

Elders/Overseers/Shepherds

Presbuteros (πρεσβύτερος, Greek) meaning **elder**, from which comes the word priest (Presbutidas - female form of elder?)

Episkopos (ἐπίσκοπος, Greek) overseer - used in reference to Jesus and church leaders

Poimen (ποιμήν, Greek) shepherd, also translated as **Pastor** (Latin). Mostly used in verb form, rather than noun. Only used as a noun to refer to Jesus.

Deacon (diakonos, Greek) servant, practical helper, ministry leader

Biblical Basis for Elders in leadership - Elders Everywhere!

Acts 14:23

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Titus 1:5

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

Philippians 1:1

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers (elders) and deacons...

Jeremiah 3:14-15

“Return, faithless people,” declares the Lord, “for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion. Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.

Roles and Responsibilities of Elders

James 5:14

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Acts 20:28

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

1 Timothy 4:14

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

What are Elders like?

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: 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; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

1 Timothy 3:1-16

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?

Titus 1:5-9

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Acts 20:28-32

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

1 Timothy 3:8-13

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives [or the women] likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

Acts 2:38

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Are elders paid?

1 Timothy 5:17-19

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

1 Corinthians 9:13-14

Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

The Church

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

1 Peter 2:25

For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1 Peter 2:4-9

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were

destined to do.

Ephesians 2:13-22

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:11-16

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors [interestingly the only mention of pastor (*poimen*) in the NT] and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Hebrews 13:7

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

1 Peter 5:5-11

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 5:25b-27

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

The Body - All parts are different, all parts are needed!

James 3:1

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

1 Corinthians: 27-31

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

Romans 12:6-8

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

On being appointed an Elder

1 Timothy 1:12

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service...

Acts 13:1-3

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Matthew 23:8-12 (Jesus, to his disciples)

"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Acts 1:23-26

So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

1 Timothy 5:21-22

I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without

partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

Conclusion

“According to the New Testament, elders lead the church, teach and preach the Word, protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine, visit the sick and pray, and judge doctrinal issues. In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church.”

- Biblical Eldership, Alexander Strauch

Identifiers for an Elder

So, those who might be Elders should have a desire, a call and ownership of the call (living out the characteristic of an elder, obvious work of the Holy Spirit in their life & gifting), be identified, acknowledged or recognized by apostles, other elders and the members of a gathering/congregation/local church body.

- How to recognise an Elder: 1 Peter 5
- Criteria for being an Elder: Titus 1:5-9 & Timothy 3:16

Elders oversee the local church in plural and parallel relationship with each other - and there is always a plurality of Elders and leaders... never a solo pastor model. No elder exercises extreme power or control within the group, but a lead elder may exist within the group to coordinate and keep the elder body on track. There may also be an elder who is compensated for some of their time, so that they can dedicate themselves more fully to ministry, a 'pastor' who also functions as an elder, who sets mission and vision with other elders; works together to help the body function; discerns gifts and equips the congregation for ministry. **We**, the whole body at Next, are a Royal Priesthood - ie. the ministers ARE the people who make up the church.

Appointment of Elders at Next (Adapted from *The World Needs More Elders*, PJ Smyth, 2011):

Four parties involved in appointing elders in the bible

The appointment of elders seems to involve the following 4 parties:

- **God:** Paul reminds the elders in Miletus that it was the Holy Spirit that made them overseers (Acts 20:28), and of course all pastors and teachers have been given by Christ himself (Eph 4:11).
- **Apostles:** On their first apostolic trip the apostles Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23), and we may assume that the Jerusalem apostles did the same in their region of churches (Acts 11:30). Paul commissioned Titus to appoint elders in every town in Crete (Titus 1:5), and he told Timothy and Titus the characteristics that would qualify leaders for oversight of local churches (1 Tim 3

and Titus 1). At Next, we will be looking to community members who have special insight or discernment and show Apostolic giftings and abilities. We'll also be consulting with Rick from Polson Park, and others to help discern in the process.

