



QLD PRESBYTERIAN  
ELDER TRAINING

# THE ELDERSHIP PAPERS

FOR THE TRAINING OF ELDERS IN THE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF QUEENSLAND



# The Eldership Papers 2023-24

© David Thurston 2024

# Contents

Introduction		3
Our Context: A Personal Reflection		7
Eldership Paper One	Elders and the Church	14
Eldership Paper Two	Eldership and the Pastoral Role	20
Eldership Paper Three	The Elder and the Minister/Pastor	29
	Key Leadership Evaluation for Emotional Intelligence	34
Eldership Paper Four	The Elder and the Session	41
	Five Step Process of Discernment	50
	Six Hats	53
	Covenant Commitments for Christians in Times of Tension	55
Eldership Paper Five	The Elder and the Denomination	57
Eldership Paper Six	The Elder and His Promises	65



# Introduction to The Eldership Papers

This introduction sets out the principles<sup>1</sup> behind *The Eldership Papers* and introduces guidelines for how they may be used. More broadly these principles encapsulate patterns of Presbyterianism that are affirmed throughout the papers.

I have included a personal assessment of where we are as a denomination as context is important to consider when we are developing a healthy eldership.

Our denomination has fallen on hard times, not only because of the problems associated with Prescare and the resulting receivership, but also because in recent times it has been popular to disparage denominations more generally. Yet, it is my opinion that many of our present problems are a result of a lack of healthy engagement and accountability at all levels of our denomination's life. *The Eldership Papers* are unashamedly built on the principles of Presbyterianism. We need to be interdependently responsible to each other, not only in the local church, but throughout the structures of our denomination. Elders are fundamental to that health as they are representative at every level of our denomination's life and structure.

## Principles

**Minister-led:** For healthy eldership to flourish, elders need to be primarily equipped to do the work of the elder by their own pastors. This is true for several reasons. First, this is a primary responsibility of pastors, who having been theologically trained, are able to train their elders in bible-based eldership. Second, healthy eldership training should be shaped to the different contexts of our many and varied churches: church size, resources and geographic situations etc. Thus,

---

<sup>1</sup> These principles are based on David Bailey's contribution to the CMR Report on Elders' Training for the 2022 Assembly.



the minister is ideally placed to nuance any eldership training to the needs of their particular church context. Finally, the minister is the 'leader' of the Session. He is the 'first among equals' and in particular is accountable to the Presbytery for the overall health of the church. As he models humble learning, living and leading this is the primary catalyst for the elders' humble posture of learning, living and leading as they serve the people of God.

**Session-based:** According to our shared Presbyterian convictions, Session is the church's primary leadership team regardless of church size, staffing levels or experiments in models of ministry. Queensland Presbyterians are, quite literally, defined by their commitment to leadership by elders. Eldership training is best conducted and most helpful to a local church when it is undertaken as a whole Session of elders, learning together as Christian men, committed to their Session becoming healthier, for the sake of the church entrusted to their care and God's mission to reach the lost.

**Presbytery-oversight:** Our hope is that Eldership Training will be a helpful tool for Presbyteries to oversee, through encouragement and direction of individual Sessions within their regions. Eldership Training will not solve significant problems within a Session. Rather, it might identify them. This may be particularly helpful if prescribed at a timely juncture by an attentive Presbytery. Identification of issues happens naturally as a result of the exploration and discussion around what eldership and Sessions should be. This assists in recognising and more clearly articulating those specific problems and challenges. In other words, we should expect healthy eldership training to be instrumental in exposing problems within the Session as well as giving them some tools to solve them.

## How to use The Eldership Papers

### **Training Objectives**

- To understand the God-given role of elders in the life of the local church
- To understand the role of elders in the life of our denomination
- To develop a team (Session) committed to spiritual leadership and caring of the household of God
- To provide tools, and patterns of serving that maintain the unique role of the body of elders



### ***The 'Audience'***

- Pastors – thinking through the role of elders and the Session within God's Household
- Existing elders and Sessions reminding themselves of God's call to the noble task of overseer
- Training for potential elders

## The Process

### ***Preparation***

Each paper is designed to promote discussion and interaction around the ideas of eldership within the Presbyterian denomination in Queensland. Therefore, each paper should be distributed at least a week before the meeting where the paper is to be discussed. The expectation is that the paper will be prayerfully read through, set questions answered, and areas of concern or clarification identified.

### ***Discussion***

The discussion of these issues should be warm and searching. These papers deal with God's Word, his Church and the role of the eldership in the life of the church for the sake of God's household. This is a discussion among brothers of Christ for the sake of Christ's Bride.

A significant part of the process of discussion is to develop and be committed to a group identity as elders. This will enable elders to be committed to more than just efficiently covering all items of an agenda at Session meetings but also to care for their life and witness as elders, for the sake of Christ and His church, which they serve.

It is hoped these papers will promote within a local Presbyterian Church a dynamic local leadership that will be used by God to develop other healthy leadership within the local church and a community of God's people who love God and their neighbour.



# Our Context: A Personal Reflection

## Introduction

Understanding the external factors that shape and form the people of our congregations is important when it comes to nurturing healthy and fruitful churches.

I realise that this hopefully ‘dates’ this introduction but our context, as challenging as it is, surely must be taken into consideration as we think about going forward and especially as we look at the fundamental role of eldership in our churches and our denomination.

## Canoeing the Mountains

I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I am the son of an elder. Having been born in 1958 I am also a late-ish baby boomer.

I remember growing up in the small Epping West branch church of the large Epping Presbyterian Church. West Epping in the early 1960s still retained remnants of its agrarian past: small dairy herds, orchards and bush. As an elder, Dad would go to Session meetings but a particular role he had four times a year was to visit the communicant members of Epping Presbyterian Church in his elder’s district. His job was to see how they were travelling, pray for them and leave them a Communion Token. A reminder and an invitation to the Lord’s Supper that would soon be celebrated by God’s people.

I begin this way not because I consider these were the best times for the church and culture, or because I am motivated by nostalgia in writing these papers. The world of the sixties was a time of rapid change and is a world that we have passed by. Rather, in this paper I want to signal and explore the necessity and significance of the challenge in establishing the biblical role of eldership in the twenty-



first century in the state of Queensland. This task, one of revisioning eldership in the twenty-first century will not only require us to be properly informed by the biblical teaching on eldership in the first century but, as we see the role that God calls us to in the present times, to become convicted that for the vision to become a reality the undertaking both is beyond our ability and therefore cannot be achieved in a single generation, and dare I say, is one that requires repentance. It is a mammoth task if it is to be done well and is best captured by the words of Psalm 127:1 1 ‘Unless the Lord builds the house the labourers labour in vain.’ Christ is calling us through his word to be fellow-workers in building His house or rather His household, we must approach this call with our eyes wide open and with deep humility, prayerful dependence, patience and courage if Christ’s call on our lives is to be realised.

In 2017 I read *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* by Tod Bolsinger. Throughout the book Tod Bolsinger uses the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804 to find a waterway to the Pacific Ocean as an extended parable for the changing context of church and ministry in the twenty-first century.

The assumption of the expedition was that what was known of the geography of eastern United States - a land of rivers flowing to the Mississippi - would be mirrored west of the Mississippi. Therefore, Lewis and Clark prepared for the expedition by becoming skilled in every aspect of canoeing. There was only one problem. On leaving the source of the Missouri river and moving further west, they were confronted with the Rocky Mountains. Mountains do not lend themselves to canoeing no matter how skilled you are. The Lewis and Clark expedition needed to learn a whole new way of seeing and doing if they were to fulfil the goal of finding a way to the Pacific.

It will be helpful to look at the ‘mountainous geography’ that confronts us as followers of Christ, would-be elders or elders who are charged with belonging to and caring for the Household of God, the Church, “the pillar and foundation of truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).





In the current context there are four 'mountain-ranges' that we need to take into consideration, and they are ordered from the general to the particular:

1. The Present Deforming Culture of the West
2. COVID-19
3. Union
4. The Present Prescare and Receivership Situation

## The Present Deforming Culture of the West

While there are many fruits of the present culture of the West that we should celebrate, some of the side-effects have a deforming impact on us as human beings, as a community and especially as a church community. It is easy to point to and bemoan some of the more recent shifts in our culture that indicate a recalibration of the church's influence and value in our culture and society: same sex marriage and the growing suspicion that Christian beliefs and behaviours are part of the problem in our culture and not part of the solution, and that the Church and Christians are potentially dangerous to the culture.

Behind these 'canary in the coal mine' issues lie more significant shifts in Western Culture. Two that are connected and mutually dependent are; consumerism and the rise of the individual. Both are ever present and all-encompassing, and thus are ever present and all-encompassing they are the 'air we breathe'. And as air we don't pay attention to it; air is a given. In the last hour, day or week when did you pay attention to air? Yet without it we die.

*Consumerism and the Rise of the Individual* is built on the principle of individual choice. You choose what you want, and they have manufactured or tailored a product or service to satisfy your wants, suit your situation, and fit your budget. You are then defined by your choices. Your choices form your identity but now you can even choose to change basic aspects of your biological identity. We now live in a culture where biology is no longer a determinative or limiting factor in shaping 'who you are'. You can choose your gender etc and identify as... whatever you want. We live in a world where you not only can 'choose your own adventure', you can 'choose your own reality'!



### ***'Thin' or 'Thick' Societies***

Sociology uses the term 'thin' or 'thick' to refer to two differently structured societies.

Thin societies are highly individualistic, value choice, and emphasise concepts such as rights, liberty and 'justice'.

Thick societies are focussed on a person's social group and value order, tradition and concepts such as duty, respect, reputation, sanctity and purity.

The first society focusses on maximising individual freedom and the second on maximising the robustness of relationships and institutions.

Increasingly, consumerism and the rise of the individual are pushing our society from being a thick to a thin culture. Our society increasingly values tolerance not as it was traditionally defined - the ability to agree to differ - but as an unwillingness to disagree. The unity of our culture is increasingly built on the fragile foundation of non-disagreement with all people's choices (unless the choices have to do with such things as the environment or 'traditional' values). Increasingly, our broader culture therefore has little coherence.

## COVID-19

### ***Post COVID-19***

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant, if at times, uneven impact on our churches and ministries. Since COVID-19 there is in the wider community a tendency to 'burnout' that is mirrored in the leadership of our churches. COVID was a time of personal stress for all people and church leaders in particular as they sought to 'pivot' through the changing landscape of lock-downs and changing public health regulations and the varied responses of those making up the church family. The reality is that COVID-19 is not the cause of every subsequent issue but may have functioned more as an accelerant of some and exposed others that were already there.

Church is by its very definition an embodied community, and not meeting as the body of Christ, 'in the body', over a significant period of time meant that some people were slow to return and some did not return at all. Some found another church to attend, while others



## Discussion

In what ways have consumerism and the rise of the individual affected or infected modern Church culture?

Why do people come to your church?

Do you have an uncomfortable sense that you are in 'competition' with other churches for people who are already Christians?

Has your church grown primarily by people becoming followers of Jesus or transfer growth from other churches?



realised their commitment to church, or to Christ, was not what they thought it was and no longer felt the need to attend or even believe.

Post COVID churches have either bounced back or are struggling to survive. Some of our churches are the beneficiaries of other churches (often non-Presbyterian churches) which have disintegrated.

## Forty-Seven Years Since Union

The rationale for Church Union in Australia was an attempt by the Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist denominations to shore-up their waning influence in Australian society, and to form a denomination on equal footing and influence with the Anglican and Catholic denominations.

For many in the Presbyterian Church of Australia and in the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, the events leading up to Union in 1977 and consequences post Union, were traumatic. There were many and varied reasons people voted to remain Presbyterian but perhaps the most 'noble' was to become a denomination that stood for the truth revealed in the Scriptures.

Being defined as a denomination built on defending the truth of the Scriptures is part of our long Presbyterian heritage, but it can create blind spots when it is emphasised to the exclusion of other biblical values. An example of this is the interviews of candidates for the ministry. This is especially visible in Presbyteries that have primarily focussed on the would-be-candidate's ability to know and articulate the truth, in the Scriptures or in the Westminster Confession, and their ability to communicate that truth in a sermon.

The biblical and theological truth we believe as Presbyterians is of fundamental importance, but not exclusively so. Of equal fundamental importance is a humble Christ-like character that models progress in maturity of love toward God and neighbours. To focus on the first at the expense of the second is to have an unbalanced leadership.

There was the hope at the time of Union that the resulting continuing Presbyterian Church would be a bastion of truth and we would see God blessing our churches because the true Gospel was proclaimed. The results after nearly fifty years are mixed at best. At Union there were over seven thousand Communicant members of Presbyterian



### Discussion

How has your church fared since COVID?

Is your church family more engaged in church or less since COVID and how do you measure that?



Churches in Queensland. I believe that the present situation is largely unchanged or even fewer. No doubt some churches have grown while others have diminished but our hopes have not been realised.

