

What the Book of Order says about serving as an elder or deacon

If you do a search on the Book of Order, you'll find there are 221 references for the word elder and 114 references for deacon. It's kind of an overwhelming factoid, but when you factor out the references in the Table of Contents the list gets a little shorter but not much. However, not all these references pertain to the actual serving as either an elder or deacon. The Book of Order is Part II of our Constitution with Part I the Book of Confessions being the historical collection of our Confessions of Faith. The Book of Order is based on scripture, our common heritage, and historic and rational principles of church order. Book of order has four sections, Foundations of Presbyterian Polity (F), Form of Government (G), Directory of Worship (W) and Rules of Discipline (D). I would also add that whenever the word "shall" is used in the Book of Order, it indicates a mandated practice, the word "should" indicates a strongly recommended practice. The word "may" means something is permitted but not required.

G-2.0102 Call to Ordered Ministry **(ELDERS & DEACONS)**

Just like Ministers of Word and Sacrament, elders and deacons are considered ordered ministries as described in the New Testament found in 1 Timothy, Ephesians, and Philippians. Ordered Ministry as such are "gifts to the church to order its life so that the ministry of the whole people of God may flourish." All are ordained to that particular ministry has unique responsibilities.

G-2.0104 Gifts and Qualifications **(ELDERS & DEACONS)**

To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, ruling elders, — God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. They should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world

G-2.0105 Freedom of Conscience **(ELDERS & DEACONS)**

It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve it in ordered ministries shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in this Constitution. So far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained.

(ELDERS)

Elders are called into ministry in partnership with teaching elders or ministers of Word and Sacrament. I can't stress this partnership enough. Responsibilities in the life of the church include worship, finances and spiritual leadership. We're going to take a quick look at what the Book of Order says about serving as an elder and as an elder within the context of the session, as well as what is required in serving as a deacon.

F-3.0202 Governed by Presbyters

The church is governed by presbyters that includes ruling elders and TE(MWS). Elders are elected "chosen by the congregation to discern and guide in its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life".

G-2.03 RULING ELDERS: THE MINISTRY OF DISCERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE

G-2.0301 Ruling Elder Defined

The New Testament Church (Acts, 1 Corinthians, Romans, 1 Timothy) provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God's Spirit and governance of God's people. Accordingly, congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit as they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Ruling elders, together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationships. When elected by the congregation, they shall serve faithfully as members of the session.

G-3.02 The Session

(Governance)

G-3.0201 Composition and Responsibilities

The session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active serviced as ruling elders, together with all installed pastors and associate pastors. Responsibilities within the session for ruling elders include:

- a. provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.*
 - a. providing a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, education, and spiritual nurture; providing for regular preaching of the Word by a minister of the Word and Sacrament or another person prepared and approved for the work;
 - b. planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world with the message of salvation and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship; planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community in accordance with the prophetic witness of Jesus Christ
 - c. initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to the love and grace of God.
- b. provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received*
 - a. include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper
 - b. administration of Baptism as appropriate, in accordance with the principles of the Directory for Worship;
 - c. exercising pastoral care among the congregation in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the congregation may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.
- c. nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ*
 - a. shall include receiving and dismissing members;
 - b. Annual review of rolls of active members
 - c. counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership;
 - d. providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship;
 - e. encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources;
 - f. managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission;
 - g. directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation;
 - h. employing the administrative staff of the congregation;
 - i. leading the congregation in Councils of the Church
 - j. participating in the mission of the whole church;

- k. warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community;
- l. serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

G-3.0202 *Relations with Other Council*

Sessions have a particular responsibility to participate in the life of the whole church through participation in other councils.

- a. elect, ruling elders from congregation as commissioners to presbytery,
- b. nominate ruling elders from the congregation who may be considered for election as commissioners to synod and General Assembly, and/or to serve on committees or commissions
- c. see that the guidance and communication of presbytery, synod, and General Assembly are considered, and that any binding actions are observed and carried out.
- d. welcome representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits.
- e. proposes to the presbytery, or through it to the synod and General Assembly, such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church; and
- f. sends to presbytery and General Assembly requested statistics and other information according to the requirements of those bodies, as well as voluntary financial contributions.

G-3.0203 *Meetings*

Meet the requirements for minimum number of stated meetings

G.3.0204 *Minutes and Records*

Meet requirements of meeting minutes of the session and all joint meeting with deacons

Maintain membership rolls and registers of baptisms

G-3.0205 & G-3.0113 *Finances*

The session shall:

- prepare and adopt a budget to support the church's mission
- conduct full financial review of all financial books and records shall be conducted every year by a public accountant or committee of members versed in accounting procedures.
- the session shall prepare and adopt a budget and determine the distribution of the congregation's benevolences.
- It shall authorize offerings for Christian purposes and shall account for the proceeds of such offerings and their disbursement. It shall provide full information to the congregation concerning its decisions in such matters.
- The session shall elect a treasurer for such term as the session shall decide and shall supervise his or her work
- or delegate that supervision to a board of deacons or trustees.
- Receive requested reports at least annually from those in charge of various congregational funds
- Session may provide by rule for standard financial practices of the congregation, but shall in no case fail to observe the following procedures:
 - a. All offerings shall be counted and recorded by at least two duly appointed persons, or by one fidelity bonded person;

- b. Financial books and records adequate to reflect all financial transactions shall be kept and shall be open to inspection by authorized church officers at reasonable times;
- c. Periodic, and in no case less than annual, reports of all financial activities shall be made to the session or entity vested with financial oversight.

