

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
Anacortes, Washington

**Position Description: Elder**

**Description of the Duties and Responsibilities of an Elder**

Rev 4, 4/07/11, Session approved 4/14/2011

**TITLE:** Elder

**ROLE:**

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 governing and ministry. Elders are chosen by the people. Together with the pastor, they exercise leadership, government, and discipline and have responsibilities for Westminster's life, as well as the Church at large. (Book of Order G-6.0300) 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. (Book of Order, G-6.0303)

**RELEVANT SCRIPTURE:**

1 Timothy 3:1-3, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Acts 1:21-25 provide helpful guidance.

**ORDINATION:**

Elders are one of three ordained offices of the PC(USA) (Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, Elders, and Deacons). Active Elders serve on the Session for three-year terms, but hold their ordination for life.

Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament. (Book of Order, G-6.0106b)

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

Christian Living

persons of faith, dedication, and good judgment; manner of life demonstrates the Christian gospel in the church and the world; evidence of grace, compassion, and fruits of the spirit in daily life

Church Involvement

active member; regular attendance at worship; financial giving (consistency of giving—not amount); understanding of and commitment to Presbyterian polity; active participation in the life of the church; able and willing to stay in Anacortes during Term of Service

Personal Qualifications

cooperativeness; ability to follow through in assigned work; maturity of judgment; readiness to listen to the concerns and opinions of others; willingness to learn and grow in areas of leadership and faith development; openness to new ideas; ability to work with confidentiality and sensitivity; ability to express own ideas

**SELECTION PROCESS:**

- 1) Elders are nominated by the Nominating Committee, and elected by a vote of the congregation at a Congregational Meeting.

## RESPONSIBILITIES and TIME COMMITMENT:

- 1) The Term of Service shall be understood under normal circumstances to begin on Jan 1<sup>st</sup> following the congregational meeting at which the Elder is elected to serve.
- 2) Active Elders normally serve a three-year term on Session.
- 3) Elders reinforce and support the fellowship of Session through participation and prayer.
- 4) Elders attend monthly stated Session meetings (and occasionally called special meetings).
  - Monthly Session meetings are held on the third Thursday evening of the month and last approximately 2-3 hours.
  - Regular attendance and committed participation are critical to the health and vitality of the church. **An Elder who misses more than three regularly stated meetings in a calendar year should prayerfully consider whether to continue as an active Session member and may be asked to resign.**
- 5) Those who attend Session meetings will be regularly encouraged [beginning with training and then built into Session meetings] to seek to reduce destructive conflict within Session. Examples of helpful behavior include: requesting that the pace of the meeting be slowed, an encouragement to pause for prayer, or asking clarifying questions not only about the topic under discussion, but also about the feelings of others. It is important to remember that not all conflict is bad. Only destructive conflict is bad.
- 6) Except in extenuating circumstances approved by Session, an active Elder may not also chair one of the leadership committees. New Elders in particular, without any previous WPC Elder experience, are discouraged from also serving as a Committee Chair during their first year of Elder Service.
- 7) Each active Elder will be assigned to serve as a member of and an Elder Liaison to one of the leadership committees and will represent that committee at Session. The Elder Liaison will attend all committee meetings and be responsible for the timely preparation and issuing of the minutes of each meeting. They will also be responsible for providing monthly committee updates to Session via the Session Docket, and presenting to Session any motions for which the committee seeks or requires Session approval. . In addition they are responsible to provide updates to the committee and Committee Chair, of the highlights of the Session meeting, especially any decisions involving the committee.
- 8) Elders assist in Worship Service Leadership (moments for mission, serving communion, baptism, intro of new members).
- 9) Elders support and interpret Presbyterian polity and mission in the church.
- 10) Elders contact inactive members as assigned in Session.
- 11) Elders lead the Session in prayer and devotions about twice a year.
- 12) Elders participate in home communion at least once a year. A home communion visit usually lasts about 2 hours.
- 13) Elders attend at least one alternate worship service at WPC no less than quarterly.
- 14) Elders attend Congregational Meetings (usually in October and January).
- 15) Elders attend "Elder" training. This training must be completed **prior** to the beginning of the year in which their service begins. Multiple instructors will be utilized, including but not limited to the Pastor, experienced Elders and Committee Chairs, and the Treasurer. The subject areas will include both the requirements and procedures of serving [i.e. Book of Order], as well as the spiritual and motivating issues. These would include, but not be limited to, spiritual responsibilities, interpersonal/interaction skills, conflict resolution, effective listening, general