Truth is not sufficient in itself as the Incarnation of Christ demonstrates Truth needs to be embodied and that embodiment in the New Testament is the local church, as it was in Ephesus:

“...if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” - 1 Tim. 3:15

A true church is not just where the truth is proclaimed or explained, a true church embodies in its relationships the truth of the Gospel. After nearly fifty years it is clear we need more than a knowing of the truth; we need communities of lived truth. In the New Testament the healthy life of the community is very much part of the brief given to elders.

Unfortunately, despite our denomination’s distinctive of rule by elders, little has been done in Queensland, or more broadly, to disciple, train or develop elders in an agreed and systematic way.

## The Present Concerns

I have been asked not to include anything about Prescare or the receivership at this point, which I will observe.

### Options

It seems to me that there are a number of options that face us at this time in the Presbyterian Church of Queensland.

1. **Ignore our failures and pursue Business As Usual:** I don’t believe this is an option for the majority of leaders in the denomination. The Denominational Consultation, *Presbyterian Church of Queensland 2021 Review and Strategic Priorities*<sup>2</sup> raised significant issues around vision, aligning the roles of committees with that of the churches, the training of elders, transparency in finances etc. For many of us there can be no business as usual.
2. **Opt for models of church and ministry that are more pragmatic and business-like:** The problem with this approach is that models are never neutral. Church is not a business. It is to be a



### Discussion

How would you describe the role of the elders in God’s household where you serve?

What training/discipleship have elders received?

<sup>2</sup> <https://healthychurches.pcq.church/pcq-review/>



loving community in Christ shaped by his self-giving love and grace. Efficiency is not ultimate in Christian relationships. Love is. And love is both extravagant and 'wasteful'. Being a pastor is not being a 'boss', a CEO or a visionary. Jesus Christ is our Lord and our Saviour and his vision is to be ours, shaped to our local context and opportunities.

3. **Humble Ourselves:** No one would choose to be here! But what if this is just where God wants us to be? What if 'here', this context, right now, is the gift of a loving God in terrible wrapping paper? What if here, right now, with all its threats and frustrations, we receive our Lord's severe mercy and humble ourselves? What if, in acknowledging we don't know what to do, we look foolish in the eyes of the world, but our Lord Jesus, who does know what to do, can use our foolishness to shame the wise? Owing that we are not the glorious denomination we hoped we were and that 'Making the PCQ Great Again', can never be an option, but that our God is both Glorious, great and gracious. Confessing we are weak and powerless, without resources but that the Spirit of Christ is our strength. In Psalm 147:10-11, the Psalmist says of God,

“<sup>10</sup> His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his delight in the legs of the warrior;  
<sup>11</sup> the LORD delights in those who fear him,  
who put their hope in his unfailing love.

What will this mean? Confession, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Difficult conversations that seek understanding not victory. Patience and more patience, kindness and love. Asking questions rather than rushing to fast pre-packaged answers.

Above all it will mean shaping all these things in Sessions, Presbyteries, committees and churches in worshipful prayer as we ask God, who does not need us for his kingdom to be gracious again and use us for his glory.



## Discussion

What do you agree with most in this paper and what do you disagree with most?



## Eldership Paper One

# Elders and the Church

## Introduction

In Acts we are given an insight into the significance of Eldership in Paul's ministry. On the outward mission journey, Paul and his fellow worker/s would proclaim the gospel and gather a new community of Christ-followers teaching them and encouraging them before moving on to a new town or city to be 'gospelled'. The apostles would then retrace their steps and in each new community of Christ appoint Elders<sup>3</sup>.

“<sup>21</sup> They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said. <sup>23</sup> Paul and Barnabas appointed Elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." - Acts 14:21-23

This shows us the fundamental importance of a local, stable leadership for the new precious churches. While Paul and other fellow-workers would come and go, the health of the community was put in the hands of proven leaders who knew the gospel, knew the people and were people of character and gifts. I imagine the period between leaving and returning allowed people to see those who had the appropriate character for being a model of Christ-likeness and the ability to care for this new church of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> I take the view that 1 Timothy and Titus were written around A.D. 55 when Paul leaves Ephesus and makes the 'painful visit' to Corinth leaving Timothy behind to appoint Elders in the Ephesian churches. Paul charges Titus to church plant in Crete and appoint Elders before meeting up with him at Nicopolis. Paul then returns to Ephesus.



In the following material we will look at:

1. The Character of an Overseer
2. Ability of an Overseer: Able to Teach
3. Ability of an Overseer: Ruling/Managing, Caring for God’s Household
4. Eldership and the Shape of the Earliest Church
5. Conversion - the Basis for Leadership and the Church

## 1. The Character of an Overseer

### **(1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9)**

Paul’s instructions to Timothy and Titus regarding the character of an overseer are essentially the same with small variations and can be best seen in the following table:

<b>1 Timothy 3:1-7</b>	<b>Titus 1:5-9</b>
Above reproach (v2)	Blameless (v6, v7), holy (v8)
Faithful to his one wife (v2)	Faithful to his wife (v6)
Temperate (v2)	Disciplined (v8)
Self-controlled (v2)	Self-controlled (v8)
Respectable (v2)	One who loves what is good; and upright (v8)
Hospitable (v2)	Hospitable (v8a)
Able to teach (v2)	Hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (v9)
Not given to drunkenness (v3)	Not given to drunkenness (v7)
Not violent but gentle (v3)	Not violent (v7)
Not quarrelsome (v3)	Not overbearing v7 not quick-tempered (v7)
Not a lover of money (v3)	Not pursuing dishonest gain (v7)
He must rule/manage his own family (Household <sup>4</sup> ) well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect (v4)	A man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient (v6)
(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) (v5)	An overseer manages God’s household (v7)
He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil (v6)	
He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap (v7)	

<sup>4</sup> The word is better translated ‘household’ rather than family firstly because that is how it is translated in 1 Timothy 3:15, God’s household and our idea of family is the small by comparison nuclear family.



### ***The Role of Character***

The focus of this section is primarily on the character of the overseer. Character not Charisma (personality) or Charismata (gifts) is primary whether we are assessing a Minister/Pastor or an Elder. Having said that giftedness is not completely irrelevant it's just not primary<sup>5</sup>.

The first thing to notice in the list is that if we take out the 'ability to teach' and 'able to rule his household well' the characteristics described in the list are not about an extraordinary Christian but the character of an ordinary mature follower of the Lord Jesus.

This then goes to the heart of the major role of an overseer. The Elder's character is fundamental to their role as they are to be an example and model to the rest of the community.

Having learned to live as a mature (progressing 1 Tim. 4:15) disciple of the Lord Jesus it also means they are equipped to lovingly disciple others. The overseer is not exceptional, there will be other mature followers of Jesus in the community, male and female, who will also be a living witness of Christ-likeness (Titus 2:2-5). Together they will by their character shape the local church to be a Community of Character.

Elders in our church communities should not be invisible or unknown or possibly only seen when the Elders collectively make a decision as the Session, overseers should be vitally involved in the daily life of the community.

### ***The Characteristics of Character***

1. Above reproach – there is nothing obvious in a leader's behaviour that others can lay a hold of and defame Christ.
2. Faithful to his wife – 'a one-woman man'. The married leader in ministry actively works on, and at, having a good marriage.
3. Temperate – this is normally associated with alcohol but alcohol is mentioned by itself further down the list so it is probably better understood as sober or clear thinking.
4. Self-controlled – describes a life of choices that is directed by a mind enlightened by God's calling in the gospel of his Son.
5. Respectable – a well-ordered life.
6. Hospitable – this is not just the invitation to a meal now and



### Question

Who have been significant models of Christian maturity in your life? Explain why they had such an impact.

<sup>5</sup> I would make the point that aspects of personality should be taken into consideration such as EQ Emotional Intelligence over IQ but there is a sense in which EQ is factored into aspects of Character in the list.





then, although it will include this. The invitation to a meal is but a symbol of a life shaped by the hospitable God

7. Able to teach – give positive Biblical instruction and able to refute error.
8. Not given to drunkenness – not controlled by alcohol<sup>6</sup>.
9. Not violent but gentle – this probably is about correction, 2 Cor 11:20: “In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face.”
10. Not quarrelsome – not contentious; not someone who enjoys arguing for the sake of arguing and can’t distinguish between the significant and the unimportant.
11. Not a lover of money – not a lover of silver; money doesn’t rule their decision making and choices.
12. He must manage his own household well – rule, care and manage the complex reality of a first century household (slaves, home businesses, extended family members) at a time when there are no hospitals or social welfare).
13. His children should obey him. His children are not crushed by his discipline and instruction but encouraged and follow his lead.
14. He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must be mature: spiritually, emotionally and relationally.
15. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap. The devil seeks to undermine the truth of the Gospel by bad behaviour that give outsiders a reason to not listen.

## 2. Ability of an Overseer: Able to Teach

In this section we focus on the first ability that takes us beyond character but is the foundation and the shaping of that character for individuals and the community – the teaching and application of the trustworthy message, the Scriptures.

An overseer must, according to 1 Timothy 3:2, ‘be able to teach’, and according to the expanded version in Titus 1:9, to ‘hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.’



### Question

What areas do you see you need to progress in your character?

<sup>6</sup> This would include other addictions that replace Christ as coping strategies for physical/emotional/relational etc anguish or pain.



In this activity Elders function the way red and white blood cells behave in the body: they both enable the body to be energised (red blood cells) and to be protected (white blood cells). Teaching the Scriptures is the ability to explain how one is saved and made a child of God and what one is saved for. It is a teaching of how the community lives together in love and forgiveness, how together the church is a living witness to the Gospel it lives by. Teaching will mean encouraging or urging others to live according to the truth as well as refuting those who oppose the trustworthy message.

This task of teaching, urging and refuting is most often carried out by the Minister at the public weekly meeting but Elders have a role beyond Sunday and a monthly Session meeting. They are also to feed and protect. This can be done in Growth Groups, one-to-one meeting, or in a discipleship group. Whether an Elder has some formal theological knowledge or not, they are to be committed disciples of Jesus who are able to lead others to Christ and lead others to maturity in Christ.

### 3. Ability of an Overseer: Ruling/Managing, Caring for God's Household

In both letters describing the role of an overseer there is a direct connection drawn between how he rules/manages or cares for his own household and how he will manage the household of God.

“ He must rule/manage his own family (household) well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)”  
- 1 Timothy 3:4-5

“ Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.” - Titus 1:7

One reason for this is that the household of the first-century was a complex unity of relationships and responsibilities just as the church was. Households included not just the immediate family but some of the extended family as well as slaves and freedmen and may well have been the place of business and commerce. Overseeing



#### Questions

Do you feel confident to be able to lead others to Christ?

Do you feel confident in being able to teach others in how to mature in Christ?

Identify areas you need more training or practice in.



a household required relational skills, management skills and the provision of health and social support.

In the next paper we will explore in more depth how the church as the household of God shapes the church leaders' role but the following section explores some aspects of it.

In subsequent papers we will give some examples of these sorts of tools e.g. dealing with conflict.

#### 4. Eldership the Pattern of Church Health

There is, I believe, a direct connection between the character of the leaders of the church and the character of the church they lead and this is for good or ill.

In Acts 2:42-47 we see a description of the first New Testament church.

“<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple Courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved”  
- Acts 2:42-47

As you read through the description of this first church, identify characteristics of the church that are also characteristics of overseers in 1 Timothy and Titus.

Elder	Church



#### Questions

What characteristics of the Jerusalem Church need to be developed in your church?

What maturing needs to be developed in you so as to lead your church in this direction?



## 5. Conversion - the Basis for Leadership and the Church

### **(1 Timothy 1:12-17)**

Paul's first letter to Timothy, setting out what he is to do in his absence, is set against the background of the danger of false teachers infiltrating the Ephesians ministry. Paul promotes the true gospel by first of all demonstrating what it has done in his own life. Paul is using himself as an example for others who trust in Christ, and this particularly would apply to those who will care for God's Church.

There are two aspects of Paul's testimony that are particularly relevant:

- i) a deep sense of one's need for mercy and forgiveness; and
- ii) the wonderful experience of the grace of God in Christ meeting that need

### **Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17**

Paul looks back on his former life before trusting<sup>7</sup> in Christ and describes it in the starkest of terms: blasphemer, persecutor and violent man. There is no glossing over the facts; later he describes himself as 'the worst of sinners. But God did what Paul could not do: he sent Christ into the world to save and rescue sinners. Paul describes God's action in Christ as 'grace being poured out abundantly, along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.'

An Elder must have a clear conviction of the receiving grace and forgiveness in Christ in being saved, as well as an experience of God's ongoing work in their life. It is out of this experience of love that he loves God and his people in Christ, and it is out of Christ's service to him that he seeks to serve God and his people in Christ. Being saved from sin and death and saved for serving God with their whole life is one's core identity in Christ. This is the foundational unity of all Christians and where we live from through the power of the Spirit.