✓ W-2.0303: Ruling Elders

Ruling elders are called to nurture the common life of the people of God through their gifts of discernment and governance. They should also cultivate an ability to teach the Word when called upon to do so. In a particular congregation, ruling elders shall provide for the church's worship and encourage the people's participation. Specifically, when serving together on the session, ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament: make provision for the regular preaching of the Word and celebration of the Sacraments, corporate prayer, and the offering of praise to God in song; oversee and approve all public worship in the congregation, with the exception of responsibilities reserved for the minister of the Word and Sacrament; determine occasions, days, times, and places for worship; and have responsibility for the arrangement of worship space, the use of special appointments (flowers, candles, banners, paraments, and other objects), and the ministries of music, drama, dance, and visual arts.

W-2.0305: *Shared Responsibility and Accountability*

In a particular congregation, the order of worship is the responsibility of the minister of the Word and Sacrament with the concurrence of the session. The selection of hymnals, service books, Bibles, and other more permanent worship resources is the responsibility of the session with the concurrence of the minister of the Word and Sacrament, and in consultation with church musicians and educators

- ✓ The session is responsible for educating the congregation about the church's worship, in order to facilitate their full and active participation. It is appropriate that the session provide for the regular study of this Directory for Worship, particularly in the training of ruling elders and deacons.

W-3.0403: *Responsibility for Baptism*

- ✓ Baptism shall be authorized by the session

W-3.0404: *Presentation*

The minister of the Word and Sacrament† introduces the Sacrament of Baptism with sentences of Scripture; other sentences of Scripture may be spoken by ruling elders, members of the congregation, or ecumenical witnesses.

- ✓ On behalf of the session, a ruling elder presents each candidate for Baptism.

W-3.0410: *Responsibility for the Lord's Supper*

- ✓ The Lord's Supper shall be authorized by the session and administered by a minister of the Word and Sacrament

W-5.0203: *Christian Education*

The session is responsible for the development and supervision of the church's educational programs, the instruction of ruling elders and deacons, and the discipleship of all members..... The session has a responsibility to identify, encourage, and equip others who have gifts for Christian education. The session also has a responsibility to support parents and others who seek to nurture the faith of children.

(DEACONS)

G-2.02 DEACONS: THE MINISTRY OF COMPASSION AND SERVICE

G-2.0201 Deacon Defined

The ministry of deacon as set forth in Scripture (Philippians, 1 Timothy, Acts) is one of compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion, and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry.

W-2.0302: Deacons

Deacons are called to lead the congregation in compassion, witness, and service, representing the ministry of the church in the world and the presence of the world in the church. While deacons have no particular responsibilities for the ordering of worship, the session should ensure that deacons (where present) have regular opportunities to lead in worship, and that their ministries of compassion, witness, and service are reflected in the public services of the church.

(ELDERS & DEACONS shared)

G-2.0202 Under Authority of the Session

Deacons, their ministry is under the supervision and authority of the session. Deacons may also be given special assignments in the congregation, such as caring for members in need, handling educational tasks, cultivating liberality in giving, collecting and disbursing monies to specific persons or causes, or overseeing the buildings and property of the congregation. Deacons shall assume other duties as may be delegated to them by the session, including assisting with the Lord's Supper. (W-3.0414). Special assignment can include being assigned to supervise the work of the treasurer.

- ✓ A congregation by a majority vote may choose not to utilize the ordered ministry of deacons. If the congregation has neither a board of deacons nor individually commissioned deacons, the function of this ordered ministry shall be the responsibility of the ruling elders and the session.

G-2.0504 Pastoral Relationships

Deacons share with Ministers of Word and Sacrament in the ministries of compassion, witness, and service

G-2.04 GENERAL PROVISIONS FOR RULING ELDERS AND DEACONS

G-2.0401 Election of Ruling Elders and Deacons

Ruling elders and deacons are men and women elected by the congregation from among its members

G-2.0402 Preparation for Ministry as a Ruling Elder or Deacon

persons elected to the ordered ministry of ruling elder or deacon, should have a period of study and preparation, followed with an examination by the session as to personal faith; knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church; and the duties of the ministry. The session shall also confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the ministry appropriate to the order. Once approved a service of ordination and installation is scheduled.

G-2.0403 Service of Ordination and Installation

Ruling elders and deacons are ordained and installed in a service of ordination and installation with

focus on Christ and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church,

G-2.0404 *Terms of Service*

Ruling elders and deacons shall be elected to serve terms of no more than three years on the session or board of deacons and may be eligible for reelection to an additional term according to congregational rule.

