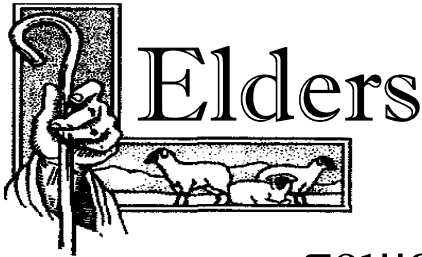


# ELDERS & DEACONS

Life Perspectives from Fellowship Bible Church



ΠΟΙΜΕΝ

*is the Greek noun for shepherd*

πρεσβυτερος

*is the Greek noun for elder*

## The Definition of an Elder

It is clear from the New Testament that the local church is to be governed by a plurality of overseers known as elders (Acts 20:28). Their spiritual responsibilities are to govern, lead, feed and guard the flock of Jesus Christ. Fellowship Bible Church, from its very inception, has been governed and led by a plurality of men elders. The office of an overseer/elder carries personal and spiritual qualifications described in the Scriptures below:

*“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.”*

1 Timothy 3:1-7

*“An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”*

Titus 1:6-9

*“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”*

Peter 5:1-4

## What are Elders Responsibilities?

An elder is called to be a servant to the whole body of FBC, not a boss. His primary motivation is to care about, care for, be concerned with, anyone and everything that touches the local church body. At FBC each elder is not only an overseer of the whole spiritual family but he also has a principal ministry assignment in which he spends the major portion of his time. The elder normally spends his time with the leadership in the ministry assigned to him, offering counsel, praying for, encouraging and generally caring about their specific ministries. In addition, each elder meets regularly with all the other elders of FBC. All significant FBC governing matters (both spiritual and practical) are brought before the whole group of elders. At those elders meetings he is called upon to listen to current issues, vision, and personal problems and then depend on the Holy Spirit as he seeks to find the mind of Christ before he offers his opinion or cast his vote on the matter.

## How Does an Elder Lead?

Every elder seeks to walk before the Lord Jesus and, depending on the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, seeks to be an godly example to the people of God. On a practical level he offers suggestions and ideas to those involved in the specific ministry to which he is assigned. The combination of lifestyle, ideas, and biblical perspective, put forward with a servant's attitude, draws a response from those he is attempting to help, which bestows authority and leadership upon him. All of these general decisions are reached only by an unanimous vote (every single elder must speak to an issue and each must be in unanimous agreement before a final decision is made). By requiring unanimity, the eldership believes that the Holy Spirit can direct the major decisions of FBC. Thus Christ is in charge of his church and no one individual or majority of individuals can control it. The key principle is to work toward the *unity of the Spirit* within the elders meetings. (Ephesians 4: 3)

## How is an Elder Gifted?

Each elder must have spiritual gifts from the leadership group described in Scripture (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4), and the *gift of teaching* (1 Timothy 3:2).

## How is an Elder Selected?

The spiritual family members of FBC by the leading of the Holy Spirit identifies future elders. This identification occurs over time as an individual gradually discovers his gifts, and others in the body of Christ respond to those gifts and begin to willingly transfer responsibility and authority to him. As this process continues, it becomes evident to the elders that a candidate for eldership is emerging from among the flock. The elders then begin to examine him in the light of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus and 1 Peter 5, to see if he meets the personal and biblical qualifications. When the elders have reached a positive *unanimous* decision, they extend an invitation to that man asking that he carefully consider the responsibility and hard work that is involved. In the end, all must be in unanimous agreement that the Holy Spirit has appointed this individual to the FBC eldership. (See Acts 20:28 re: the elders of the church at Ephesus.)

## How Long Does an Elder Serve?

Each elder serves the local FBC spiritual family indefinitely. The reason is that the Holy Spirit has gifted him for this task and has brought all the other elders to an unanimous agreement that he is God's man. So until the Holy Spirit takes that office away, or makes a

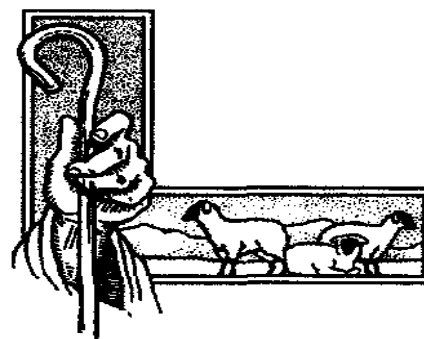
change in it, he continues to serve the local body of believers. There are times when for health or personal reasons an elder will step down, either for a limited time or permanently, but once again, the mind of the Lord is sought for such action.

## How is an Elder Evaluated?

Each elder is evaluated by the rest of the elders approximately every two to three years. During this evaluation, his personal walk with the Lord, his wife and family as well as his relationship with his community and his spiritual family are all opened up in light of the Word of God. As a result of that spiritual exam he then may receive words of encouragement, exhortation, and commendations from his fellow elders.

Eldership at FBC is not an office that men accept lightly. Nor is it a position of pomp and circumstance; it carries no financial reward. But one day, those who have ministered well will hear the Lord and Chief Shepherd of His church say:

*“Well done, you good and faithful servant;  
enter into the joy of my reward.”*





## The Public Recognition & Appointment of Deacons

All Christians are called upon to serve (**diakonia**) one another in love. The Lord has also given certain men and women within the Body of Christ in every generation since the Day of Pentecost the spiritual gift of service (**diakonia**) (Romans 12:7). Then there is the Office of Deacon.