---

<sup>7</sup> This explains the description of himself as 'acting in ignorance and unbelief' he did this before he trusted in Jesus unlike the false teachers who are perverting the Gospel with the law after having believed in Jesus.



## Homework

Paul shared his testimony of his conversion as a way of encouraging other believers and witnessing to the power of the Gospel. Your homework this week is to prepare your testimony to share with those with who you are studying *The Eldership Papers*.

Below is a plan for organising your testimony. Your aim is to make it engaging and challenging in under 3 minutes.

### **Steps in preparing your testimony:**

1. *Introduction:* Before you became a Christian, what did you think would make you happy in life? What drove you? What did you think your purpose in life was? Write that into a couple of paragraphs to become the opening part of your story, using concrete examples to back up abstract statements.
2. *Body:* What has made you unhappy? How has your drive been unsatisfied or unsatisfying? Write that into a couple of paragraphs to be the main body of your story; again, using concrete examples to back up abstract statements.
3. *Bridge:* How has the death and resurrection of Jesus challenged your perspective on what will make you happy or achieve your purpose in life? Write a sentence on this for the bridge.
4. *Conclusion:* How has Jesus changed your thinking today? How has Jesus changed your actions today? Write a couple of paragraphs on how Jesus shapes your life today, using concrete examples to back up abstract statements.
5. *Ending:* Write a sentence on how the way God sees you in Jesus makes you feel now.



## Eldership Paper Two

# Eldership and the Pastoral Role

## Introduction

In Eldership Paper 1, we considered the characteristics and abilities for an overseer and how they were aligned with the health and character of God's household, the church. This is because an Elder is not only able to teach what a mature follower of Jesus looks like, they are also able to embody this in their relationships and habits, a maturity that can be imitated.

In Eldership Paper 2, we will continue looking at the characteristics of Eldership but this time through the lens of 'shepherd' and will focus more on the motivations appropriate to a shepherd/Elder in 1 Peter 5. We will spend time looking at 1 Thessalonians 2 to see those attitudes in action in the ministry of Paul, Silas and Timothy.

To prepare us for that journey we will begin by looking at the image of shepherd-leader in the Old and New Testaments.

## Old Testament Background

The LORD's kingship/leadership as shepherd is celebrated in the best-known Psalm: Psalm 23.

“ A psalm of David.

<sup>1</sup> *The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.*

<sup>2</sup> *He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,*

<sup>3</sup> *he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.*

<sup>4</sup> *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.*

<sup>5</sup> *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil my cup overflows.*

<sup>6</sup> *Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*



The shepherd-king David, celebrates the Shepherd LORD's personal care and provision in poetry. As the Shepherd, the LORD provides all that is needed for a sheep; still waters and green grass, the refreshment of soul. But the divine Shepherd also guides and protects. Right paths sometimes lead through dark and difficult places, but even there, David celebrates the LORD's caring presence. For David, the future, because of this Shepherd's loving wise character, is safe. David anticipates being at home in the house of the LORD. David's delight in the LORD's care is further enjoyed because he too was a shepherd.

David, the king after God's own heart was called from being a shepherd caring and guarding sheep to being a shepherd caring and guarding God's people Israel.

David, wasn't always a good shepherd. In the tragedy of Uriah and Bathsheba, power replaced care and protecting his reputation - looking good - replaced being a man after God's own heart.

This departure from the ideal of a human shepherd leader becomes endemic leading up to the time of Judah's exile to Babylon.

The most extended and scathing critique is found in the book of Ezekiel chapter 34:1-12:

“*The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> ‘Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? <sup>3</sup> You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. <sup>4</sup> You have not strengthened the weak or healed those who are ill or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. <sup>5</sup> So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. <sup>6</sup> My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.*

<sup>7</sup> *“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>8</sup> as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock*



*lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock,<sup>9</sup> therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:<sup>10</sup> this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.*

*<sup>11</sup> “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. <sup>12</sup> As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep...”*

The Old Testament looks forward to a time when the LORD, the good Shepherd, will judge and replace the wicked shepherds.

## New Testament Background

The New Testament reveals the coming of the good Shepherd who is contrasted with the wicked shepherds in Mark 6:14-53 and then in John 10:11-13.

### **Contrasting Two Shepherds**

In Mark 6:14-56, two shepherds and two feasts are contrasted: Herod Antipas at his birthday celebrations and Jesus and the feeding of the five thousand.

Herod’s celebrations involve pride and rash promises that result in the murder of John the Baptist.

Mark 6:34, significantly, tells us that:

“ *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.*

**Read Mark 6:39-53** and underline the parts of the narrative that show that Jesus is the Shepherd of Psalm 23.

“ *<sup>39</sup> Then Jesus told them to make all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. <sup>40</sup> So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. <sup>41</sup> Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave*





*them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. <sup>42</sup> They all ate and were satisfied, <sup>43</sup> and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. <sup>44</sup> The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.*

*<sup>45</sup> Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>46</sup> After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.*

*<sup>47</sup> Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. <sup>48</sup> He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, <sup>49</sup> but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, <sup>50</sup> because they all saw him and were terrified.*

*Immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'<sup>51</sup> Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, <sup>52</sup> for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.*

*<sup>53</sup> When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there.*

### **Jesus the Good Shepherd John 10:11-13**

“<sup>11</sup> 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.'"

Jesus identifies how you can tell bad shepherds, hired hands, from Himself, the good shepherd by how they behave when the flock is under attack. The hireling preserves his own life by leaving the sheep to the wolves. The good Shepherd in contrast lays down His life for His sheep. Because they belong to Him, He gives His life for them. For Jesus, His commitment to His people would result in His death by crucifixion at the time of the Passover.



**Be Shepherds of God’s Flock 1 Peter 5:1-4**

“ To the Elders among you, I appeal as a fellow Elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed:<sup>2</sup> be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;<sup>3</sup> not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” - 1 Peter 5:1-4

In 1 Peter, Peter addresses the churches in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia to be faithful and Christ-like under suffering. In one of the last sections of the letter he addresses the Elders of the churches as an Elder himself. This makes sense, given that they will need to be both models (v3) of how to be faithful and Christ-like under suffering, and to encourage those under their care to be patient and loyal in the present hard times.

Peter identifies himself as a fellow Elder, a witness (proclaimer) of Christ’s sufferings and one who will share with them in the glory to come with the coming of Christ. Peter then addresses them as shepherds of God’s flock that is under their care.

Peter addresses the motivations they are to have as these Elders watch over the flock. He first identifies what motivation to avoid and then identifies a motivation to embrace.

Fill in the table below.

<b>Negative Motivation</b>	<b>Positive Motivation</b>
... not because you must	
... not pursuing dishonest gain	
... not lording it over those entrusted to you	



**Questions**

If the Elders embraced the negative motivations, who would they be like?

If the Elders embraced the positive motivations, who would they be like?

How does v4 encourage the Elders Peter is addressing to live out their role or calling as shepherds?



Throughout the first and second papers, the importance of Elders being examples or models has been stressed over and over again. The power of a seeing a life lived with purpose, direction and integrity brings life to others and inspires them to similar behaviour. This is the role of an Elder in God's church.

### **1 Thessalonians 2:3-12**

In 1 Thessalonians 2:3-12, Paul reminds the Thessalonians of his, Silas' and Timothy's shepherding behaviour when they were among them.

As you read through this section of 1 Thessalonians, circle the relationship roles Paul, Silas and Timothy lived out among the Thessalonians, and underline how those roles were expressed.

“<sup>3</sup> For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. <sup>4</sup> On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. <sup>5</sup> You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. <sup>6</sup> We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. <sup>7</sup> Instead, we were like young children among you.

*Just as a nursing mother cares for her children,<sup>8</sup> so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.<sup>9</sup> Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.<sup>10</sup> You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.<sup>11</sup> For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,<sup>12</sup> encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”*

- 1 Thessalonians 2:3-12



## The Language of Church

Before we finish this paper, I want to briefly address the issue of how we address other members of our church. This will largely turn on what image we adopt to describe church. In Paul Minear’s classic study called Images of Church in the New Testament, 96 images of the church are identified. There is no doubt that is an embarrassment of riches, but the more important question is: what is the dominant image of the church in the New Testament? I believe the dominant image is the household of God. Through Christ, our fellow heir, we can approach the holy God as Father; we are given the Spirit of sonship.

We must be careful not to adopt deforming roles about leadership from the world, about leadership such as, ‘boss’, or ‘CEO’ or think that church is a business because these will run counter to developing warm, interdependent relationships in the household of God in which a new identity is formed in Christ.

What image have we adopted and how does it deform our role as Elders when we describe our brothers and sisters in Christ as:

Volunteers?	
Attenders?	
Members?	
Giving units?	

Language matters especially in a culture that seeks to judge success by values other than what God values.



### Question

How should the meeting of a group of Elder/Pastor (the Session) be shaped by the behaviours described in 1 Peter 5?



## Eldership Paper Three

# The Elder and the Minister/Pastor

## Introduction

Up to this point we have been describing the characteristics and motivations of an Elder. In Eldership Paper 3, will describe the relationship between the Elder/s and the Minister or Pastor, which is both simple and complex. In this section, we will cover a range of smaller topics which I hope will yield good conversations between the Elder/s and the Minister.

Three resources for this and the ongoing chapters are:

- *Rare Leadership* – Marcus Warner/Jim Wilder
- *Imperfect Leadership (Chapter 15: Leadership)* - Zack Eswine
- *The Plurality Principle: How to Build and Maintain a Thriving Leadership* - David Harvey

## Describing the Relationship

I believe, if able, we should use biblical language to describe relationships between Christians. My primary biblical suggestions to use to describe the relationship between the Elder/s and Minister are: brother, fellow-worker, fellow-servant, fellow-soldier.

What is the difference between:

Brother

Fellow

-worker

-servant

-soldier?



The use of 'fellow' states that they are involved in the same pursuit, ministry and goal.

The relationship between Minister and the Elder/s should be mutual, loving and seeking through godly ministry and modelling, to encourage and lead God's household.

## Elders – the Minister's First Team

The role of the Minister is to value his Elders as his first team. For most Ministers who serve churches without a staff, this is not particularly controversial, but still may be difficult to cultivate. For Ministers of larger congregations, with staff members, there is a temptation to make the staff your first team. This is understandable, given a Minister is likely to spend more time with the members of staff than the Elders day-to-day, but this temptation should be resisted by both the Minister and the Elders. Ministers resist this tendency by developing a personal relationship with the Elders that is deeper than that with the staff. There is always a significant power differential between staff and the Minister, whereas the Minister and Elder/s should cultivate complete mutuality. Elders resist the professionalisation of church ministry by pursuing a team ministry of mutual encouragement and prayerful pastoral concern for the congregation.

The Elders and Minister serving together with prayerful engagement during the challenges, struggles, and ups and downs of brothers and sisters in the church, remains paramount.

## Presbyterian Descriptions

The difference in roles between Ministers and Elders in our denomination is most commonly described as:

- Ministers are teaching Elders; and
- Elders are ruling Elders.

This distinction most likely comes from:

“<sup>17</sup> The Elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” - 1 Timothy 5:17

These descriptors appear neat but perhaps they are too neat; surely God rules through his word and all overseers are to be 'able to teach'.



### Question

How much of a Session's time should be devoted to prayer for the household of God?



I take it these overseers are ruling Elders.

Of course, all Ministers in our denomination have been trained to teach, while the majority of Elders have not done theological training. Yet, too wide a distinction between both roles is, I believe, unhelpful and deforming for the leadership of the church. Ministers must not be seen as professionals when it comes to teaching the Bible, and they certainly aren't when it comes to caring for the church. We 'profess' but we are not professionals. We are and should remain 'amateurs' - amateurs pursue something for the love of the activity. Teaching Elders and ruling Elders who are able to teach, do so for the love of God, God's people and one another.

### ***Responsible to Whom?***

Ministers in the denomination are ultimately accountable to the Presbytery. This has traditionally been limited to a visitation by a committee appointed by the Presbytery to assess the overall health of the church or charge every five years. The other time a Presbytery steps in and exercises its oversight is when it becomes clear that there is something possibly amiss in the church. This could range from insufficient funds to moral failure. It then it will appoint a special visitation to look into the health and/or viability of the congregation. Some Presbyteries are presently considering other patterns of mutual encouragement, support and health-checks.

When it comes to the day-to-day ministry in a congregation, a Minister as a brother, fellow-worker, -servant, and -soldier should covet the engagement of other Elders in his work. In a previous church at which I served, at our beginning of year Session retreat, I would present a draft report of where I believed I, as the Minister, needed to focus that year. When this was adopted, or reshaped and adopted, during the Session retreat, I would expect the Session of Elders to regularly ask me during the year, for an update on how the agreed upon tasks were going. Being accountable to the Presbytery ultimately does not cancel out the need for the Minister to be encouraged, supported and helpfully questioned about their ministry to and for God's people. Of course, there is a corollary to this: namely, that Elders also have a role and need to be encouraged, supported and helpfully questioned. This is mutual encouragement, and when done well, it forms a strong, cohesive, Christ honouring team.