leadership training, addressing issues not personalities, Elder Advocate usage, and the roles and relationship between Committee Chairs and the Elder Liaison to that committee.

- 16) Active Elders, as well as all leadership Committee Chairs, attend the annual Leadership Retreat (usually a Friday evening and Saturday the second weekend in January).
- 17) Incoming Elders attend at least the November and December Session meetings and committee meetings (for which they are the Elder Liaison) in the fall before their term of service begins in order to get “up to speed” on the issues and procedures of Session and that committee.
- 18) Elder Liaisons work with the Committee and the Committee Chair to create goals and budgets for the committee.
- 19) Outgoing Elders provide transition service as requested to new Elders through January, one month after term expires.
- 20) Active Elders attend a Presbytery meeting when elected (generally once per year). These meetings take place four times a year and usually last all day. Usually two will take place on Wednesdays and two on Saturdays.
- 21) One Session member shall be elected to serve as Chair of the Nominating Committee (per Book of Order). This is a year long commitment. The Nominating Committee Chair has the responsibility of ensuring that the Nominating Committee is in compliance with the Nominating Policies and Procedures document each year.
- 22) Each year Elders will elect an “Elder Advocate” from their midst [preferably from the class of third year Elders] with and through whom the Pastor will work to address conflict issues of Session as well as Elder performance issues. Elders may also contact the Elder Advocate for Session related conflict or performance issues they are having with the Pastor or another Elder, and the Elder Advocate and requesting Elder would then begin the same 3 way conversation with all three parties. The amount of time required for this position depends on the usage of the position by the Pastor and/or Elders.

### **LEADERSHIP STYLE:**

The purpose and pattern of leadership in the Church in all its forms of ministry shall be understood not in terms of power but of service, after the manner of the servant ministry of Jesus Christ. (Book of Order, G-14.0103)

### **RELATIONSHIPS:**

Elders, active and inactive, maintain supportive collegial working relationships with the Pastor, other Elders, Elder Advocate, Committee Chairs, Deacons, members and friends of the congregation, and the Church staff. Elders also support each other in their responsibilities, ministries, and personal discipleship. Serving as an Elder can be an experience that deepens your personal faith and broadens your perceptions of the Church's ministry locally and globally.

**EXCERPTS from the BOOK OF ORDER describing the position of Elder:**

**THE CHURCH AND ITS OFFICERS**

**G-6.0204-.0304**

reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

**G-6.0300**

**3. Elders**

G-6.0301  
Scriptural  
Practice

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 governing and ministry.<sup>j</sup>

G-6.0302  
Governmental  
Responsibilities

Elders are chosen by the people. Together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, they exercise leadership, government, and discipline<sup>k</sup> and have responsibilities for the life of a particular church as well as the church at large, including ecumenical relationships. They shall serve faithfully as members of the session. (G-10.0102) When elected commissioners to higher governing bodies, elders participate and vote with the same authority as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, and they are eligible for any office.

