

## OFFICER NOMINATIONS GUIDE

### Trinity Presbyterian Church, May 2024

The Session (i.e., elders) of Trinity has opened up officer nominations for the month of May. This is a time where any communing member of the congregation is able to nominate those qualified to the office of elder or deacon. Because we want you to be informed about what we believe the Bible teaches about elders and deacons, and how to go through this process, we have created this brief guide.

This document includes:

- I. What qualifies someone to be an elder or deacon
- II. What the tasks of elders and deacons are
- III. How to go about nominating someone

Even if you are a longtime Trinity member, we ask that anyone making a nomination read through this short guide before filling out a nomination form.

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#### I. WHAT QUALIFIES SOMEONE TO BE AN ELDER OR DEACON?<sup>1</sup>

##### Elders

There are two clear places in the Bible where God outlines what kind of person qualifies to be an elder in the church—1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 (in addition to those two texts, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:17-38, and Hebrews 13:7, 17 are helpful).

**1 Timothy 3:1-7,** <sup>1</sup> *The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

**Titus 1:5-9,** <sup>5</sup> *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— <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup> 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.*

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<sup>1</sup> In this document, we do not give extensive explanation on the idea of “offices/leadership” in the church or “ordination” in general. If you would like more to read in those areas, please email Mitchell. He has some resources he can send you.

From these two lists, we can garner a few general points about what qualifies someone to be an elder. **In summary, elders are men who are spiritually mature and theologically knowledgeable.**

- **Male Eldership:** The sole mention of men (note: “husband of one wife” in both lists) in these lists, as well as the rest of the teaching about leadership and authority in the New Testament, have led our denomination and our church to believe that God only opens the office of elder to men (see *BCO* 7-2, 8-1).<sup>2</sup>
- **Spiritually Mature:** Both lists include some specific characteristics that these men should have. Most of those correspond to characteristics that all Christians should have; however, what elders are called to is *maturity* in Christian character. They are not required to be perfect, but they should be a model for the congregation in their Christian character and faith (see Heb. 13:7).<sup>3</sup>
- **Theologically Knowledgeable:** An elder does not have to be a seminary-trained theologian, like we require our pastors to be. But the requirement to be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2) and to “be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9) means he must know God’s Word and what it teaches. In our denomination and church, we take this to mean that he must know and be able to affirm the theology of our doctrinal standards—The Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, and Shorter Catechism—to allow him to clearly and confidently explain the Scriptures to others.<sup>4</sup>

## Deacons

The only place Scripture gives a list of qualifications for deacons is in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

**1 Timothy 3:8-13,** <sup>8</sup> *Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup> They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup> And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. <sup>11</sup> Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup> Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. <sup>13</sup> For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

However, a narrative text where deacons are selected is Acts 6. There the apostles say that they must be “men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.” (v. 3) Again, we can garner a few general points about what qualifies someone to be a deacon. **Deacons are men who are spiritually mature and theologically grounded.**

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<sup>2</sup> For more information if you are wrestling with this topic, see Kevin DeYoung’s *Men and Women in the Church* and Dan Doriani’s *Women and Ministry*. You may borrow these from Mitchell if you’d like.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed summary of these character qualifications, see Robert Yarbrough’s *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 189-204. Mitchell would be happy to give you scans of this section if you’d like.

<sup>4</sup> The second question that a ruling elder must affirm at his ordination is,

“Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?”

- **Male Diaconate:** Again, deacons are said to be “a man of one wife” in 1 Timothy 3, and Acts 6 specifies that they must be men (Greek, *andras*) of good repute. While there is more discussion, even in conservative traditions, about how to understand 1 Timothy 3:11 and other uses of *diakonos* in Scripture (like Rom. 16:1), we do believe that the Bible teaches that only men are called to the office of deacon (see BCO 7-2, 9-3).<sup>5</sup>
- **Spiritually Mature:** The list of character qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy almost repeats that of the elder, and the statement in Acts 6 that they must be “men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” agrees with that high bar for character. Like the elders, they are not required to be perfect, but deacons should be *mature* in their Christian character and faith (see again Heb. 13:7).
- **Theologically Grounded:** A deacon is not required to be “able to teach,” because it is not a part of his task. However, he “must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9). In our denomination and church, we take this to mean that he must know and be able to affirm the theology of our doctrinal standards—The Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, and Shorter Catechism.<sup>6</sup>

## II. WHAT ARE THE TASKS OF ELDERS AND DEACONS?

The *Book of Church Order of the PCA*<sup>7</sup> states the tasks of elders and deacons both generally and in more detail. Generally speaking (see BCO 7-2)

