

**ELDER'S
ROLL BOOK
AND HANDBOOK**



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Elder

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District

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Church

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First Published by
THE WESTMINSTER FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NEW ZEALAND

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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA,
G.P.O. BOX 100,
SYDNEY, N.S.W. 2001.

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DUTIES OF AN ELDER

"The eldership is a spiritual function, as is the ministry." (The Second Book of Discipline of the Church of Scotland 1578)

1. Pray regularly and systematically for all the members of his flock.
2. Visit his members as often as he is able, especially if there is sickness or bereavement.
3. Encourage the young people to attend Sunday School, Bible Class, and Youth Organizations.
4. Keep the matter of church membership before all adherents and young people, and invite to the minister's Communicant's or Enquirer's Class.
5. Call on every member without fail at the Communion season, and invite to the Lord's Table.
6. Mark up his elder's roll-book as soon as the cards have been returned from the roll-keeper, and call on any member who is falling away.
7. Visit all new people who have moved into his area.
8. Be loyal and true at all times to his minister, fellow office-bearers, and church members.
9. Attend Church morning and evening, and the mid-week meeting, as "examples to the flock". (1 Peter 5:3).
10. Uphold by word and conduct the honour and glory of Christ.

"I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit. For without me ye can do nothing."
(John 15:5)

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:27)

"Tend that flock of God whose shepherds you are, and do it, not under compulsion, but of your own free will, as God would have; not for gain but out of sheer devotion . . . And then, when the Head Shepherd appears you will receive for your own the unfading garland of glory."
(1 Peter 5:2-4, N.E.B.)

* See also "The Book of Order", Chapter 3 (New Zealand) or (Australia) The Rules and Procedure of your State Assembly Section "Eldership".

THE ELDER IN ACTION

HOW TO USE THIS ROLL BOOK

The Communicants' Register is kept by the Minister or by the Roll-Keeper. Households on this Register are grouped into convenient districts (numbered), with an elder appointed to each district.

In order that the elder can shepherd his flock effectively he should not have more than 15 households under his spiritual care.

At the Communion season the Roll-Keeper will check to see that a Communicant's Card has been made out for each communicant member; and that these cards are in the possession of the elder concerned in good time for distribution.

It is the elder's duty to call on the home with these cards and personally invite communicant members to attend the Lord's Table. There should be no absence except for a reason which can be presented to God.

The elder should enter the home as a family friend and spiritual counsellor, and as such conduct family worship, if this is possible.

It is the duty of the church member to hand the Communion Card to the office bearer on duty on Communion Sunday. If the card has been forgotten, a fresh one should be made out at the door. The rule should be: for every person attending Communion, one card must be handed in. This rule is essential if an accurate Roll is kept.

The Roll-Keeper collects the cards, marks up the Communicant's Register, and returns the cards to the elders concerned as soon as possible.

The elder marks up his Roll-Book, and in the spirit of loving enquiry calls on members who have been absent from Communion.

His aim and fervent prayer must be to see that his flock is present at worship every Sunday as well as at Communion seasons.

The elder is also responsible for "out-reach."

At the back of this book there is a page entitled ...

"PRESBYTERIAN AND OTHER HOMES IN MY DISTRICT NOT YET IN MEMBERSHIP"

These homes will have been discovered by the elder himself, or by a "survey" undertaken by the congregation.

Such homes should be visited at least twice each year, if possible with an "out-reach" team; and a record kept of any interest shown. The elder should seek to win all unchurched people in his district for Christ and His Kingdom.

THE BIBLICAL WARRANT FOR THE ELDERSHIP

THE OLD TESTAMENT

In Exodus 3:16 the Israelites are said to have had elders at the time of their captivity in Egypt. Moses was directed by God to ask them to stand behind him as he made his request to the king of Egypt (Exodus 3:18).

These elders of Israel were associated with Moses when he ascended Mount Sinai to receive God's commandments. (Exodus 24:1, 9, 14).

Later on the task of Moses as the leader of the children of Israel journeying through the wilderness to Canaan became too great a burden for him.

We read that he exclaimed to God, *"I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me."*

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel."

"And I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee."
(Numbers 11:14, 16, 17)

After their settlement in the Promised Land every town and village seems to have had its own body of elders responsible for civil law as well as for religious affairs. (See Deut. 21:2, Deut. 22:15; Joshua 20:4).

THE NEW TESTAMENT

In New Testament times the Jewish synagogues were normally governed by a council of elders under the chairmanship of a ruler of the synagogue (Luke 8:41). A similar organization was naturally followed by the Christian church.

When Paul and his companions established churches, they placed their converts under the care of elders. *"They ... ordained elders in every church."* (Acts 14:23).

Titus was sent to Crete by Paul for the same purpose. *"I left thee in Crete that thou shouldst ... ordain elders in every city."* (Titus 1:5).

Elders in the churches of the New Testament, like their counterparts in the synagogues, were responsible for the general direction of the work (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:2). They were also preachers (1 Timothy 5:17), and made pastoral calls upon the sick (James 5:14).

The elders of the church in Jerusalem received the collection sent from the Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:30); and took part in the Council at Jerusalem, together with the Apostles (Acts 15:4, 6, 23; 16:4).

All elders seem to have been of equal rank. When they acted together the word "presbytery" is used (1 Timothy 4:14). The same Greek word "Presbyterian" is employed in Luke 22:66, Acts 22:5, to denote the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council which had jurisdiction over all the elders of the synagogues.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH GOVERNMENT

"As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church, so Christ, who hath instituted government and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in His church, besides ministers of the word with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church, which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders."

—From the Westminster "Form of Church Government"

The New Testament knows nothing of a Peter claiming to be Christ's Vicar upon earth and exercising supreme authority (see 1 Peter 5:1-2). It knows nothing of rule by one man. On the contrary, each church, as it was established, was placed under the control of elders ordained for that purpose by the Apostles or their delegates.

Wherever we look in the Epistles the churches which had been established were ruled by elders (eg. James 5:14, 2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1).

In due time the apostles died. Most of them had been the companions of Jesus (Acts 1:21-26). There is no evidence whatsoever that they appointed successors. The theory of an apostolic succession is without foundation. The rule and government of the local churches remained with the local elders of each church; men who had already been appointed.

It seems that in the course of time these elders elected one of their number as the preaching or teaching elder for their particular congregation.

Such men were known as ministers "one who serves" (Ephesians 6:21), pastors "one who feeds" (Ephesians 4:11), or bishops "one who oversees" (1 Timothy 3:1). These words refer to one and the same office (Calvin).

The ministers or bishops (both words mean "teaching elders") took charge of the local congregation; but they still remained elders, and were not ranked higher than ruling elders.

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find the three episcopal orders of bishop, priest, deacon. It is always the double order of bishop (elder) and deacon (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1, 8).

In our Presbyterian church we therefore have two elders only, according to New Testament usage. There are the Elders — the Teaching Elder (Minister) and the Ruling Elders — together forming the Kirk Session,

which is charged with the spiritual oversight of the local congregation with powers to ordain further Ruling Elders.

There is the Presbytery, made up of equal numbers of Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders, with powers to ordain by the laying on of hands, further Teaching Elders. These elders are thereby set aside to the ministry of the word and sacraments. There is the national Assembly, also made up of equal numbers of Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders.

And at the local level there are the deacons or managers who control the temporal affairs of the congregation.

Notes written by the Rev. Arthur G. Gunn, B.A., Minister St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Manurewa, South Auckland.

AT MY ORDINATION I SIGNED THE FORMULA:

“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.”