## Identity Group versus an Accountability Group

In *Rare Leadership* by Marcus Warner and Jim Wilder (p53), there is a discussion about the differences between an Identity Group and an Accountability Group. Essentially, Accountability Groups tend to fizzle out in time, with fear of failure undermining their effectiveness. Identity Groups are built around who we are and who we are called to be in Christ. They are made up of people who are each other's allies.

The group is:

- Prayerful
- Committed to being who God has called us to be in Christ (our best self)
- Tender towards weakness
- Committed to seeking God together and
- Aware that transformation takes time

One of the best ways I know of how this might happen is giving each Elder or would-be Elder the opportunity to share their story through a 'life mapping' exercise. This exercise is built around describing how God has been working in your story. This is much more than a testimony; it is a deep dive into knowing and trusting one another as brothers in Christ. We receive the precious gift of another's life story and make prayerful observations and encouragements<sup>9</sup>.

## Ongoing Maturity of a Church's Eldership

Another resource I have found useful in building maturity is the *Key Leadership Evaluation for Emotional Intelligence* by Ian Jagelman<sup>10</sup>.

All Elders including the Minister/s should be committed to growing in what is known as emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to become more aware of ourselves and the influences that work within us. It also enables us to become more aware of what is going on in and for other people. As a consequence, we grow in spiritual and relational maturity and are better able to serve God's people by engaging well in the life of the church.

The best way of doing this would be for an Elder or Minister to self-assess using the afore-mentioned exercise and have two or three other Elders also assess them using the criteria within the

<sup>9</sup> Find the resources for Life Mapping at <https://leaderbreakthru.com/timeline/>

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Ian Jagelman's *The L Factor: Identifying and Developing Christian Leaders* p99-107





exercise. This process is to be one of encouragement and will use the characteristics of the 'identity group.' The Elder will then identify any significant differences between their own assessment and the assessment of others, and these will be the subject of a conversation between fellow Elders.

The purpose of this process is to identify areas where progress can be made over time, and encouragement given.

## Something Old and Something New

I realise that for most existing Sessions this is not current practice. It is something new and perhaps is seen as unnecessary and intrusive. I want to suggest that, given the role of the Elder & Minister, and given the characteristics of the overseer and the fundamental role Elders are to have in shaping the life of the church community by modelling maturity, being vulnerable with one another is modelling what we should be asking of our brothers and sisters. What appears new may in fact be old; not that Paul and Barnabas had post-it notes or had a *Key Leadership Evaluation for Emotional Intelligence*, but I have no doubt that just as Paul told his own story of God's work in his life and ministry, he invited others to tell theirs, and pursued Christ-like maturity and vulnerability in himself and his fellow-workers.

If the leadership of a church is committed to this level of Christ-like maturity, vulnerability and intimacy, the church community will find this becoming part of its spiritual DNA in its discipleship and Growth Groups.



### Question

How do you feel about the idea of being in an 'identity group' where you tell your story and work out where you could grow in relational leadership and godliness?



# Key Leadership Evaluation for Emotional Intelligence

Name:

Please circle the score you feel represents where you are at, where 5 is high and 1 is low. As you work through this sheet, underline competencies you feel particularly need to be addressed this year.

## I. SELF-AWARENESS

### a) Emotional Awareness

*Recognising one's emotions and their effects.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Know which emotions they are feeling and why.
- Realise the links between their feelings and what they think, do, and say.
- Recognise how their feelings affect their performance.
- Have a guiding awareness of their values and goals.

### b) Accurate Self-Assessment

*Knowing one's inner resources, abilities, and limits.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence are:

- Aware of their strengths and weaknesses.
- Reflective, learning from experience.
- Open to candid feedback, new perspectives, continuous learning, and self-development.
- Able to show a sense of humour and perspective about themselves.

### c) Self-Confidence

*A strong sense of one's self-worth in Christ and capabilities.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Present themselves with self-assurance — have “presence.”
- Can voice views that are unpopular and go out on a limb for what is right.
- Are decisive, able to make sound decisions despite uncertainties and pressures.



## 2. SELF-GOVERNMENT

### **a) Self-Control**

*Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Manage their impulsive feelings and distressing emotions well.
- Stay composed, positive, and unflappable even in trying moments.
- Think clearly and stay focused under pressure.

### **b) Trustworthiness**

*Maintaining integrity.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence

- Act ethically and are above reproach.
- Build trust through their reliability and authenticity.
- Admit their own mistakes and confront unethical actions in others.
- Take tough, principled stands even if they are unpopular.

### **c) Conscientiousness**

*Taking responsibility for personal performance.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Meet commitments and keep promises.
- Hold themselves accountable for meeting their objectives.
- Are organised and careful in their work.

### **d) Adaptability**

*Being flexible in responding to change.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Smoothly handle multiple demands, shifting priorities, and rapid change.
- Adapt their responses and tactics to fit fluid circumstances.
- Are flexible.



### **e) Innovation**

*Being open to novel ideas and approaches.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Seek out fresh ideas from a wide variety of sources.
- Entertain original solutions to problems.
- Generate new ideas.
- Take fresh perspectives and risks in their thinking.

## 3. PURPOSE LED

### **a) Achievement Drive**

*Striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Are result-oriented, with a high drive to meet their objectives and standards,
- Set challenging goals and take calculated risks.
- Pursue information to reduce uncertainty and find ways to do better.
- Learn how to improve their performance.

### **b) Commitment**

*Aligning with the goals of a group or organisation.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Readily make sacrifices to meet larger organisational goals.
- Find a sense of purpose in the larger mission.
- Use the group's core values in making decisions and clarifying choices.
- Actively seeks out opportunities to fulfil the group's mission.

### **c) Initiative**

*Displaying proactivity.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Are ready to seize opportunities.
- Pursue goals beyond what is required or expected of them.
- Cut through red tape and bend the rules when necessary to get the job done.
- Mobilise others through unusual, enterprising efforts.



**d) Optimism**

*Persistence.*

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

People with this competence:

- Persist in seeking goals despite obstacles and setbacks.
- Operate from hope of success rather than fear of failure.
- See setbacks as due to manageable circumstances rather than a personal flaw.

## 4. PEOPLE FOCUS

**a) Understanding Others**

*Sensing others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns.*

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

People with this competence:

- Are attentive to emotional cues and listen well.
- Show sensitivity and understand others' perspectives.
- Help based on an understanding other people's needs and feelings.

**b) Developing Others**

*Sensing others' development needs and bolstering their abilities.*

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

People with this competence:

- Acknowledge and reward people's strengths and accomplishments.
- Offer useful feedback and identify people's needs for further growth.
- Mentor, give timely coaching, and offer assignments that challenge and foster a person's skills.

**c) Ministry Sensitive**

*Anticipating, recognising, and meeting visitors' and members' needs.*

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

People with this competence:

- Understand members' needs and match them to ministries provided.
- Seek ways to increase members' satisfaction and loyalty.
- Gladly offer appropriate assistance.
- Grasp a member's perspective.



#### **d) Synergy Sensitive**

*Cultivating opportunities through different kinds of people.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Respect and relate well to people from varied backgrounds.
- Understand diverse world-views and are sensitive to group differences.
- See diversity as opportunity, creating an environment where diverse people can thrive.
- Challenge bias and intolerance.

#### **e) Power Awareness**

*Understanding personal and position power.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Accurately read key power relationships.
- Detect crucial social networks.
- Understand the forces that shape views and actions of members and visitors.
- Accurately read organisational and external realities.

## 5. INFLUENCE

#### **a) Communication**

*Listening openly and sending messages.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Are effective in give-and-take, registering emotional cues in attuning their message.
- Deal with difficult issues straightforwardly.
- Listen well, seek mutual understanding, and welcome sharing of information fully.
- Foster open communication and stay receptive to bad news as well as good.

#### **b) Conflict Management**

*Negotiating and resolving disagreements.*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

People with this competence:

- Handle difficult people and tense situations with diplomacy and tact.
- Spot potential conflict, bring disagreements into the open, and help de-escalate situations.
- Encourage debate and open discussion.
- Orchestrate win—win solutions.



**c) Leadership**

*Inspiring and guiding individuals and groups.*

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

People with this competence:

- Articulate and arouse enthusiasm for a shared vision and mission.
- Step forward to lead as needed, regardless of position.
- Guide the performance of others while holding them accountable.
- Lead by example.

**d) Change and Transition Management**

*Initiating or managing change.*

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

People with this competence:

- Recognise the need for change and attempt to remove barriers.
- Challenge the status quo to acknowledge the need for change.
- Champion the change and enlist others in its pursuit.
- Model the change expected of others.
- Monitor the emotional impact of change.

**e) Team Building**

*Nurturing instrumental relationships.*

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

People with this competence:

- Cultivate and maintain extensive informal networks.
- Seek out relationships that are mutually beneficial.
- Build rapport and keep others in the loop.
- Make and maintain personal friendships among work associates.

**f) Networking**

*Working with others toward shared goals.*

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

People with this competence:

- Balance a focus on task with attention to relationships.
- Collaborate, sharing plans, information, and resources.
- Promote a friendly, cooperative climate.
- Spot and nurture opportunities for collaboration.



### **g) Team Performance**

*Creating group cooperation in pursuing collective goals.*

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

People with this competence:

- Model team qualities like respect, helpfulness, and cooperation.
- Draw all members into active and enthusiastic participation.
- Build team identity and commitment.
- Protect the group and its reputation; share credit.

### Scores

Add your scores for each section. Then add each section to ascertain your total score.

1. Self-Perception	/15
2. Self-Government	/25
3. Purpose Led	/20
4. People Focus	/25
5. Influence	/35
<b>Total</b>	<b>/120</b>

(Adapted from Ian Jagelman The L Factor: Identifying and Developing Christian Leaders p99-107)





## Eldership Paper Four

# The Elder and the Session

## Introduction

In the previous Eldership Papers, we have largely dealt with the Elder as an individual or as part of a body of Elders that included the Minister.

In this paper, we will be distinguishing the role of the Elder from the role of the group of Elders - the Session - and this will also prepare us for future papers that deal with the denomination and the role of the Session and Elders within it.

## An Elder and a Minister are Not a Session

A principle of Presbyterianism is that all Courts of the denomination (Session, Presbytery, State Assembly and Federal Assembly) exercise authority over a particular range of issues and yet are still accountable for the exercise of that authority<sup>11</sup>. We will explore this stratification and limitation of power in more detail in the next paper – The Elder and the Denomination – but at the beginning of this paper it is important to make a distinction between the role and power of a Session as compared to the role of the Elder and the limited authority of the Minister.

## Hats

One helpful way of approaching this is by thinking of the different ‘hats’ that an Elder will wear at different times:

- The Elder as a Child of God ‘hat’
- The Elder as a mature follower of Jesus ‘hat’
- The Elder at Session ‘hat’

<sup>11</sup> The Westminster Confession, as well as the Larger and Shorter Catechism, were developed during the English Civil War. A war waged against Charles I who claimed to rule by Divine Right and resisted any attempt by Parliament to be accountable.



### ***The Elder as a child of God ‘hat’***

Fundamental to an Elder is not that they are an Elder, but rather, they are a child of God through his grace revealed in Christ. This places him with all other children of God as a forgiven sinner and human being undergoing restoration in the image of Christ, as fellow servants in Christ in the local church.

### ***The Elder as a mature follower of Jesus ‘hat’***

As we have seen, Eldership is primarily recognition of being a model of Christian maturity accompanied by the ability to teach and the ability to care in a complex system like a household. The Elder should be aware that being a model of Christian maturity is fundamental to their public role. As a mature member of the church who has a pastoral role for the household of faith, an Elder should be able urge and encourage spiritual maturity in their brothers and sisters through conversations and prayer.

### ***The Elder at Session ‘hat’***

The Session meeting is a meeting of a Court of the denomination. The Elder has a deliberative and determinative role in local church policy, discipline and direction. It is to Session and not to the Elder that power is given. Outside of the Session meeting, the Elder does not have the power or authority that the Session has but does have the influence of any mature member of the church.

Constitutionally, Ministers have very little power except over what happens in public worship, including funerals, marriages, and in the service of ordination of Elders. The Minister determines who may preach, and as a function of his role as teacher determines that all teaching material is appropriate (Code 3.45; 3.48). The Minister also controls which religious groups may use the property belonging to the congregation (Code 3.46). However, the Minister can develop an authority over time by teaching God’s Word well.

Both Elders and Ministers are ordained and essentially make the same promises, with some differences. Another principle of the Presbyterian denomination is that those who make promises are given particular responsibilities. This includes Communicant members as well as Elders and Ministers.



## The Code

In the following Papers we will be quoting the Code. The Code is the document that has been developed over a significant time as a guide to:

- What the different responsibilities of the different Courts are, and how they are to relate to each other
- How the responsibilities of those Courts and office holders in the Courts are to be performed within the Presbyterian Church of Queensland.

