriate.

## CHURCH OF CHRIST

### Elders' Procedural Policies:

1. We consider that every elder, regardless of how long he may have served, is of equal status as a shepherd of this church. There are no junior or senior elders.
  - a. From the first day one serves as an elder, he has full co-responsibility with the other elders for the oversight of this church.
  - b. We believe each elder is under the oversight of the other elders.
2. In our meetings no one shall dominate the proceedings. One may speak only after having been recognized by the chairman. Raising one's hand is the appropriate way to indicate one wants to speak.
  - a. We follow generally accepted rules of parliamentary procedure.
  - b. At least one more than half of the elders currently serving are required to be present in order to have a quorum for making decisions for the group.
  - c. A majority vote of those present is considered to have approved or disapproved a motion.
  - d. Anyone not present at a meeting is considered to have voted with the majority on any motion.
  - e. On matters of opinion, all elders agree to support the decision of the group as if the vote had been unanimous.
  - f. It is forbidden to talk to anyone outside the meeting about how anyone voted on any issue.
  - g. Should a matter be decided by the group that an individual elder, for conscience's sake, cannot support, he has at least three alternatives.
    - 1) He can ask for the matter to be reconsidered, providing him with more time to make his point clearer.
    - 2) He can request assistance from the elders via prayer, study, coaching, or even counseling in order to manage his own anxiety appropriately.
    - 3) He can resign from his role as an elder if the above does not remedy the situation and the majority decision is sustained.
3. We avoid communicating with others in any manner so as to represent our personal point of view as being that of the . . . elders.
  - a. Exceptions are:
    - 1) When directed by the elders to communicate a message on their behalf.
    - 2) When repeating a decision of the elders which has previously been made public.
  - b. We are entitled to express a point of view personally, but unless or until affirmed by the elders as a group, that point of view should be clearly identified as one's personal viewpoint.

4. At all times confidentiality must be respected.
  - a. This means there will be many things considered by the elders which are not to be discussed with others, including: our wives, family members, or closest friends.
  - b. Any violation of this will be considered as highly inappropriate and known violators will be confronted in the Spirit of Gal. 6:1.
5. All discussions of policy pertaining to the life of this church will involve the entire group. To facilitate the work done in large group meetings, special assignments can be delegated to an individual or to a smaller task group to perform evaluation, take action in a specific-area, or develop alternative suggestions or approaches to solving a problem.
6. All major decisions relative to church staff personnel will include the entire group. This will include invitations of employment terms of employment, and termination. A Personnel Ministry-group will do preliminary work in these areas,, but final approval will be made by the entire group.
7. Meetings are open to all members except for special meetings that deal with sensitive or confidential matters. The chairman and/or the administrative elders will designate "elder only" meeting times.  
(The ministerial staff should be included in all meetings except when "Elder Only" confidentiality has been requested, or when personnel matters are to be discussed.)
8. In order to concentrate on shepherding, the elders will use task groups (deacons, ministers, specially qualified members) to do as much as possible toward "church management." It is important to work toward developing trust in assigned groups to make good decisions. With all assigned tasks goes the authority needed to accomplish the responsibility.

## A COVENANT TO SERVE

Your elder team is created for service in the \_\_\_\_\_ church. Each team is a relational group because of shared experiences in ministry with this body of believers. With God's help we can serve with mutual commitments to each other and to our chosen tasks.

Accountability to God, to this body, and to each other will be a demanding call as we serve. Such service is daily cross-bearing for Christ and his church.

To assist us in achieving the goals of identification, love, caring, and accountability, the following covenants are set forth:

1. THE COVENANT OF AFFIRMATION AND ACCEPTANCE: I pledge to accept each of you as my brother. I may not agree with your every action, but I will attempt to love you as a child of God and do all I can to express God's affirming, love. I need you.
2. THE COVENANT OF AVAILABILITY: I pledge to meet with you on a regular basis. I also pledge additional time energy and insight, according to my resources, if you need me.
3. THE COVENANT OF PRAYER: I promise to pray for each of you regularly.
4. THE COVENANT OF HONESTY: I agree to strive to become a more open and honest person to share my true opinions, feelings, struggles, joys and hurts ... as well as I am able. I will trust you with my dreams and problems.
5. THE COVENANT OF FEEDBACK: I will attempt to mirror back to you what I am hearing, you say and what you are feeling. If this means risking pain for either of us, I will trust our relationship enough to take the risk, realizing it is in "speaking the truth in love that we grow up in every way into Christ who is the head" (Eph.4:15). I will try to express this feedback in a sensitive and controlled manner.
6. THE COVENANT OF SENSITIVITY: Even as I desire to be known and understood by you, I pledge to be sensitive to you and your needs to the best of my ability. I will try to hear you, see your point of view, understand your feelings, and draw you out of the pit of possible discouragement or withdrawal.
7. THE COVENANT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: I will promise to keep whatever is shared within the confines of this group except those matters which by mutual agreement can or should be shared with others.

In full acceptance of these covenants, I affix my name to this document in recognition of my commitment to God and the members of my elder team. I will keep this document as a reminder of this voluntary covenant.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

(This signature is for your own commitment, and you will retain this document.)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
and with all your soul, and with all your mind,  
and with all your strength.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.  
No other commandment is greater than these.

## Covenant of Conduct

In order for the congregation and the elders to deal effectively with issues, the following guidelines are to be followed:

1. All members affirm their right to express their opinions about the life and ministry of the congregation.
2. The congregation operates with a participatory form of government that allows members to share their opinions directly with the elders, ministers, deacons, ministry leaders, and at congregational meetings.
3. When members of the congregation express an opinion to an elder, the elder shall ask, "What would you like me to do with this information?"
4. If the member desires to have the information transmitted to the elders, the member shall be invited to bring the information / opinion to the next elders meeting. The time and date shall be given.
5. If the member does not wish to appear in person, the elder shall ask the member for permission to use their name in reporting. If permission is not given, the elder shall say, "I'm sorry but I will not be able to repeat this to the eldership since we do not deal with anonymous letters or comments."
6. If permission is given, the elder shall report the information / opinion to the eldership and use the member's name.
7. At his discretion, an elder may ask the member to refer this issue to another elder for presentation.
8. Each issue shall be placed on the agenda and written in the minutes along with the action taken by the elders. Action may include: "Received as information," "Elder to visit member and report at next meeting," etc.
9. Opinions may be shared in writing with the elders and shall be handled in the manner mentioned above if the letter or statement is signed.