- The tasks of **elders** are governing and giving spiritual oversight to the church, including teaching
- The tasks of **deacons** are serving both the physical and spiritual needs of the church

In the longer description of the tasks of an **elder**, the BCO summarizes the teaching of Scripture as:

*It belongs to those in the office of elder, both severally and jointly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to his charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enter therein. They must exercise government and discipline, and take oversight not only of the spiritual interests of the particular church, but also the Church generally when called thereunto. They should visit the people at their homes, especially the sick. They should instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, nourish and guard the children of the Church. They should set a worthy example to the flock entrusted to their care by their zeal to evangelize the unconverted, make disciples, and demonstrate hospitality. All those duties which private Christians are bound to discharge by the law of love are especially incumbent upon them by divine vocation, and are to be discharged as official duties. They should pray with and for the people, being careful and diligent in seeking the fruit of the preached Word among the flock. (BCO 8-3)*

<sup>5</sup> For more information if you are wrestling with this topic, see Robert Yarbrough’s *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 204-6, 209-12. Mitchell would be happy to give you scans of these sections if you’d like.

<sup>6</sup> The second question that a deacon must affirm at his ordination is,

“Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?”

<sup>7</sup> Our *Book of Church Order (BCO)* is not primarily a doctrinal document like the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, but outlines the details of how our church is to be governed. We consider it godly wisdom based on Biblical principles, and it details how we have agreed to operate in our denomination. You can find it online at: [www.pcaac.org/bco](http://www.pcaac.org/bco)

For the tasks of a **deacon**, the BCO reads:

*It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these gifts among the objects to which they are contributed. They shall have the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation. In matters of special importance affecting the property of the church, they cannot take final action without the approval of the Session and consent of the congregation.*

*In the discharge of their duties the deacons are under the supervision and authority of the Session. In a church in which it is impossible for any reason to secure deacons, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the ruling elders. (BCO 9-2)*

To see how those tasks play out in specific ways at Trinity, feel free to talk to any of our current elders or deacons. They are the best source for understanding what those tasks look like in the day-to-day life of the office.<sup>8</sup>

### **III. HOW SHOULD I GO ABOUT NOMINATING SOMEONE TO ONE OF THESE OFFICES?**

The first thing to point out is that nominating someone doesn't automatically make him an elder or deacon. It simply puts him into a process of discernment and training.

At Trinity, our process of discerning and training is extensive. For those not already ordained, we require that they participate in our School of Christian Theology (a 22-week, Sunday afternoon class, each fall-spring), as well as officer training (which takes place in the fall if there are any candidates).<sup>9</sup> At the end of that training, the candidate will take written exams on the topics of (Christian character, church government, the Bible, theology, the sacraments, and the duties of the office), and then be orally examined before the Session on the same subjects. If he passes those exams, the Session then presents him to the congregation, where he must be elected by a majority of the congregation in a congregational meeting.

We know this process is rigorous, but we are attempting to take seriously God's call to "not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (i.e., ordination to office; 1 Tim. 5:22). We recognize that we are doing a serious thing when we put men before you as leaders. They are not simply called to do tasks; they are to be men who set an example for the congregation in their faith and life. We want to be thoughtful and diligent as we train men for that purpose.

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<sup>8</sup> You can find the current officers on our website: <https://www.trinitymboro.com/officers>

For a broader discussion of those tasks, see two helpful books on the subjects: *The Shepherd Leader* by Timothy Witmer and *The Deacon* by Cornelis Van Dam.

<sup>9</sup> If a man has already completed the School of Theology at the time of his nomination, he is able to enter straight into officer training in the fall semester. Additionally, because Trinity has a rotation policy for both the elders and deacons, there are men ordained to those offices who are not currently serving. They are eligible to be nominated as well. For more information, you can ask to see our Rotation Policy.

Here are the steps you should take in considering whether to nominate someone:

1. Spend some time meditating on the qualifications and tasks listed above, thinking about whether you see those things exhibited in any men who are members of Trinity. Then pray about whether you should nominate them.
2. We recommend (but don't require) that you ask the person if he has thoughts about you nominating him. You don't need his permission to do so, but he may have reasons why he doesn't think you should nominate him that are worth hearing as you consider.
3. If you determine you would like to nominate him, you can fill out our online form or a physical nomination form, which is on the table next to the entrance to the sanctuary. You can then place it in the nominations box. You can do either of these until the end of the day, May 31<sup>st</sup>.
4. If you are unsure which office you would like to nominate the man to (elder or deacon), you can designate both. It can be a part of his discernment and the discernment of the current leadership which office he best fits at this time.