



## First Presbyterian Church of Petaluma OFFICERS ORIENTATION

Thank you for accepting the nomination to be an officer in our church. We need you. Your faith, spiritual maturity, previous training and experience will serve you well as you serve the church.

Presbyterians are big on preparation. We are required to implement a few more steps before you begin serving as an elder or deacon. Since we want you to begin your service in January, it is important that we get started right away. Each step is detailed below.

### TIMELINE FOR NEW OFFICERS

<b>Event:</b>	<b>Preparation:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>1. Time of preparation for ministry</b>	Scan through the <i>Book of Order</i> and <i>Book of Confessions</i> . Ask questions of the pastor or current officers. Pray and read Scriptures regarding service and leadership in the church.	Between Nomination and Session Examination
<b>2. New Officers Orientation</b>	This required crash course on the responsibilities of officers usually takes place on a Saturday morning. All new officers are asked to set aside this important time. Please complete the Bible study on church leadership and bring it with you.	(see your letter)
<b>3. Examination by Session</b>	Plan to tell us about yourself - your faith, your hopes and dreams for our church. Session members are to ask questions regarding your "personal faith: knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church, and the duties of the office." ( <i>Book of Order</i> , G-14.0205)	(see your letter)
<b>4. Congregational Meeting to elect officers</b>	Please provide a paragraph or two that describes your background, your faith, experience, family.	(see your letter)
<b>5. Service of Ordination and Installation</b>	Be ready to answer the Vows/Questions of Ordination and Installation ( <i>Book of Order</i> , G-14.0207)	(see your letter)
<b>6. Begin service.</b>		(see your letter)

# SO, WHAT IS AN OFFICER TO BE AND DO?

What we do begins with who we are. The first responsibilities of an officer have to do with your beliefs and your character.

## BELIEFS OF ELDERS AND DEACONS

When someone becomes a member of the church, we ask that they profess that Jesus Christ is their Savior and Lord.

Presbyterian churches ask significantly more of their officers. The Book of Order says, "Elders should be persons of faith, dedication, and good judgment. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel, both within the church and in the world." (G-6.0303)

### DID YOU KNOW?

YOU CAN READ ONLINE OR DOWNLOAD THE BOOK OF ORDER AND THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS (PDF) FROM THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA) WEBSITE. GO TO:

[HTTP://WWW.PCUSA.ORG/OGA/CONSTITUTION.HTM](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/constitution.htm)

Elders and Deacons are expected to have knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Book of Confessions and Book of Order. (G-14.0205)

All officers are expected to accept the Bible as written by God and authoritative for faith and practice. In addition to the Bible, it is expected that officers receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of the church. (G-14.0207)

In addition to these beliefs, it is important that each elder and deacon consider the commitment of time that will be needed to serve faithfully. Jesus insisted that his disciples count the cost of following him. We also need to count the cost of serving as an officer.

These months of preparation and the New Officer Orientation will assist you in making a faithful and knowledgeable commitment. At the time of ordination, you will be prepared to answer the questions of ordination and installation.

## ACTIONS OF ELDERS

An elder is responsible, first of all, to serve as a contributing member of the Session, the governing body of a Presbyterian church. The Session consists of all elders in active service and all of the congregation's ordained pastors.

Here's how the Book of Order describes the responsibilities of the Session.

The session is responsible for the mission and government of the particular church. It therefore has the responsibility and power

- a. to provide opportunities for evangelism to be learned and practiced in and by the church...