W-3.0303: *Scripture*

The public reading of Scripture is to be clear, audible, and attentive to the meaning of the text. Reading from the church's Bible conveys a sense of the permanence and weight of the Word of God and demonstrates the communal nature of the biblical story. Anyone may be invited to read Scripture, including children and youth. Because deacons are charged with the ministry of witness to the gospel and ruling elders are responsible for the proclamation of the Word, it is fitting for a deacon or ruling elder to read Scripture. The session will ensure that all readers are prepared for this important ministry

W-3.0308: *Prayers of Intercession*

In response to the Word, we pray for the world God so loves -.... prayers are not the work of a single leader, but an act of the whole congregation as Christ's royal priesthood. We affirm our participation in the prayer through our "amen" and other responses. Prayers of intercession and supplication are offered for: the mission and ministry of the universal Church and the local congregation; care of creation and the right use of resources; peace and justice in the world; the leaders and peoples of all nations; the poor, hungry, and oppressed; compassion and reconciliation in the local community; healing and wholeness for all who suffer; and other special needs.....Because pastors are called to serve as good shepherds for God's people, it is fitting for a minister of the Word and Sacrament† to lead the prayers of intercession and supplication. Because deacons are responsible for ministries of compassion and ruling elders are charged with the nurture of the congregation, it is also fitting for a deacon or ruling elder to lead these prayers.... *Prayers of Intercession*

W-3.0411: *Offering*

Christian life is an offering of one's self to God..... we respond with gratitude, offering him our lives, our spiritual gifts, and our material goods. Tithes and offerings are gathered as an act of thanksgiving to God..... All of these gifts are received with a prayer of dedication to God, spoken or sung. Because ruling elders and deacons are charged with the stewardship of the church's resources and leadership in ministry to the poor, it is fitting for a ruling elder or deacon to lead this prayer.

W-3.0414: *Communion*

The bread and cup are shared in the manner most appropriate to the occasion..... Ordinarily ruling elders, deacons, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament† serve the bread and cup; the session may authorize other church members to do so.

W-3.0502: *Blessing and Charge*

The Service for the Lord's Day concludes with a blessing in the name of the triune God, such as the priestly blessing or apostolic benediction. Because this blessing is an expression of the gospel of God's grace and an extension of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament, a minister of the Word and Sacrament† ordinarily speaks the blessing. The charge calls the church to go forth as agents of God's mission in the world. Because deacons are responsible for the church's ministry of witness and service,

and ruling elders have oversight of the church's faithfulness to God's mission, it is fitting for a deacon or ruling elder to speak the charge.

W-4.0404: Constitutional Questions

- Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
 - Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?
 - Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
 - Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?
 - Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?
 - Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?
 - Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
 - Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- ✓ (1) (For ruling elder) Will you be a faithful ruling elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?
- ✓ (2) (For deacon) Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

W-5.0204 *Pastoral Care*

God calls the Church to continue the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, caring for one another, sharing joys and sorrows, providing support in times of stress and need, and offering admonition, forgiveness, and reconciliation..... Ruling elders, deacons, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament[†] have particular responsibility for the exercise of pastoral care within the community of faith.

Services of wholeness and healing are one way of enacting the church's ministry of pastoral care. The central element in these services is prayer, calling upon God's saving grace or giving thanks for healing received. Services of wholeness are to be authorized by the session and are under the direction of the minister of the Word and Sacrament[†], but may involve leadership from ruling elders, deacons, and others with gifts for prayer.

The information I've offered today is the edited language of the Book of Order compiled in such a way to hopefully make the information easier to understand dependent upon your role within the church. As

elders and deacons, you each have important unique responsibilities and there are opportunities to more fully serve and participate within the life of your congregation.

There are additional opportunities to serve during worship based on the responsibilities of the office of elder or deacon

In the reading of Scripture

Leading prayers of Intercession

Leading the Prayer of dedication for offering gifts

To speak the charge at the close of worship.

W-3.0303: Scripture

Because deacons are charged with the ministry of witness to the gospel and ruling elders a responsible for the proclamation of the Word, it is fitting for a deacon or ruling elder to read Scripture.

W-3.0308: Prayers of Intercession

Because deacons are responsible for ministries of compassion and ruling elders are charged with the nurture of the congregation, it is also fitting for either to lead prayers of intercession

W-3.041: Offering

Tithes and offerings are gathered as an act of thanksgiving to God..... All of these gifts are received with a prayer of dedication to God, spoken or sung. Because ruling elders and deacons are charged with the stewardship of the church's resources and leadership in ministry to the poor, it is fitting for a ruling elder or deacon to lead this prayer.

W-3.0414: Communion

Ordinarily ruling elders, deacons, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament[†] serve the bread and cup;

W-3.0502: Blessing and Charge

Because deacons are responsible for the church's ministry of witness and service, and ruling elders have oversight of the church's faithfulness to God's mission, it is fitting for a deacon or ruling elder to speak the charge.