

The Role of Elders and Deacons in the Church

Introduction

This document is the result of thorough research, years of study, and prayerful consultation with elders, evangelists, and leaders from sister churches, including the Orlando Church of Christ and Anchor Point Church in Tampa. It reflects the collective wisdom and guidance of faithful leaders who have walked this path before us and is designed to help us establish a leadership structure that honors God and strengthens South Lake Church of Christ.

This is an **exciting and historic moment** for our church! For the first time, we will be appointing elders to shepherd and guide our congregation, as outlined in the New Testament. This step is not just a formality but a fulfillment of God's design for a healthy church. It is a reflection of our shared commitment to grow spiritually, deepen our relationships, and fulfill the mission God has entrusted to us.

As the current leader, I take this responsibility with deep reverence and joy. I believe that a healthy church is one that thrives under the care of a collaborative leadership team that includes elders, teachers, and preachers (Ephesians 4:11-13). Appointing elders will bring wisdom, spiritual maturity, and godly oversight to our church, helping us grow in unity, strength, and mission.

A Spirit of Humility and Openness

As we move through this process, it is important to foster an environment of humility, openness, and mutual respect. No one should feel compelled to speak with authority or offer absolute answers, especially on matters they are unsure of. Instead, this is an opportunity for us to learn together, share insights, and prayerfully reflect on God's Word.

Answers to questions will come through the resources and information provided through the lessons presented at our congregational midweek services. This ensures we remain unified and rooted in Scripture, rather than relying on personal opinions or assumptions. Let's approach these discussions with the understanding that God will guide us as a community through His Spirit and Word.

This process is not just about selecting leaders—it's about preparing our hearts, aligning with God's will, and embracing the exciting future He has planned for South Lake Church of Christ. Let's come together in prayer and expectation, trusting that God will raise up leaders who will shepherd His people with love, humility, and grace.

1. Biblical Qualifications and Qualities

The Bible provides guidance on the character and responsibilities of church leaders, found primarily in **1 Timothy 3:1–13**, **Titus 1:5–9**, and **1 Peter 5:1–4**. These passages describe elders (also called overseers or shepherds) and deacons as individuals with specific spiritual and relational attributes.

Key Qualifications for Elders

1. **Above Reproach** (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6):
A life free from valid accusations, marked by integrity in all areas.
 2. **Husband of One Wife** (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6):
Faithful in marriage and committed to maintaining a godly family.
 3. **Self-Controlled and Temperate** (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8):
Emotionally balanced, not given to extremes or quick tempers.
 4. **Hospitable** (1 Timothy 3:2):
Welcoming and approachable, fostering trust and community.
 5. **Not Violent or Quarrelsome** (1 Timothy 3:3):
A peacemaker, not argumentative or prone to conflict.
 6. **Able to Teach** (1 Timothy 3:2):
Knowledgeable in Scripture, capable of guiding and instructing others.
 7. **Manages Household Well** (1 Timothy 3:4–5; Titus 1:6):
Demonstrates godly leadership in their family, with children who respect and honor them.
 8. **Not Overbearing or Pursuing Dishonest Gain** (Titus 1:7):
Humble and trustworthy, with no personal agendas or greed.
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Key Qualifications for Deacons

1. **Worthy of Respect** (1 Timothy 3:8):
Honorable and respected for their godly character.
2. **Sincere and Honest** (1 Timothy 3:8):
Genuine in words and actions, not hypocritical.
3. **Not Indulging in Addictions** (1 Timothy 3:8):
Demonstrates self-control over habits and lifestyle.
4. **Committed to Sound Doctrine** (1 Timothy 3:9):
Holds firmly to the faith and lives it out with a clear conscience.
5. **Faithful in Family Life** (1 Timothy 3:12):
Leading their household with integrity and devotion.

2. Understanding Qualities vs. Qualifications

Some confusion may arise from interpreting the qualifications as a rigid checklist versus a portrait of character. It is important to clarify:

- **Qualifications define the baseline expectations:** These ensure candidates meet biblical standards for leadership.
- **Qualities reflect the character and maturity of the leader:** These qualities, such as humility, gentleness, and approachability, go beyond skills and demonstrate Christlike character.

Together, these qualifications and qualities provide a comprehensive picture of a leader who is fit to serve the church.

3. Addressing Potential Misunderstandings

➤ Misplaced Views on "Husband of One Wife"

The qualification "husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6) does not require a man to have been married only once in his lifetime but speaks to faithfulness in marriage. This means:

- A leader must be a "one-woman man," showing fidelity and honor in his marital relationship.
- Divorce or remarriage should not automatically disqualify someone but must be evaluated in the context of their current faithfulness and spiritual maturity.

➤ Misplaced Views on "Children Who Believe"

The qualification about children (Titus 1:6, "whose children believe") does not demand perfection or that all children be baptized disciples. Instead:

- Leaders should manage their household well, fostering respect and godliness.
- Children's faith journeys are influenced by free will, and parents should not be held accountable for adult children who make independent decisions.

➤ The Role of Humility in Leadership

One common misunderstanding is that leadership equates to authority or being the most knowledgeable. However, Scripture teaches that true leaders must display humility:

- **Not Overbearing:** Titus 1:7 warns against leaders who are domineering. Leadership is about guiding, not controlling.
- **Not a "Know-It-All":** Leaders must demonstrate a willingness to listen, learn, and collaborate. James 3:17 emphasizes that wisdom from above is "peace-loving, considerate, and submissive."

➤ **Temperament and Gentleness**

The church must carefully evaluate a leader's temperament, as it directly impacts their ability to serve:

- **Gentle Leadership:** "Not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome" (1 Timothy 3:3). A harsh or argumentative spirit disqualifies someone from leadership, no matter their biblical knowledge.
- **Approachable and Relational:** Leaders must foster trust, being approachable and willing to engage with others without defensiveness.

➤ **Guarding Against Opportunism**

A leader's motivations matter deeply:

- Titus 1:7 warns against leaders seeking dishonest gain or personal ambition.
- Leaders must demonstrate that their desire to serve stems from love for God and His church, not personal advancement or recognition.

4. The Process Moving Forward

As a church, we will engage in prayerful discernment and teaching to prepare for appointing elders and deacons. This process involves:

1. **Teaching and Equipping:** Educating the church on biblical leadership through congregational midweeks.
2. **Nominations and Vetting:** Evaluating candidates based on biblical qualifications and qualities, ensuring humility and reliability.
3. **Prayer and Unity:** Inviting the congregation to pray for wisdom and unity throughout the process.

4. **Affirmation and Training:** Presenting and affirming leaders who meet the qualifications, followed by practical training and testing in their roles.
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5. A Call to Prayer and Unity

This is a sacred process that calls for humility and trust in God's guidance. Let us commit to:

- **Praying for Wisdom:** "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all" (James 1:5).
 - **Fostering Unity:** "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).
 - **Encouraging One Another:** Trust that God is working through this process to raise up leaders who will shepherd His people with love and care.
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Conclusion

This step toward appointing elders and deacons is a critical milestone in the life of South Lake Church of Christ. With careful consideration of biblical principles, humility, and collaboration with our sister churches, we seek to establish a leadership structure that honors God and reflects His design for a healthy church.

Let us move forward together in unity, trusting that God will guide us in this endeavor to appoint leaders who will shepherd His people with love, humility, and grace.

In Christ and with Godspeed,



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South Lake Church of Christ