- b. to receive members into the church...
- c. to lead the congregation in participation in the mission of the whole Church in the world...
- d. to provide for the worship of the people of God...
- e. to provide for the growth of its members and for their equipment for ministry...
- f. to develop and supervise the church school and the educational program of the church;
- g. to lead the congregation in ministries of personal and social healing and reconciliation in the ...
- h. to challenge the people of God with the privilege of responsible Christian stewardship of money and time and talents...
- i. to establish the annual budget, determine the distribution of the church's benevolences, and order offerings ...
- j. to lead the congregation continually to discover what God is doing in the world and to plan for change, renewal, and reformation under the Word of God;
- k. to engage in a process for education and mutual growth of the members of the session;
- l. to instruct, examine, ordain, install, and welcome into common ministry elders and deacons on their election by the congregation and to inquire into their faithfulness in fulfilling their responsibilities;
- m. to delegate and to supervise the work of the board of deacons and the board of trustees and all other organizations and task forces within the congregation, providing for support, report, review, and control;
- n. to provide for the administration of the program of the church, including employment of nonordained staff, ...
- o. to provide for the management of the property of the church...
- p. to maintain regular and continuing relationship to the higher governing bodies of the church...
- q. to establish and maintain those ecumenical relationships necessary for the life and mission of the church in its locality;
- r. to serve in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline;
- s. to keep an accurate roll of the membership of the church...

(See the Book of Order, G-14.0207, for more)

Wow! That's a lot to keep track of. Fortunately, the Session does not carry out these tasks alone. We have staff to assist in most areas, and most responsibilities of the Session are delegated to committees and commissions.

So, in addition to serving on the Session, each elder at First Presbyterian Church is responsible to chair and lead a committee or commission, as detailed in the Standing Rules of the Session of First Presbyterian Church.

**FPCP'S LEADERSHIP WEBSITE**  
LEADERS OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF PETALUMA HAVE A WEBSITE - AN ONLINE RESOURCE FOR INFORMATION THAT YOU WILL NEED FROM TIME TO TIME, INCLUDING THIS DOCUMENT. GO TO THE CHURCH WEBPAGE: [WWW.PETALUMAFIRST.COM/](http://WWW.PETALUMAFIRST.COM/) AND CLICK ON RESOURCES, THEN CLICK ON LEADERSHIP. OR GO DIRECTLY:  
[HTTP://WWW.PETALUMAFIRST.COM/RESOURCES/LEADERS.SHTML](http://WWW.PETALUMAFIRST.COM/RESOURCES/LEADERS.SHTML)

## **ACTIONS OF DEACONS: SYMPATHY, WITNESS AND SERVICE**

The office of deacon as set forth in Scripture (Phil 1:1; I Tim. 3:8–15) is one of sympathy, witness, and service after the example of Jesus Christ. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, of exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, warm sympathies, and sound judgment should be chosen for this office.

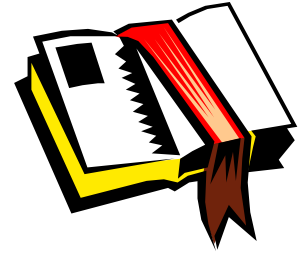
It is the duty of deacons, first of all, to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith. They shall assume such other duties as may be delegated to them from time to time by the session, such as leading the people in worship through prayers of intercession, reading the Scriptures, presenting the gifts of the people, and assisting with the Lord's Supper.

As the whole church is under the jurisdiction of the session, the board of deacons shall be under its supervision and authority.

(See the Book of Order, G-6.0400, for more)

# PRELIMINARY BIBLE STUDY ON CHURCH OFFICERS

Since the Bible is our ultimate, authoritative guide for faith and practice of an individual Christian and of a church, let's begin here.



*There are four Bible studies here (A-D). Please set aside a four blocks of time well before the Officers Orientation to study the Scriptures listed below and write your answers to the related questions. This will enable us to do more in less time when we have our Orientation. We will not do these studies in our time together, but we will discuss some of the questions. If any questions arise during your study, make a note and bring it up during our time together. Enjoy.*

## **A. Biblical Precedent for Church Officers**

The Early Churches' Nominating Committee: Read Acts 14:23

What tells you that Paul and Barnabas gave careful consideration before choosing elders and deacons in churches?

Teaching Elders: 1 Timothy 5:17-18

What were some differences between elders in the early church? How do you know elders and pastors received criticism in the early church? What does Paul advise Timothy to do if someone makes an accusation against an elder?