*“For those who have served well as deacons (**diakonos**) obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”*

1 Timothy 3:8

## The Beginning of the Church

The church of Jesus Christ began in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost 33 AD, with the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2). Over the following few years, the apostles and the new Christians shared with the whole known world the good news that their risen Lord was offering salvation to all who would place their faith in Him (Acts 1:8). Small house churches began to spring up and it soon became apparent during those formative years, that our Lord’s people were called to a variety of functions within the new “body of Christ” using their “spiritual gifts.” It also became apparent that the church needed two different leadership ministries: Elders and Deacons. In Acts 6:15, we can see the emergence of the *leadership ministry of the elders and deacons*. In giving out food to the needy in the new church, the apostles realized that the Greek widows had been overlooked. So, “...the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, ‘It is not

*desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables (diakonia). But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.’”*

## The Growing Church

As the local churches began to grow over the next thirty years, our risen Lord directed His apostles to continue to develop ministries of *elders* and *deacons*. Since FBC’s own beginnings in the mid 1980’s, our Lord has directed his people by his Spirit and his written word to establish a witness for Himself in Colorado Springs through a local church. It became clear to this first group of believers that the Lord wanted this church to function with him as the “Senior Pastor” or the “Chief Shepherd” and a group of Spirit-chosen elders as his “under-shepherds.” The ministry of elders was to be filled by spiritually mature men who would be responsible to seek the *mind of Christ* as they fulfilled their ministry of shepherding the flock of God. The shepherding would include feeding, caring for, and protecting the flock in the midst of a fallen and evil world. (See Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9 for the spiritual characteristics required of elders, and Acts 20:27-35 for some responsibilities.)

## Still Growing in Knowledge

It has become apparent to the FBC elders of this local church in the last few years that even though we were aware that God had placed many biblically qualified *deacons* among us to serve His people, we had neglected to acknowledge them and their ministries enough to our immediate spiritual family so that they could be called upon in time of need. We now would like to explain the **ministry of deacons** and then begin to publicly acknowledge to you some of those men and women whom we believe our Lord has chosen to serve among us.

## Jesus is our Model “**diakonos**”

The word deacon in Greek is *diakonos*, or servant, and the word service is *diakonia*. In the New Testament, a *diakonos* was a person who was led and empowered by the Holy spirit to meet the needs of another person or group of persons in the body of Christ or in the local community.

Our Lord was declared by God the Father to become the suffering servant of Isaiah 40-42: “Behold My Servant [*diakonos*, in the Septuagint which is the Hebrew Old Testament translated into Greek], whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights...” (42:1). “Jesus said to [His disciples], “You

know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; [diakonos]; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served [diakonia], but to serve [diakonia], and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45) All Christians are called upon to serve [diakonia] one another in love (Galatians 5:13).

## The Characteristics of Deacons

Our risen Lord has given each new believer within the “body of Christ” certain spiritual gifts in order to serve Him within our local church as well as our local community. There are two categories of spiritual gifts: *speaking gifts* and *serving gifts* (1 Peter 4:10-11). Then, from among the men and women gifted with “serving gifts” (administration, helps, service, giving, vision, leadership, and mercy, etc.), our risen Lord calls out certain “tested” deacons as servant leaders to minister among us as well as *lead* the rest of us into ministry.

A list of characteristics for deacons can be found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. As is true of the ministry of elders, the ministry of deacons also appears to demonstrate that God is more concerned about the character of a person than He is about the task they have been called to do.

*“Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”*

Please note that the apostle Paul has opened a door of opportunity within a local church whereby both men and women are encouraged to serve our Lord and his people together as deacons. It is clear that in this context the apostle has in mind that certain women can be called into the ministry of deacons out of a variety of lifestyles: married wives, widows, single women, or even the wife of an elder or deacon who has already been tested in the ministry of serving. Paul wrote earlier to the Romans of a “tested” deacon: *“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant [diakonos], of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may need of you: for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.”*

(Romans 16:1-2)

## The Value of Deacons

Deacons are called to have some of the same spiritual characteristics as elders, but in regard to their spiritual responsibilities they are called to be in submission to the leadership of the unanimous voice of the elders who submit themselves to our Lord.

### The Responsibilities of a Deacon

The word deacon (diakonos) indicates servant and service. The elders will encourage the deacons to use their service gifts among us and within our communities (we encourage deacons to serve in their community or zip code or in a specialized *task*) and to lead and encourage many of us who share the same gifts to join them in their ministries. Some of those ministries will fall in line with our Lord’s word in Matthew 25:35-36: *“For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”*

### Recognizing Tested Deacons

The current elders of FBC have spent a good season of prayer and study on the important subject of the ministry of deacons. Once we all agreed it was biblically proper to recognize and appoint “tested” deacons to serve this local body, we began to ask the Lord, and many of you, to point out the many faithful men and women who have already been serving our Lord among us. We then began to ask some of them to consider serving alongside the elders in the ministry of deacons.

### Your Part in the Future

As our deacon ministry begins to grow, we as your elders would encourage you to bring to our attention any man or woman you see serving within our body whom you believe is spiritually qualified (“tested”) as outlines in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 to serve as a deacon in this leadership ministry. We also appreciate your prayers for the men and women who have been appointed for leadership in this ministry at FBC.