G-6.0303  
Gifts and  
Requirements

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-6.0106)

G-6.0304  
Specific  
Responsibilities

a. It is the duty of elders, individually and jointly, to strengthen and nurture the faith and life of the congregation committed to their charge. Together with the pastor, they should encourage the people in the worship and service of God, equip and renew them for their tasks within the church and for their mission in the world, visit and comfort and care for the people, with special attention to the poor, the sick, the lonely, and those who are oppressed. They should inform the pastor and session of those persons and structures which may need special attention. They should assist in worship. (See W-1.4003, W-2.3011-.3012, W-3.1003, W-3.3616, and W-4.4003.) They should cultivate their ability to teach the Bible and may be authorized to supply places which are without the regular ministry of the Word and Sacrament. In specific circumstances and with proper instruction, specific elders may be authorized by the presbytery to administer the Lord's Supper in accord with G-11.0103z. Those duties which all Christians are bound to perform by the law of love are especially incumbent upon elders because of their calling to office and are to be fulfilled by them as official responsibilities.

Duty to Report

b. An elder shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge, gained in the course of service to the church, of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of privileged communication; or (2) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

CHAPTER X**THE SESSION**

G-10.0000

G-10.0100

**1. General**G-10.0101  
Membership

The session of a particular church consists of the pastor or co-pastors, the associate pastors, and the elders in active service.<sup>a</sup> All members of the session, including the pastor, co-pastors, and associate pastors, are entitled to vote.

G-10.0102  
Responsibilities

The session is responsible for the mission and government of the particular church.<sup>b</sup> It therefore has the responsibility and power

a. to provide opportunities for evangelism to be learned and practiced in and by the church, that members may be better equipped to articulate their faith, to witness in word and deed to the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and to invite persons into a new life in Christ, in accordance with G-3.0300;

b. to receive members into the church upon profession of faith,<sup>c</sup> upon reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ, or upon satisfactory certification of transfer of church membership, provided that membership shall not be denied any person because of race, economic or social circumstances, or any other reason not related to profession of faith;

c. to lead the congregation in participation in the mission of the whole Church in the world, in accordance with G-3.0000;

d. to provide for the worship of the people of God, including the preaching of the Word, the sharing of the Sacraments, and for the music program, in keeping with the principles in the Directory for Worship, and to appeal to the presbytery for a duly trained and authorized elder under the provisions of G-11.0103 in those extenuating circumstances where an ordained minister of the Word and Sacrament is not available to meet the needs for the administration of the Lord's Supper;

e. to provide for the growth of its members and for their equipment for ministry through personal and pastoral care, educational programs including the church school, sharing in fellowship and mutual support, and opportunities for witness and service in the world;

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 communities in which the church lives and bears its witness;

h. to challenge the people of God with the privilege of responsible Christian stewardship of money and time and

talents, developing effective ways for encouraging and gathering the offerings of the people and assuring that all offerings are distributed to the objects toward which they were contributed;

i. to establish the annual budget, determine the distribution of the church's benevolences, and order offerings for Christian purposes, providing full information to the congregation of its decisions in such matters;

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, with concern for equal employment opportunity, fair employment practices, personnel policies, and the annual review of the adequacy of compensation for all staff, including all employees;

o. to provide for the management of the property of the church, including determination of the appropriate use of church buildings and facilities, and to obtain property and liability insurance coverage to protect the facilities, programs, and officers, including members of the session, staff, board of trustees, and deacons;

p. to maintain regular and continuing relationship to the higher governing bodies of the church, including

(1) electing commissioners to presbytery<sup>d</sup> and receiving their reports; sessions are encouraged to elect commissioners to the presbytery for at least one year, preferably two or three;

(2) nominating to presbytery elders who may be considered for election to synod or General Assembly;

(3) in both the above responsibilities, implementing the principles of participation and inclusiveness to ensure fair representation in the decision making of the church;

(4) observing and carrying out the instructions of the higher governing bodies consistent with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);

(5) welcoming representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits;

(6) proposing to the presbytery and, through it, to the synod and the General Assembly such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the whole church;

(7) sending annually to the stated clerk of the presbytery statistical and other information according to the requirements of the presbytery.

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;<sup>e</sup>

s. to keep an accurate roll of the membership of the church, in accordance with G-10.0302, and to grant certificates of transfer to other churches, which when issued for parents shall include the names of their children specifying whether they have been baptized, and which when issued for an elder or deacon shall include the record of ordination.