The First Deacons: Acts 6:1-7

Why were deacons needed in the Jerusalem church? What were the elders or apostles neglecting? How was the conflict resolved?

How are deacons like elders according to this passage? How are they different?

Do you think the function of deacon is a lesser function than the function of elders? Why or why not?

## B. Church Officers and Spiritual Gifts

Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

List the spiritual gifts mentioned in this passage. Circle the gifts you believe God has given to you.

Read Romans 12:6-8

List the spiritual gifts mentioned in this passage. Circle the gifts you believe God has given to you.

Notice there is no spiritual gift called “eldering” or “deaconing.” Which spiritual gifts do you think are needed or helpful for elders?

Which spiritual gifts do you think are needed or helpful for deacons?

In addition to spiritual gifts, what training, skills or life experiences do you have that have prepared you well for your new ministry?

training	skills	life experiences

What will you need to learn in order to minister effectively in your new role?

### C. Qualifications and Instructions for Church Officers

*Being a church leader is a heavy responsibility because the church belongs to God. Here the veteran, Apostle Paul, gives instructions to young Timothy (and to us) for choosing elders and deacons in the church. Notice we're not given responsibilities; we have instead qualities of a church leader.*

What do you think are some good reasons for becoming a Deacon or Elder?

Why do you want to be a church officer?

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7. In the table below (left column), list the qualifications of elder.

Read verses 8-13. In the table below (right column), list the qualifications of deacon.

Elders Qualifications	Deacon Qualifications

Compare and contrast the qualifications of Elders and Deacons. On the chart, circle characteristics that are only on the Elder list. On the chart, right-hand column, circle characteristics that are only on the Deacon list. Which qualifications apply to both Elders and Deacons?

Do you know anyone who has all the biblical qualifications for a church office?

What do you think a church should do if nobody in the church fits every standard for church leadership? How should these lists (1 Timothy 3:1-13) be used?

Self Evaluation: How well do you measure against the standards for Elder or Deacon? In the previous chart, mark a “+” next to characteristics you believe are strongly evident in you. Mark a “-“ next to characteristics where you need improvement.

Unfortunately, the biblical qualifications for elders and deacons aren’t always important to some churches as other criteria. Check the qualifications or reasons churches you have known had when recruiting officers:

- Success in business
- Reward for faithful service of the church
- Good looks
- To meet a quota (age, gender, race)
- To keep someone from leaving the church
- Ability to financially support the church
- Found someone who didn’t say “no”
- Popularity

What sort of person should not be an elder or deacon?

How do you interpret “husband of one wife” (literally: “one-woman man”)?

Do you think God means to exclude women from being elders or deacons? Single adults (like Paul and Jesus)? Widows and widowers? Divorcees?

*Note: "the husband of one wife" is ambiguous, but it probably means fidelity within the married state - Mays, James Luther, Ph.D., Editor, Harper's Bible Commentary, (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.) 1988.*

*When Paul says that each elder should be faithful to his wife, he is prohibiting both polygamy and promiscuity. This does not prohibit an unmarried person from becoming an elder or a widowed elder from remarrying.- Life Application Bible, 1991 by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc*

What about younger people? Must an elder always be older?

Which of these qualities have you made progress in during the last year?

In which areas do you want to grow now?

What will you do to grow in these areas in the coming year? How can the church help you grow in these areas?

## **D. Leadership like Jesus**

Read 1 Peter 5:1-4

How does a Christian approach leadership in the church? Notice the contrasts Peter provides between what leadership **is not** and what it **is**.

How was leadership taught to Peter by his mentor (See John 13:1-17)?

What sort of “clout” does a church leader have?

How is this description of leadership different than leadership in politics or business? How is it similar?

What reward, promised to faithful leaders in the church, can you look forward to?

Write one question you want to bring to the Officers Orientation.

*Thank you for taking the time to complete these studies!*