### ***The Code in Action***

The Code should operate like the bones in a body; unseen but important when particular actions are required, e.g. making significant decisions, or in times of crisis. In normal church life, the relational, gospel ‘flesh’ is on display not the ‘bones.’ When there is a crisis the wise processes of the Code can bring calmness and direction in a difficult situation.

## Courts

The Presbyterian denomination in Australia is made up of four Courts<sup>12</sup>:

- Session
- Presbytery
- State Assembly
- Federal Assembly

### ***Session***

The Session is the Court of each local church, composed of Elders and called Ministers.

The Oxford Shorter Dictionary defines a Session as:

“ 2a *The meeting of a legislative or deliberative body to conduct its business;*

## The Role of the Session

Below is a summary of the function of the Session from The Code Rules 17-19.

1. **Oversee and promote the spiritual health and fruitfulness of the Church in regard to public worship, teaching and discipline.**

---

<sup>12</sup> We will be looking at the Presbytery, State Assembly and Federal Assembly in greater detail in the following Eldership Paper



2. Supervises all ministries and groups within a church including of all employed staff, according to the rules and practices of the Presbyterian denomination.
3. Determine the time, date and place of public worship, the Lord's Supper and Baptism.
4. Admit persons to membership of the church.
5. Discipline erring members and restore them to membership.
6. To call congregational meetings.
7. Examine the suitability of persons for Eldership and membership of the Committee of Management.
8. Ordain and induct Elders.
9. Appoint leaders and group leaders of ministries such as Sunday Schools, Youth Groups, Growth Groups etc.
10. Nominate special offerings in agreement with the Committee of Management.
11. Receive and discuss petitions from members of the church.
12. Provide for the care of the poor.
13. Ensure the sending and receiving of appropriate documents to Presbytery, state and federal Assembly.
14. Ensure secure holding of congregational records.

### ***How this Might be Done***

It is one thing to have these responsibilities described it is another to ensure they are appropriately done. Below are a few ideas of how a Session can keep its fingers on the congregational pulse.

- The Minister provides a review of the things he has been doing since the last meeting. This is not 'hours spent in ...'. Rather, it is an opportunity to encourage questions about to be asked about pastoral issues, upcoming issues and, above all, prayer for those issues.
- The Session approves the job description of all paid staff workers, and ministry leaders. Therefore, in order to understand each ministry area for each Session meeting a different ministry leader or staff worker, if there are any, provides a one-page summary of how their ministry is going. This is provided a few days before the Session meeting. The ministry leader then attends the Session meeting and is given perhaps half an hour could be given in the meeting, broken up as: 20 minutes to ask questions about the report (how their ministry is going, and how they are going in their ministry?)



and 10 minutes given to praying for the leader and members of the ministry.

- Developing policies and processes for regular occurrences in the life of the church. This way, repeating issues can be dealt with before the Session meetings, allowing Session time to be spent discussing new issues and not going over the same ground every time.

These regular occurrences would include:

- Approving information documents about membership, baptism or giving.
- A policy for interviewing the parent/s for prospective infant baptism and candidates for adult baptism
- A policy with regard to interviewing prospective members
- A process of conflict within the church community

A Session is required to meet for its business at least four times a year. Most Sessions meet monthly however, these meeting don't always have to be official Session meetings where decisions are recorded.

Session meetings should not look like the board meeting of a secular business. This decline into a mere business meeting is not avoided by having a short Bible reading at the beginning followed by an even shorter prayer and a benediction at the end.

The purpose of a Session meeting is to deal with the spiritual oversight of the church under its care and this is a spiritual process of prayer, discussion and discernment.

## A Closed or Open Session

Traditionally, Sessions are, by definition, 'closed.' This defines the discussion within the meeting as confidential. This is an incredibly important principle when dealing with difficult pastoral issues and particularly issues of discipline. However, in my experience, issues such as these did not make up the majority of items on the agenda. As a consequence, it is possible to reverse the procedure so as to start with the Session meeting as 'open' and only 'close' the meeting when dealing with confidential issues. Elders could then discuss all material with others in the church, except for those issues that occurred in 'closed' Court.

As much as is possible, Session should not be seen as a place of 'secret men's business.'



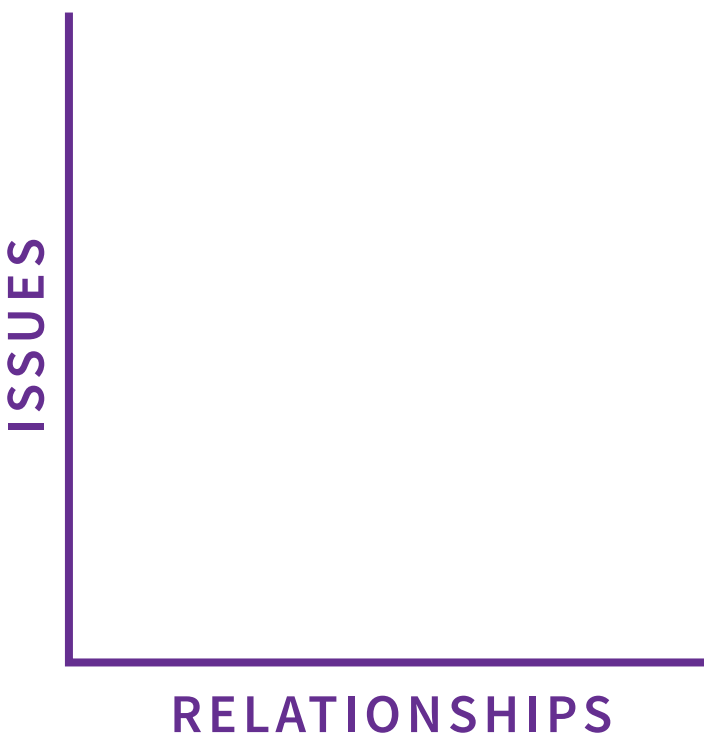
## Developing a Culture of Collaboration and Discernment

Most if not all, decisions that are made concerning a church are made up of two components:

- how big, important or urgent an issue is; and
- the significance of is the relational component of the decision

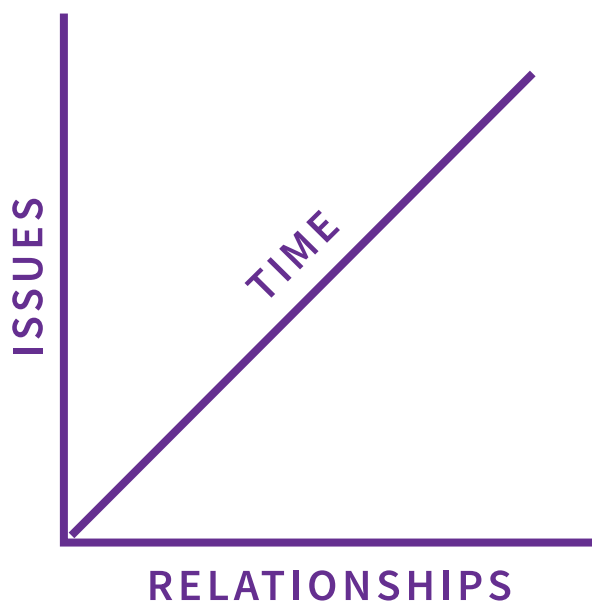
On the diagram below, discuss where you would plot the following issues. Give reasons and discuss them with the Minister and/or other Elders:

1. Evacuating the church due to a fire
2. Starting a new church service
3. Beginning a new ministry
4. Changing the time of the service





In the diagram below, I've added another vector – time. Good leadership anticipates significant issues that will impact lots of people and makes use of the time that anticipation gives.



On the diagram above, where you would plot the following 'issues.' Give reasons and discuss them with your Minister and/or other Elders:

1. The congregation is growing and there is little space for new people to join.
2. The Minister and an Elder come up with a draft paper with five options to discuss at the Session meeting to determine the top two options.
3. The Session at calls a congregational meeting to discuss the challenge of growth. They provide a draft paper to the congregation with the two preferred options, with reasons, for congregational input and feedback.
4. The Session with the congregational input determines to go ahead with option x or explore other options.
5. Sufficient lead time allows collaboration and engagement.



## Discernment in Two Movements

Below you will find two resources for discernment

1. The Six Hats by Edward de Bono and
2. The Five Steps of Discernment

### ***The Six Hats***

Session is a place of discernment, but sometimes Elders experience it as a roadblock to discernment if there is unwillingness to engage in an idea, especially if it is the Minister's idea. A healthy Session is one that is able to discuss, offer different opinions and even disagree without causing relational break down in its membership. A Minister should encourage good discussion, different opinions and even healthy disagreement - but this needs to be valued and cultivated. One tool for doing this is the Six Hats - which are six different coloured hats (White, Yellow, Black, Red, Green and Blue) that represent six different sorts of thinking - all of which are valuable.

In my opinion, this should only be used for significant decisions, rather than smaller ones. Essentially, each coloured hat is given time for people to contribute thoughts that fit that colour and the results are noted. It is helpful to write the contributions on a white board.

Often a decision is fairly obvious at the end of a discussion, or at least the significant issues are identified.

### ***The Five Steps of Discernment***

This is a process of prayerful discernment over an issue that can be used by couples, groups, churches and, of course, Sessions. I've used this towards the end of a call process with the Session and the Selection Committee, and found it very useful.

### ***Zack Eswine - Chapter 15 Leadership***

In *The Imperfect Pastor*, Zack Eswine asks three questions when making a decision with the leaders of the church that I think are very helpful:

1. Is this the right thing?
2. What is the right way to do this?
3. Is this the right time?

These questions will help us make wise and timely choices.





## Conflict

Decision making can bring conflict. Conflict is normal and can be good for clarifying issues and helping the Session to grow as a mature team. How the members of Session handle conflict will be an example to others.

One principle about conflict is that, in the middle of conflict it is hard to agree on the rules of healthy biblical engagement. This is best done before a real conflict issue occurs.

Two resources that will help in having a healthy Session are:

1. Covenant Commitments for Christians in Times of Tension and
2. Resolving Everyday Conflict – a Peacewise DVD and workbook

***Covenant Commitments for Christians in Times of Tension*** – You will find this document at the end of this paper. The way I've used this with a Session is: make it available to all members of Session; work through the document in a Session meeting wholly devoted to being clear about the material; sign the document and make it part of the Session's minutes and policy documents.

***Resolving Everyday Conflict*** – This is a seven-week training program that is helpful in dealing with conflicts that we regularly find ourselves involved in. I believe all leaders of teams, ministries and groups should have done this course but especially Elder who 'are not given to anger nor are they argumentative.



# Five Step Process of Discernment



This simple five step process is designed to allow for three sources of discernment to work in harmony together.

These are:

- God-given human insight
- the wisdom of reflecting in community and
- an intentional time of listening to God.

This idea has been adapted from Gerard Hughes' *God of Surprises*.

1. Gather a small group of people who you trust, who know you well and are willing to walk a process of discernment with you e.g. husband and wife, growth group, retreat group, peer group, soul friends, (If you are a Minister you might access your Session).
2. Frame the question you are discerning in a closed form so that the answer is 'yes' or 'no,' e.g. Is my time here complete? Will I seek another term as Pastor? Should I apply for this position? Would it be good for our family to move to this location? Should we become members of this church? Is it time to resign my job? Should I take up theological study? Should I go into full-time ministry?
3. Allocate a time period for the decision, e.g. 2 weeks, 1 month, three months. Then divide whatever period you have allocated into five equal parts i.e. a month becomes 5x 6 days. You can intentionally set aside a period that more easily divides into 5 i.e. 10 weeks.
4. Then follow the outline below:

## **Step A: Compile the reasons for saying 'Yes'**

(We don't compile a list of 'pros' and 'cons' straight away. When we do that we tend to balance a 'pro' with a 'con,' which works against the process.)



During this period the group collectively seeks to produce the most thoughtful and considered list of reasons to say 'yes' that it can. Apply as much wisdom and reflection as possible to this.

- a) The primary person asking for assistance with discernment puts together an initial list and circulates it.
- b) The group meets for discussion of these, or emails their ideas around and adds or suggests any others.
- c) The primary person edits the final list and distributes the completed list to the group on the last day.

***Step B: Discern these reasons***

During this period the group agrees to not communicate with each other but to pray through the list asking God for assistance in discerning how important each 'reason' is. There is no further discussion of these.

- a) Members of the group agree to pray daily and to record their reflections during or after prayer.
- b) In particular, they are asked to 'tune in' to questions that should be raised or sense that the 'reasons' listed are growing or decreasing in importance.

***Step C: Compile reasons 'against' or to say 'No'***

During this period the group collectively seeks to produce the most thoughtful and considered list of 'reasons to say 'No' it can. Care is taken not to simply mirror the 'first list' in negative form. Significant independent 'reasons' that stand on their own are sought for.

