

The Ministry of Ruling Elders after Session Service

Description: Whether you have just completed your first term on session or the fifth, questions always arise for ruling elders at the end of their service: How do you manage that transition and let go? How do you resist the temptation to simply fade away? What is the role of an inactive ruling elder? How can you appropriately stay engaged and involved as one ordained to ordered ministry?

1. Introductions, Expectations, and Community Building

- Name and where you are from.
- Connect with one person not presently known to you and see how long it takes you to find a personal connection (e.g. a person you have in common).
- When were you ordained? Group by decades. Share what it was that made you decide to accept the nomination to ordered ministry.
- How many terms have you served on the session of your current or any congregation? For those who have served more than one term, share with another person why you agreed to another term, especially if not just a second consecutive term.

2. **Constitutional Expectations:** We continue to be active members of our congregations AND carry the responsibilities of our ordinations until we choose to set any of that aside. Serving on session is only ONE role of a ruling elder.

G-2.0404

Once ordained and while they are active members of any congregation of this denomination, ruling elders or deacons not in active service on a session or board of deacons continue to bear the responsibilities of the ministry to which they have been ordained, except as provided in G-2.0406, G-2.0407, or in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

G-2.0301 Ruling Elder Defined

G-3.0101 Councils as an Expression of the Unity of the Church

G-1.0304 The Ministry of Members

G-1.0402 Active Member

3. Service Within the Congregation

- Staying connected
- Being alert to issues “in the pews”
- Counseling active and “inactive” members
- Training and mentoring newly ordained ruling elders and deacons
- Mentoring confirmands and new members
- Serving as liaison to persons preparing for ordination as a teaching elder
- And...

4. Service Beyond the Congregation

- Representing the congregation in community and ecumenical positions
- Serving as a commissioner to presbytery, synod or General Assembly
- Serving on presbytery, synod and/or GA committees, agencies, boards, etc.
- And...

The Ministry of Ruling Elders after Session Service Some Constitutional Expectations

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G-2.0301 *Ruling Elder Defined*

As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church 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. Ruling elders are so named not because they "lord it over" the congregation (Matt. 20:25), but because 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 teaching elders, 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. When elected as commissioners to higher councils, ruling elders participate and vote with the same authority as teaching elders, and they are eligible for any office.

G-3.0101 *Councils as an Expression of the Unity of the Church*

Councils of the church exist to help congregations and the church as a whole to be more faithful participants in the mission of Christ. They do so as they

Provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard,

responding to the promise of God's new creation in Christ, and
inviting all people to participate in that new creation;

Provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received,

welcoming those who are being engrafted into Christ,
bearing witness to Christ's saving death and resurrection,
anticipating the heavenly banquet that is to come, and
committing itself in the present to solidarity with the marginalized and the hungry; and

Nurture a covenant community of disciples of Christ,

living in the strength of God's promise, and
giving itself in service to God's mission.

G-1.0304 *The Ministry of Members*

Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ's mission. A faithful member bears witness to God's love and grace and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church. Such involvement includes:

- proclaiming the good news in word and deed,
- taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation,
- lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support,
- studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life,
- supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,
- demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church,
- responding to God's activity in the world through service to others,
- living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,
- working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment,
- participating in the governing responsibilities of the church, and
- reviewing and evaluating regularly the integrity of one's membership, and considering ways in which one's participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful.

G-1.0402 *Active Member*

An active member is a person who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into membership of the church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of this church, and participates in the church's work and worship. In addition, active members participate in the governance of the church and may be elected to ordered ministry (see G-2.0102). Active members shall regularly, after prayerful consideration, recommit themselves to the disciplines and responsibilities of membership outlined in G-1.0304. The session shall have responsibility for preparing those who would become active members of the congregation.