- **Other Elders:** Timothy probably became an elder when the company of elders laid hands on him (1 Tim 4:14), and common sense tells us that fellow elders play a key role in approving and accepting a new elder into their team. For the initial appointment, the Board will work along with the TGS to appoint the first elders. It is likely the board will continue to work alongside elders in the discernment process, while the elders will drive the training, equipping and discipling part of the process.
- **The Local Church:** Due to the emphasis on an elder's good reputation & respect, clearly the local church itself needs to approve the appointment of their elders.

Four steps to appointment

There is no rigid process of appointment, but here is a scenario incorporating the above four groups:

1. **Identified:** Apostles particularly, seem to have a God-given 6th sense for identifying future elders, and existing elders certainly need to develop a 'nose' for potential elders. Usually the local elders will choose and the apostles confirm, but the apostles (or a wide-awake church member) may initially alert the elders to someone.

What kind of things should we look out for in a potential elder?

- Emerging character, gifting, and love for Jesus.
- A humble spirit and a servant heart.
- The gifting to 'oversee' – the ability to preside over a broad and diverse ministry without getting tripped up by detail.
- The personality and people skills to get on well with the other elders, people of the church, and people outside the church.

So, Character, Gifting and Relationship – i.e. they must be able to get on really well with the other elders.

2. **Tested, proven and disciplined:** Once the elder candidate is identified, they then need to be disciplined and tested and proven. This will probably happen by spending more time with the elders, and by doing more 'elder-type' ministry.

The King James Version of 1 Timothy 5:22 says "Lay hands suddenly on no man", and in the New International Version it reads "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands". Laying-on hands is easy. Laying-off hands is traumatic.

Whilst the only ultimate guarantee of an elder finishing strong is his own walk with God, appointing elders is not meant to be an exercise in guesswork. It is not a lottery. Jesus tells us that the way to remove much of the gamble-factor is proven track record: When the writer of Hebrews says that the followers should "consider the outcome of our (the leaders') way of life", the 'outcome' that he is referring to is proven track record. How has his life turned out over a meaningful length of time? What is the fruit?

Jesus said in Luke 16:10-12 that if man is faithful with little, then you can trust him with more, and that if he is faithful with another's, then he can have his own, and that if he is faithful in the natural things, then he can be entrusted with spiritual responsibility. This is a principle to be observed! So don't rush in. Watch for another 6 months. Let the man keep doing the job before publicly setting him apart to do the job that he is actually already doing. This can lead to some frustrations (i.e. doing the job without the increased authority and gifting that comes through the laying on of hands), but it is an important part of testing and proving.

3. **Presented:** Once the apostles and elders are satisfied that he is ready (not perfect, just ready), they will need to inform the local body of believers of their intention to make this man an elder in the near future. Hopefully, there will

be an instant murmur of approval, but a week or two should be given to allow people to raise any objections. During the week leading up to his appointment, all concerned should do some dedicated prayer & fasting which is the biblical pattern for these massive leadership appointments (Acts 13:3, Acts 14:28).

4. **Set-apart:** Assuming that there is a satisfactory sense of approval from the body, then the man is ready to be appointed an elder of that local church. Preaching or teaching might take place on the role of elders during a Sunday meeting, and speak about the hand of God on the elder candidate. Then the elder candidate can be invited forward and the other elders and members of the church can lay hands on them and pray for them and their spouse, if married.

Questions from the community meeting:

Can the elder be a wife of one husband? [David L]

- Yes, the elder can be male or female, as seems to be the practice in the NT

Is the paid/lead elder full time? Is the lead elder the paid elder? What if the lead elder wasn't the paid one? [David L]

- The lead elder simply leads the elders as a body, and can be any one of the elders. If Next is able to hire a part time or full time pastor, they would be one of the elders, and subject to the same tasks and appointment, but be able to more freely give of their time as they would be compensated for their work.

No money so far this year for a paid pastor... [Deb]

- The board is working on this, but it's up to the community to work together, giving freely as we have received, to make this possible.

How does this prevent the lead pastor from burnout? [Shannon C.]