- a) Again, the primary person puts together an initial list and circulates it for reflection.
- b) The group meets or emails their thoughts for discussion of these 'reasons' and suggest the addition of any others.
- c) The primary person edits the final list and distributes this list again to the group on the last day.

**Step D: Discern these reasons**

In the same way as in step 2, the group agrees not to discuss the validity of the 'reasons against' but simply to pray regularly through the list asking God for guidance in discerning how important each 'reason' is (the process is to see a commonality in discernment that is not due to discussion).

- a) Members of the group agree to pray daily and to record their reflections during and after prayer.
- b) In particular, they are asked to be sensitive to questions that should be raised or the sense that these reasons are growing or increasing in importance.

**Step E: Evaluate and Reflect on the changes which occurred over the discernment period**

In the final period the group first reflects on the lists and their journaling in silent times and then meets to share listen and reflect together in what happened for each list; particularly during Step B and Step D as people prayed and reflected.

- a) The group members share one at a time their sense of what God confirmed or challenged over the four steps, with specific attention paid to the times of silent prayer.
  - b) The primary person should listen and then share last.
  - c) Is there a clear sense of a pattern arising from the discussion?
5. It may be that a clear direction can be affirmed as a result of this process. It also may be that, as the group discussed the outcome of the process, the critical questions to ask and answer become clear. This also may allow the decision to be made on a clearer basis.

**Adapted by Tim Dyer**

*John Mark Ministries 2005*




*Revised 2015*



# Six Thinking Hats

Adapted from Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats

- Uses parallel thinking to arrive at a solution (design a way forward) rather than adversarial debate.
- The six hats are coloured: white, red, black, yellow, green, blue.
- The six hats represent six directions (or ways) of thinking.
- The result is a creative and collaborative investigation that leads to clarity.
- It will often save time because it removes debate that can often be a mixture of different directions of thinking at the same time.
- The function of the Six Thinking Hats is to organise the decision-making process.

Hat	Focus	Notes
	<p>Calls for information known or needed. "The facts, just the facts."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Available data</li><li>• Past trends</li><li>• Gaps in the data</li></ul>	
	<p>Symbolizes brightness and optimism. Under this hat you explore the positives and probe for value and benefit.</p>	
	<p>Judgment - the devil's advocate or why something may not work. Spot the difficulties and dangers; where things might go wrong. Probably the most powerful and useful of the hats, but a problem if overused.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Why might it NOT work?</li></ul>	



Signifies feelings, hunches and intuition. When using this hat, you can express emotions and feelings and share fears, likes, dislikes, loves, and hates.

- All gut feelings - intuition



Focuses on creativity: the possibilities, alternatives, and new ideas. It's an opportunity to express new concepts and new perceptions.

- Creativity
- Other ways of doing things



Used to manage the thinking process. It's the control mechanism that ensures the Six Thinking Hats® guidelines are observed.

- Process



# Covenant Commitments for Christians in Times of Tension

“ Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:30)

As individual members and as the body of Christ, before God, we commit that:

## ***In our thinking we will***

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Accept conflict      | Acknowledge together that conflict is a normal part of our lives. It arises from different needs, values interests and viewpoints. It is healthy if handled well. Rom 14:1-8; 10-12; 17-19; 15:1-7       |
| Affirm hope          | Affirm that as God walks with us in conflict we can work through to a place where we can continue together and grow through the experience. Matt 18:20; Eph 4:15-16                                      |
| Commit to reflection | Be willing to engage in thoughtful reflection about our own attitudes, the part we are playing in this conflict and the unhelpful expectations we may be carrying. Matt 7:3                              |
| Commit to prayer     | Admit our needs and commit ourselves to pray for a mutually satisfactory outcome for all involved (ie we do not pray for our success or for the other to change, but for a join way forward). James 5:16 |

## ***In our actions we will***

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Go to the other...                   | Go directly to those with whom we disagree; avoiding behind-the-back criticism, waiting the other person out, or playing games about who should 'go first'. Matt 5:23-24; 18:15-20   |
| ...In the spirit of humility         | Go in gentleness, patience, humility. Be prepared to own our part in the conflict instead of pointing out others' wrongdoing. We will be prepared to share our needs, interests, and values. Eph 4:25; Gal 6:1-5                           |
| ... To seek and to offer forgiveness | We will be prepared to offer an apology for any hurts we have caused the other and to seek their forgiveness. We will be prepared to receive an apology, and before God, will seek to offer forgiveness as ti is requested of us. Eph 4:32 |
| Be quick to listen                   | Listen carefully, ensuring we understand what is being said and why, before responding. We will seek as much to understand as to be understood. James 1:19; Prov 18:13   |



Be slow to judge	We will suspend judgments and will avoid making assumptions of other's motives. Matt 7:1; Rom 2:1-4, 14:13; Gal 5:22-26
Guard our tongues	We will avoid sharp, barbed comments or replies which are hurtful. We will take great care to guard against 'labelling', threats, or words that carry a negative connotation. James 3:5; Eph 4:29
Be willing to talk and work through differences	We will work through the disagreements constructively. We will grant space for all to reflect and think with compassion. We will find ways to honour each other's interests, needs, values, and concerns. We will agree to a fair and reasonable process of how the outcome will be determined. We will engage in co-operative discussion about the options and consider each fully. We will accept the emerging outcome and working with it, not against it. Acts 15; Phil 2:1-11

***In our lives we will***

Be steadfast in love	Be firm in our commitment to seek a mutual outcome; be stubborn in holding to our common foundation in Christ; be steadfast in love. Col 3:12-15
Be open to mediation	Be open to accept skilled help. If we cannot reach agreement among ourselves, we will use others with gifts and training in mediation, consultation, facilitation, and negotiation. Phil 4:1-3
Trust the community	We will trust the community and if we cannot reach agreement or experience reconciliation, we will turn the decision over to others in the congregation/denomination or from the broader church community. Acts 15
Be the Body of Christ	Believe in and rely on the solidarity of the Body of Christ and its commitment to peace and justice, rather than resort to the courts of law. 1 Cor 6:1-6





## Eldership Paper Five

# The Elder and the Denomination

## Introduction

There are two core principles that make us Presbyterian:

1. What we believe as Presbyterians, as described in the Westminster Confession, read in the light of the Declaratory Statement, adopted by the Federal Assembly on the 24th of July, 1901. These documents guide the way Ministers and Elders of the church read the Scriptures; our only rule of faith and practice.
2. The governing of our denomination, at every level of its structural and organisational life, is by Elder (Presbyters).

This paper looks at the structures of the denomination and the vital need for Elders not only to understand the nature and structure of the denomination, but also the importance of clearly communicating this to brothers and sisters in Christ who join our churches.

## Presbyterianism and the Patterns of Australian History

On the first of January 1901, the various states and territories of Australia became a Federation, the Commonwealth of Australia.

In the constitution of Australia, to the Federal Government was given responsibility for items with national scope:

- Post, telephones and the Internet
- Money
- Immigration
- Defence



The States and Territories were given responsibility for:

- Public Transport
- Schools
- Hospitals
- Policing

Local Governments<sup>13</sup> were given responsibility for:

- Rubbish collection and recycling
- Parks, sports fields and swimming pools
- Pet control
- Parking

Also in 1901, on the twenty-fourth of July, the various Presbyterian State and Territory Assemblies became federated as the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The structures of the Commonwealth of Australia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia are remarkably similar.

The Federal Assembly was given responsibility for those things of a national scope.

These are:

- Doctrine of the Church
- Worship of the Church
- Discipline of the Church
- Admission and training of candidates for the ministry and deaconesses
- Receiving Ministers from other denominations
- Overseas Mission
- Mission to remote areas of Australia at the request of the appropriate state
- Christian education
- Publication of the national journal; and
- Chaplains to the defence force

The State Assembly exercises power in three areas of the denomination's life - the administrative, legislative and judicial:

- **Administrative:** exercised through committees appointed by the Assembly to conduct its business throughout the year. The Committee submits an annual report to the Assembly for debate and approval concerning decisions and new initiatives.
- **Legislative:** Assembly can make or alter rules that concern

<sup>13</sup> There is no mention of Local Governments in the Constitution of Australia.



the denomination's operations. These rules or alterations are incorporated into the Code after a process of consultation with Presbyteries and Sessions.

- **Judicial:** The Assembly can review decisions by Presbyteries through complaint, appeal or petition.

The Presbytery is responsible for:

The superintending of all matters relating to doctrine and discipline in the charges (churches) within its bounds.

- The acceptance, supervision, and annual review of candidates for the ministry, including deaconesses.
- Deals with all matters in relation to the appointment, ordination, induction and resignation of Ministers.
- Deals with all matters affecting the teaching and character of all workers ordained or otherwise under the Presbytery's jurisdiction.
- Ensures the instruction of the state and federal Assemblies are observed within the bounds of the Presbytery.
- The establishment of new churches within its bounds.

The Session is responsible for:

- Oversight and promotion of the spiritual health and fruitfulness of the Church in regard to public worship, teaching and discipline.
- Supervision of all ministries and groups within a church, including of all employed staff within the church, according to the rules and practices of the Presbyterian denomination, as well as ministries of the church.
- Determining the time, date and place of public worship, the Lord's Supper and Baptism.
- Admitting persons to membership of the church.
- Disciplining erring members and restore them to fellowship.
- Calling Congregational meetings.
- Examining the suitability of persons for Eldership and membership of the Committee of Management.
- Ordaining and inducting Elders.
- Appointing leaders and group leaders of ministries such as Sunday Schools, Youth Groups, Growth Groups etc.
- Nominating special offerings in agreement with the Committee of Management.



- Receiving and discussing petitions from members of the church.
- Providing for the care of the poor.
- Ensuring the sending and receiving of appropriate documents to Presbytery, state and federal Assembly.
- Ensuring secure holding of congregational records.

There is a similarity of shape between the structures of Government in Australia and the Government of the Presbyterian denomination in Australia. The main difference is that our denomination has an extra level of 'government:' the Session.

## The Role of a Denomination

The local church is fundamental to the denomination in all aspects of governance. All other Courts and committees primarily exist to serve the local church and not the other way around. In the New Testament, there is no mention of a formal denomination. The closest thing we have to a denomination or denominational organisation is Paul and the Pauline Circle, a large group of fellow-workers, fellow-servants and fellow-soldiers who served with Paul and often under his direction. We see in Paul's letters and in Acts an organism that at times behaves in 'denominational' ways.

Some of these are:

- The selection of and training up of suitable persons for ministry
- Church planting and appointment of Elders and Deacons (1 Timothy and Titus)
- The public endorsement of gospel workers. This often occurs at the end of Paul's letters (Romans 16)
- Opening up of new fields of mission - Romans and Paul's intention to spread the gospel in Spain.
- Dealing with conflict and discipline (1 & 2 Corinthians)
- Organising mercy ministries – the Jerusalem Collection for the poor (1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians)

These are some of the aspects of Paul's ministry that approximate to some of the functions of a denomination. And like Paul, the denomination and denominational agents and agencies, should be servant-like. Also like Paul, they need to avoid the exercise of their power, except in truly extreme circumstances, as well as resisting centralising power and initiative for the sake of efficiency. The drive for efficiency can all too easily justify forsaking the pursuit of spiritual



### Question

What have you noticed about the structure and responsibilities of the of the different Courts of the Presbyterian denomination?



and relational maturity. Like our reason, the denomination is a good servant and a terrible master.

A denomination is an association of churches who agree on many things both doctrinally and governmentally. By formally associating, there are many things they are able to do together that they could not do individually:

- A theological college to train candidates for the ministry
- Support for planting churches or giving to churches in need
- Develop mission strategies at home or abroad
- Oversee the spiritual and temporal resources of churches and ministries
- Develop specialised support ministries or resources around age-specific groups

### ***Tim Keller on the Value of Belonging to the Presbyterian Denomination***

On July 1, 2022, Mike Cospers interviewed Tim Keller for the *Rise and Fall of Mars Hill* podcast.

Early in the interview, Tim Keller reflected on the value of belonging to a denomination that takes what a pastor does and says seriously enough to hold them accountable; something that was missing at Mars Hill. Tim reflected how he had to answer questions put to his Presbytery by another Presbytery about the orthodoxy of his teaching about creation. Tim was presented with a question to answer through his Presbytery on five different occasions. Keller saw this accountability by the Presbytery as fundamentally helpful for both the Pastor and his church.

You can listen to the episode or read the transcript at:  
[www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/tim-keller-mike-cospers-mars-hill-bonus.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/tim-keller-mike-cospers-mars-hill-bonus.html) .

When Tim Keller visited Australia in 2014, he met with representatives of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. David Jones interviewed Tim and at one point asked the question, “What is the nature of Eldership in a large church like Redeemer?”

As I remember it, he talked about how mature Elders, alongside a Minister, keep him from being authoritarian. This, he said, was

***Listen to Tim Keller on the Rise and Fall of Mars Hill podcast***





because the Session has power to make certain decisions and not the Minister; the Minister presents an idea or concept and then seeks to persuade the Session members as to its soundness. Tim told a story about wanting to start another church and taking the idea to the Session, which discussed it, considered it, and eventually said they didn't think that this was the right time for a new church plant. I remember Tim reflecting that he still thought planting the church was the right idea and the right time; thus, the situation presented him with a choice. This wasn't a gospel issue, so would he remain a good Presbyterian or go rogue? He submitted to the wisdom of his brother Elders. The church was planted eventually, at a later date.

Tim did identify a danger for Elders in the use of the Session's power: the need to be careful to avoid micro managing.

## The Spiritual Discipline of Belonging to the Presbyterian Denomination

There is a spiritual discipline in belonging to a denomination as a Minister or an Elder. This discipline is articulated in a promise made by Ministers and should, in my opinion, be made by Elders:

“ *vii. Do you promise to give conscientious attendance upon the Courts of the Church, and to direct your best attention to the business thereof, doing all in the spirit of faithfulness, brotherly kindness, and charity?* ”

The first part of this promise is covered in the sixth promise Elders make, but it is the second half that I believe is significant, '... doing all in the spirit of faithfulness, brotherly kindness, and charity'.

A denomination is an association of people whom we have not chosen, nor have they chosen us, but what we do have in common is eternally important: we share in a life in Christ. This is true of all Christians, but what those who belong to the Presbyterian denomination share is not only a framework of belief, but also a way of ordering our churches that is both Biblical and Christ-honouring. But here is the real point: it is easy to say we share a life in Christ, and this is true of all Christians, but the need to exercise kindness and love (charity) becomes increasingly difficult with people we know and rub shoulders with. We can regularly rub each other up the wrong way! That is why belonging to a church family and



### Question

What strikes you most in Tim Keller's comments about belonging to the Presbyterian Denomination?



a denomination is a spiritual discipline. It is easy to have warm feelings towards people I do not know and who do not know me. It is the people closest to me that I struggle with, and am tempted to ignore or belittle. Belonging to a denomination as an Elder or a Minister provides a way of growing up spiritually, emotionally and relationally.

I take it that what this will mean in practice is that when we disagree with a person in our denomination, we seek to engage them - rather than disengage, avoid and dismiss them. It will mean seeking clarity about the position of another, and being prepared to reconsider our own. It may even entail repentance and forgiveness! Above all, it leads to humility.

## Eldership All the Way Up

Elders are represented at every level of the denominational 'tree'.

A principle of Presbyterianism that is observed at the level of the General Assembly of Australia (meeting every three years), the State Assembly (usually meeting once a year) and the Presbytery (usually meeting once a month) in which the local Church is placed, is the parity between Elders and Ministers. That is, equal numbers of Ministers and Elders meet to conduct the business of these three Courts. It is only at the local level of Session that there is a lack of parity. In most churches there is one Minister and a number of Elders, or a couple of ordained Ministers and a number of Elders.

This representation must be embraced by the Elders of a church; it is both a privilege and a responsibility.

Eldership promise vi. says:

“ Do you engage through Divine Grace to discharge with diligence and faithfulness the various duties of your office, watching over the flock, showing yourself a pattern of good works, and giving a conscientious attendance on the meetings of Session, Presbytery, and Assembly, when duly called so to do?

Fundamental to healthy Presbyterianism is the engagement of Ministers and Elders in the Courts of the denomination, making committees accountable to serve the churches in the most effective way. If we are disengaged, or lack courage in lovingly asking



### Question

What is helpful for you in thinking about belonging to the denomination as a spiritual discipline?



appropriately difficult questions and pursuing answers in brotherly kindness and charity, we only have ourselves to blame when things go wrong. In our Presbyterian denomination, responsibility and healthy accountability leads to the health of the whole.

## Presbyterianism: Neither Fish nor Fowl

One of the blessings of the excellent biblical training we receive at our theological college (QTC) is that Christians who are looking for a church that teaches the Bible well, will often find a Presbyterian church home to settle in to. There is however, at times, a down side to this blessing. People from other church backgrounds can't seem to understand how we operate; we are neither fish nor fowl! Those from a congregational background expect that most decisions will be made by a majority vote of the church. Those from a hierarchical background wonder why the Minister doesn't just get on and change what he likes.

We often do a pretty bad job of explaining the Presbyterian rationale of why we do things the way we do, and why do some people get a say and others don't at different times.

For those from different denominational backgrounds, this can be frustrating at best, and at worst can lead to conflict.

We would serve God's people well if we explained the value of a system where the Minister has limited power, while the Session has significant authority, and where Communicant members of the church - those who are followers of Christ and have declared that this particular church will be their spiritual home - have a significant say in who will be an Elder or a Minister to the congregation.

One way of doing this is: whenever decisions are being made, an explanation of the process and the different responsibilities of different people is given. It would also be helpful to explain that becoming a Communicant member of the Presbyterian denomination, is not a commitment to all things Presbyterian, but is a commitment to living as a child of God in Christ. This level of clarity and ownership of how we make decisions must lead to greater understanding, and hopefully deeper, vital ownership in the local church.



### Question

What do you feel is the greatest impediment for Elders and Ministers engaging in the structures of the denomination?



### Question

If a person who had been attending your church for four months asked you what was different about how Presbyterians made decisions, compared to other denominations, name three key differences.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Consider developing a document in Session explaining the structure of decision making in your church and what helpful principles underlie that structure.





## Eldership Paper Six

# The Elder and His Promises

## Introduction

In this paper we will firstly consider the place promises occupy generally in the Presbyterian denomination, particularly in the local church. Secondly, we will look at and explore the promises Elders, in particular, are required to make.

## Promises lead to Responsibilities of Privilege

In our denomination, promises lead to the responsibilities of privilege. This phrase means that people in particular roles are required to make promises when they are given significant responsibility for the health and fruitfulness of the church - which is described as a privilege in Scripture.

In the local church these are:

- Ministers
- Elders
- Communicant Members

**Ministers**, after a significant period of training, supervision, testing by his Presbytery and finally, on many occasions, the call of a congregation to be their Minister, they are ordained by the Presbytery of the church to which they are called or appointed. The service of ordination includes promises on what they believe, how they will live, what their motivations are for ministry, and how they will depend on God's grace in fulfilling this ministry.

**Elders**, are required to be trained in the role of Elder. This training includes requirements of Eldership, the promises they will make, and their understanding of the Westminster Confession of Faith as amended by the General Assembly of Australia, read in the light



of the Declaratory Statement. Like marriage, Eldership should not be entered into lightly or hastily. There are a number of ways a candidate for Eldership can be nominated either by a Communicant Member or by the Session. After nomination, the date is set for the election of the nominated persons, or a postal vote is conducted. Once a date is set for voting, there is an opportunity for the members of the congregation to raise with the Session, in writing, issues of belief, behaviour and character that they may feel either disqualify a candidate for Eldership or perhaps put a pause on the candidate moving forward at this point in time. Once the date is set for voting, Communicant Members of the congregation and Adherent members<sup>14</sup> vote for those nominees they believe should be Elders. The votes of Communicant Members and Adherents are recorded separately. The Session then considers the results of the vote at its next meeting and determines the outcome. The Session has the ultimate say as to whether a person will become an Elder of the Session<sup>15</sup>. The outcome of this process is announced by the Session and events move forward to the ordination of the Elder/s. An Elder is not ordained by the Presbytery. He is ordained by the Session of the church, and it is at a church service that he is required to answer questions and promises.

**Communicant Members** are fundamental to the overall health of the congregation in our denomination. When Ministers are being called to a congregation, or Elders voted on, a distinction is made between the votes of the Communicant Members and Adherents. Perhaps the best way of describing the difference is to say that the votes of Communicant Members on an issue are determinative<sup>16</sup>: they determine the outcome of the votes, normally; whilst the votes of Adherents are indicative: their votes indicate their preference, which is taken into consideration. In the majority of all votes I have observed, the Adherents' votes have aligned with the votes of Communicant members.

<sup>14</sup> **1.5** Adherents are people who have attained the age of sixteen (16) years and over and who:  
(a) are baptised people who make such profession of their faith as would entitle them to become Communicants, but who choose not to become Communicants of the Presbyterian Church of Australia by virtue of membership of another Christian Church, or by reasons of conscientious objection, and  
(b) worship regularly in the congregation, and  
(c) contribute to its support, and  
(d) apply to or are invited by the Session to be enrolled. (BB 1996 48.8)

<sup>15</sup> This is one of those moments when we see that the Presbyterian form of government is not purely congregational (democratic).

<sup>16</sup> The exception to this rule is voting for anything where the Session ultimately determines the outcome which includes who becomes an Elder.



Unlike the promises made by Ministers and Elders, the promises of Communicant Members are not prescribed by the General Assembly of Australia<sup>17</sup>. There is a significant distinction between the roles of Ministers, Elders and Communicant Members. Whilst Ministers and Elders make promises that refer to the denomination's doctrine, government and principles that shape worship services, no such responsibilities are laid on Communicant Members. The promises Communicant Members make most often include:

- a belief in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- a declaration that Jesus is their Lord and Saviour, acknowledging repentance from sin
- That they seek to love him, confess him and serve him in all of their life,
- that they will make use of God's means of grace – reading the Bible and prayer and
- will regularly attend church
- will give of their means in supporting the physical needs of the congregation
- will respect the authority of the Session as they pastorally oversee the congregation

Increasingly, those who are accepted into membership are invited to give their testimony.

There was a time in the 1980's and 90's when many people who attended our churches were indifferent to membership. Not only is that changing for those attending, I believe Sessions need to increasingly clarify what membership means and especially what the privileges and responsibilities of members and leadership are towards one another.

## Questions and Promises for Elders-Elect

The service of ordination for an Elder, including the questions and promises are quite formal. This style declares the significance in both the life of both the congregation and the Elder, as well as a degree of solemn joy and thankfulness as is appropriate.

There are seven questions or promises that an Elder makes. My aim is to briefly describe the substance of each of the questions.

---

<sup>17</sup> Promises are recommended by the General Assembly of Australia through the GAA Public Worship and Aids to Devotion Committee ([pwad.org.au](http://pwad.org.au).)



### Question 1

The Congregation assenting, [to the questions they have previously been asked] the following questions are put to the Elders-elect<sup>18</sup>:

“ ii) *Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only rule of faith and practice?*”

The question identifies that the Scriptures - those histories, laws, wisdom, songs, prophecies, gospels, and letters which make up the Old and New Testaments - are the Word of God. This embraces the idea of their divine origin, but in no way discounts the role, background and abilities of the human authors.

Further, the first question identifies that these Scriptures are sufficient and authoritative for faith and practice.

*Faith and Practice:*

*Faith* identifies the substance of who and what we believe. Who God is, and how Christ is the fulfillment of the Father's plans and purposes to bring salvation, through the enlivening of the Spirit. The pivotal role of Christ's life, cross and resurrection, and our response of faith and repentance. Our adoption into God's family and the purpose of the Church for the glory of God. Jesus' return to judge the world and gather his resurrected people in a new heaven and new earth.

*Practice* includes all of who we are and is demonstrated in our living; and how the Church is Christ's creation for the glory of God and the sake of the world. Practice includes the response of all of who we are as individuals, and who and how we are when we are together.

*Sufficient* means that we do not need anything else besides the Scriptures for faith and practice. What this doesn't mean is that the Scriptures are sufficient for space travel or how to do an appendectomy.

*Authoritative* means that this Word of God is to be received as the authority over all other authorities – reason, tradition and experience. This does not mean that God's Word is antithetical to these helpful tools. Rather, reason, tradition and experience cannot be used to trump the Word of God.



### Question

Identify an issue that is a little contentious. What do the Scriptures say on this issue? What place do reason, tradition or experience play in your thinking?

<sup>18</sup> <https://presbyterian.org.au/gaa-code-book/>



## Question 2

“ ii. *Do you own and accept the Westminster Confession of Faith<sup>19</sup>, as amended by the General Assembly, and read in the light of the Declaratory Statement contained in the Basis of Union adopted by this Church on the 24th day of July, 1901, as an exhibition of the sense in which you understand the Holy Scriptures and as a confession of your faith; and do you engage firmly and constantly to adhere thereto, and to the utmost of your power to assert, maintain and defend the same?*

This is the longest question and also the most complicated; thus, some background will be helpful.

*The Westminster Confession of Faith (1 July 1643 - 22 February 1649)*

During the English Civil War (1642-1651) between Charles I and Parliament, the Parliament was committed to reforming the Church in England so that it would be closer to the Word of God and aligned more with Reformed churches in other countries - especially the Church of Scotland, which was Presbyterian. The Parliament called ‘an Assembly of learned, godly and judicious Divines (*theologians*) to advise and consult of such matters and things as should be proposed unto them...’

The Assembly consisted of 121 theologians, ten lords and twenty commoners with the rights of assessors, as well as four Ministers and two Elders appointed by the Church of Scotland.