- The paid elder would have the support of the body of elders in their role for the mutual support of each other.

Problem with the elder model... how are the elders accountable to the congregation? [Andrew C]

- The elders can be held accountable as much as any community member - through honest and open discussion, and by following the biblical model for church discipline, when required. They also serve a 6 year term, to be renewed after a 1 year break, unless the community does not affirm their eldership at that time.

The statement: "A community led by a community in the service of a community?" [Robb K]

- A community (ie. Next) led by a community (ie. the plurality of elders together) in the service of a community (the triune God).

The order of events for hiring a process... affirmation or vote? [Robb K]

Fasting and praying? [Jason]

- Yes! We did and we will continue to do so!

Concern: Burnout - could an elder be called elsewhere? [Carl B]

- Part of the elder model is equipping for church planting and growth, so yes, absolutely an elder could be called elsewhere. We see eldership as a lifetime calling, but not necessarily always at Next. Hopefully we'll be growing leaders and sending them out!

Multiple paid elders? Multiple part time paid? [David L]

- Yes, this is possible. We're not sure if we can hire one elder at this time, let alone multiple elders, but we are considering bi-vocational elders, multiple part time elders, etc.

How do we establish the first elders? [Katrina]

- See above...

Are there FMCiC elders? [Shannon]

- The FMCiC does not have an elder model in place, but does have a Pastor's Cabinet model, which we feel diminishes the role of the other elders under the pastor, rather than recognising them as a team. We're not totally outside the box, but not totally conforming to the FMCiC model. We believe there is a strong biblical basis for this difference.

Clarification of Elder/Lead Elder roles [Sue]

- The elders are responsible for the same things. The lead elder would simply lead the elders in their work, but not hold a position of higher authority.

Leads Elder responsible for making sure the elders do their jobs? [Corky]

- Yup. Helping affirm and train and teach and support and encourage and keep them accountable.

Pastor as a verb - great! What discussion was there about the APEST model/roles? [Garry]

- Yes. We see the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, and Teachers model as fitting well within the Elder model, but without severing out the various roles as drastically. A teacher could also have apostolic qualities, for example. Hopefully all of those roles would be represented from within the body of elders as well as growing in the rest of the community.

Can we speak to the female elder model? [Robb K]

- See above, and examples of female elders in the NT such as Priscilla, Nympha, Euodia and Syntyche and Phoebe.
- FMC founded on ordination of women [Andrew]
- Women leaders in the church were acknowledged and written to... [David L]

God could lead us financially if we hired the right person [Carl B]

- True, but this does not negate our responsibility. We can call for miraculous action from God, but we also must remain faithful and generous givers, as we are called to do.

Thanks for acknowledging the current model. How do we initiate the process? NomCom? [Deb]

- See above...

Educating the NomCom with what the TGS is up to... might be a lot of unnecessary work [Todd]

Extra duties of the lead elder - Administrative clarification? [Sue]

- The lead elder may not be the paid elder, but it would be assumed that the paid elder would take on a larger share of administrative duties, along with the administrator and in coordination with Squad Leaders and the rest of the community, as they would be compensated to do so.

Why are we using the word Elder? Other than Pastor... [Corky]

- In the NT, the word Pastor is only used to refer to one person: Jesus. Where used elsewhere, it is used as a verb to describe a role or part of the role of an elder - to pastor (ie. shepherd the people).

Can we see the job description before it goes public? [Rachel]

- Yes, we'll send it around. The board will also have input before it goes to the community or is posted publicly.

What is the point if we don't have any money? Fasting & Praying? Praying for God to bring in the money? [Tracy]

- Good questions... see response to Carl's question above.
- Our giving is not in keeping with when we had a paid pastor, but we still have money in the bank. [Deb]

Timelines - are we rushing them? [Carl]

- We are waiting on God's time, but we still need to be moving forward towards something. Hopefully if the process is all in place, we can wait and call on God to bring forward the right people at the right time. But we don't feel like we should stall on implementing the model, but instead take time once we've got the model in place to look for the right people.
- We're looking for quality not speed. [Steve]