Essentially, the Parliamentary brief for the Assembly was to rewrite the confessional document of the Church of England, the Thirty-Nine Articles, so that it better represented a Reformed outlook. The Assembly, in response to this brief, developed five documents:

1. The Westminster Confession of Faith
2. The Larger Catechism
3. The Shorter Catechism
4. The Form of Church Government, and
5. The Directory of Public Worship

Only the Westminster Confession of Faith has a role in the promises made by Elders and Ministers of the Presbyterian denomination in Australia. Essentially, the Westminster Confession is a statement of systematic theology, as is seen by the content of its thirty-three chapters:

<sup>19</sup> <https://presbyterian.org.au/gaa-code-book/>



- I. Of the Holy Scripture.
- II. Of God, and of the Holy Trinity.
- III. Of God's Eternal Decree.
- IV. Of Creation.
- V. Of Providence.
- VI. Of the Fall of Man, of Sin and the Punishment thereof.
- VII. Of God's Covenant with Man.
- VIII. Of Christ the Mediator.
- IX. Of Free Will.
- X. Of Effectual Calling.
- XI. Of Justification.
- XII. Of Adoption.
- XIII. Of Sanctification.
- XIV. Of Saving Faith.
- XV. Of Repentance unto Life.
- XVI. Of Good Works.
- XVII. Of the Perseverance of the Saints.
- XVIII. Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation.
- XIX. Of the Law of God.
- XX. Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience.
- XXI. Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath-day.
- XXII. Of lawful Oaths and Vows.
- XXIII. Of the Civil Magistrate.
- XXIV. Of Marriage and Divorce.
- XXV. Of the Church.
- XXVI. Of Communion of the Saints.
- XXVII. Of the Sacraments.
- XXVIII. Of Baptism.
- XXIX. Of the Lord's Supper.
- XXX. Of Church Censures.
- XXXI. Of Synods and Councils.
- XXXII. Of the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead.
- XXXIII. Of the last Judgement.



The Confession is a systematic exposition of Calvinism, and as such, the sovereignty of God in all things is stressed - and particularly with regard to salvation. Which leads us to the Declaratory Statement<sup>20</sup>.

The Declaratory Statement re-emphasises a biblical balance at particular points of the Confession. In doing this it does not contradict the Confession; rather, it qualifies it either by quoting additional texts<sup>21</sup> or enunciating that a position stated in the Confession does not lead to a particular outcome<sup>22</sup>.

Clause 5. in The Declaratory Statement concerns liberty of opinion<sup>23</sup>. Liberty of opinion is different to liberty of expression. In essence, Clause 5 is an encouragement for Ministers and Elders to major on the major elements of The Westminster Confession of Faith and not the minors<sup>24</sup>. Liberty of expression that creates division within the denomination is not guarded in this clause at all.

Clause 6. in The Declaratory Statement<sup>25</sup> acknowledges that the situation in which the Confession was written, concerning the relationship between Church and State, has significantly changed. There is now a separation between Church and State, such that The Declaratory Statement acknowledges in Clause 6. that Christ is the only Head and Ruler of our Church, and that the rule of the State is limited by his rule when it is in conflict, while still acknowledging the appropriate acknowledgement of monarchs and governments according to God's Word.

### Question 3

“ iii. *Do you own and accept the purity of worship as practised in this Church?*

Purity of worship was a significant issue at the time of the Confession's composition: Bishops were being imposed on the Church of Scotland, as was the Prayer Book. This was seen as the thin edge of the wedge of Roman Catholicism, and the undoing of the Reformation.

<sup>20</sup> See the text of the Declaratory Statement on the last two pages of this Paper.

<sup>21</sup> Part 2. Of the Declaratory Statement, when referring to Chapter III, Section 1.

<sup>22</sup> Part 3. Of the Declaratory Statement when referring to 'those who dies in infancy'.

<sup>23</sup> 5. That liberty of opinion is allowed on matters in the subordinate standard not essential to the doctrine therein taught, the Church guarding against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace.

<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, it will be the General Assembly of Australia that will determine what is a major or minor issue.

<sup>25</sup> 6. That with regard to the doctrine of the civil magistrate and his authority and duty in the sphere of religion, as taught in the subordinate standard the church holds that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only King and Head of the Church, "and Head over all things to the Church, which is His body." It disclaims, accordingly, intolerant or persecuting principles and does not consider its office-bearers, in subscribing the Confession, as committed to any principles inconsistent with the liberty of conscience and the right of private judgement, declaring in the words of the Confession that "God alone is Lord of the conscience".



This question articulates a position called the Regulative Principle. The Regulative Principle in essence affirms that, in corporate worship, only those things affirmed by Scripture are to be practiced and so, nothing should be done that does not have specific Scriptural warrant.

Key components of worship are singing, praying, the reading of God's Word, preaching the Scriptures and the appropriate celebration of The Lord's Supper and Baptism.

#### **Question 4**

“ iv. *Do you own the Presbyterian form of government to be founded on the Word of God and agreeable thereto; and do you promise that through the grace of God you will firmly and constantly adhere to, and to the utmost of your power, in your station, assert, maintain and defend the same?*

Once again, there is a historical context to this question. King Charles I was claiming to be the head of the church and seeking to impose Bishops. For Presbyterians, only the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head and Ruler of His Church, and His Word identifies that the normal practice of Church government was the Eldership.

Examples of asserting, maintaining and defending the form of government of the Presbyterian denomination would be:

- Clearly explaining the strengths of the Presbyterian system to church members.
- Making yourself familiar with other Courts of the denomination.
- Attending the different Courts of the denomination when asked.
- It would also entail lovingly identifying failures of the Presbyterian system when they came to your attention.

What this promise doesn't **require** is that you tell everyone from either a congregational or hierarchical system of church government that they are **wrong**.

#### **Question 5**

“ v. *Do you adhere to your acceptance of the Call of this Congregation, to exercise among them the office of Ruling?*

This question simply asks whether, given the process of congregational election and prayerful confirmation by the Session, you will serve the Lord and the congregation as a Ruling Elder.





### Question 6

“ vi. *Do you engage through Divine Grace to discharge with diligence and faithfulness the various duties of your office, watching over the flock, showing yourself a pattern of good works, and giving a conscientious attendance on the meetings of Session, Presbytery, and Assembly, when duly called so to do?*

In many respects this question describes the duties of a Ruling Elder. These are:

- Watching over the flock – pastoral care (Eldership Paper 2)
- Showing yourself a pattern of good works – being a model of Christian maturity (Eldership Paper 1)
- Giving conscientious attendance on the meetings of Session (Eldership Paper 4)
- Presbytery, and Assembly, when duly called so to do (Eldership Paper 5)

The first part of the question is significant. The office you are to discharge is to serve God’s people as God’s person and so must be done depending on God’s grace. Depending on grace promotes humility and grace towards other people and dependence on God to serve with diligence and faithfulness.

### Question 7

“ vii. *All these things you profess and promise through grace, as you shall be answerable at the Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ?*

The last question catches up all the other question/promises. First of all, it reminds us that this will only be done by depending on God’s grace, strength, power and Word in your life. And secondly, you are accepting the Call to care for and serve the Household of God, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This is both a privilege and a responsibility. A responsibility for which all who serve God’s people are accountable to the Lord Jesus, the only Head and Ruler of the Church.

For myself, ministry is a means of grace. It’s the place where I grow, because in ministry I see the grace of God in Christ, and I see my sin and God’s power to forgive and renew. In the crucible of serving God’s people, I am invited to grow to be more like my Lord and Saviour, with my brothers and sisters in Christ.



## The Scheme of Union including the Declaratory Statement under the Basis of Union

### **THE SCHEME OF UNION**

The Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, the Presbyterian Church of South Australia, the Presbyterian Church of Tasmania and the Presbyterian Church of Western Australia, holding the same doctrine, government, discipline, and form of worship, believing that it would be for the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom that they should form one Presbyterian Church, as hereinafter provided, to be called the Presbyterian Church of Australia, and under authority of Christ alone, the Head of the Church and Head over all things to His Church, agree to unite on the following basis and subject to the following articles to be subscribed by the Moderators of the respective churches in their names and on their behalf.

### **BASIS OF UNION**

- i. The Supreme Standard of the united church shall be the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.
- ii. The Subordinate Standard of the united church shall be the Westminster Confession of Faith, read in the light of the following declaratory statement:
  1. That in regard to the doctrine of redemption as taught in the subordinate standard, and in consistency therewith, the love of God to all mankind, His gift of His Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and the free offer of salvation to men without distinction on the grounds of Christ's all sufficient sacrifice, are regarded by this Church as vital to the Christian faith. And inasmuch as the Christian faith rests upon, and the Christian consciousness takes hold of, certain objective supernatural historic facts, especially the incarnation, the atoning life and death, and the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, and His bestowment of His Holy Spirit, this Church regards those whom it admits to the office of the Holy Ministry as pledged to give a chief place in their teaching to these cardinal facts, and to the message of redemption and reconciliation implied and manifested in them.
  2. That the doctrine of God's eternal decree, including the doctrine of election to eternal life, is held as defined in the Confession of Faith, Chapter III, Section 1, where it is expressly stated that according to this doctrine, "neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established"; and further, that the said doctrine is held in connection and harmony with the



truth - that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, that He has provided a salvation sufficient for all, and adapted to all, and offered to all in the Gospel, and that every hearer of the Gospel is responsible for his dealing with the free and unrestricted offer of eternal life.

3. That while none are saved except through the mediation of Christ and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who worketh when and where and how it pleaseth Him; while the duty of sending the Gospel to the heathen who are sunk in ignorance, sin and misery is imperative; and while the outward and ordinary means of salvation for those capable of being called by the Word are the ordinances of the Gospel, in accepting the subordinate standard it is not required to be held that any who die in infancy are lost, or that God may not extend His Grace to any who are without the pale of ordinary means, as it may seem good in His sight.
  4. That in holding and teaching, according to the Confession of Faith, the corruption of man's nature as fallen, this Church also maintains that there remain tokens of man's greatness as created in the image of God, that he possesses a knowledge of God and of duty - that he is responsible for compliance with the moral law and the call of the Gospel, and that, although unable without the aid of the Holy Spirit to return to God unto salvation, he is yet capable of affections and actions which of themselves are virtuous and praiseworthy.
  5. That liberty of opinion is allowed on matters in the subordinate standard not essential to the doctrine therein taught, the Church guarding against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace.
  6. That with regard to the doctrine of the civil magistrate and his authority and duty in the sphere of religion, as taught in the subordinate standard the church holds that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only King and Head of the Church, "and Head over all things to the Church, which is His body." It disclaims, accordingly, intolerant or persecuting principles and does not consider its office-bearers, in subscribing the Confession, as committed to any principles inconsistent with the liberty of conscience and the right of private judgement, declaring in the words of the Confession that "God alone is Lord of the conscience".
- iii. Any proposed revision or abridgement of the subordinate standard of the Church, or restatement of its doctrine, or change of the formula, shall, before being adopted, be remitted to the local assemblies, and through them to the presbyteries, and no change shall be made without the consent of a majority of the local assemblies, three-fifths of the presbyteries of the whole Church, and a majority of three-fifths of the members present when the final vote of the General Assembly is taken.



- iv. On any change being made in the Basis of Union in accordance with Section III, if any congregation thereupon refuses to acquiesce in the change and determines to adhere to the original basis of union, the General Assembly is empowered - (1) to allow such congregation to retain all its congregational property; or (2) to deal in such other way with the said property as to the Assembly may seem just and equitable.
- v. proposed change in either of the two preceding Sections III and IV shall be made only under the provisions contained in section III.
- vi. Formula to be signed by Ministers and elders at their ordination or induction, and by probationers on receiving licence:

*I own and accept the Subordinate Standard of this Church, with the explanations given in the articles contained in the declaratory statement, as an exhibition of the sense in which I understand the Holy Scriptures, and as a confession of my faith. I further own the purity of worship practised in this Church, and the Presbyterian government thereof to be founded on the Word of God, and agreeable thereto; and I promise that through the Grace of God I shall firmly and constantly adhere to the same, and to the utmost of my power shall in my station assert, maintain, and defend the doctrine, worship and government of this Church.*

**ENDNOTE:**

1. The power under Section III has been used twice. Due to the shortage of ordained Ministers during the First World War, the GAA in 1916 (BB 1916 Min. 70) amended the Confession of Faith Chapter XXVII, Section IV to allow for administration of the Sacraments by other than ordained Ministers (see Chapter 4.2 of Constitution, Procedure and Practice)  
In 1928 (BB 1928 Min. 57) the GAA amended the Confession of Faith Chapter XXIV Section IV to permit marriage of a man with his deceased wife's sister, or of a woman with her deceased husband's brother (see Chapter 5.1 of Constitution, Procedure and Practice)
2. When these amendments were made under Section III, no congregation exercised the right under Section IV to adhere to the original basis of union.