
CALLED TO SERVE

The Meaning, Roles, and Responsibilities of Congregational Leadership in the Presbyterian Church (USA)

(according to the *Book of Order*)



A resource for the Nominating Committee of
Rosedale Gardens Presbyterian Church - Livonia, Michigan

THE SHAPE OF ORDAINED MINISTRY

according to the Book of Order – the constitution of our Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Church’s ministry is a gift from Jesus Christ to the whole Church. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills, exercising his authority by the ministry of women and men for the establishment and extension of God’s new creation. Christ’s ministry is the foundation and standard for all ministry, the pattern of the one who came “not to be served but to serve” (Matt. 20:28). The basic form of ministry is the ministry of the whole people of God, from whose midst some are called to ordered ministries, to fulfill particular functions. Members and those in ordered ministries serve together under the mandate of Christ.

The Church’s ordered ministries described in the New Testament and maintained by this church are deacons and presbyters (teaching elders and ruling elders). Ordered ministries are gifts to the church to order its life so that the ministry of the whole people of God may flourish. The existence of these ordered ministries in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church . . .

The call to ordered ministry in the Church is the act of the triune God. This call is evidenced by the movement of the Holy Spirit in the individual conscience, the approval of a community of God’s people, and the concurring judgment of a council of the Church.

To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders—God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God’s people and the concurring judgment of a council of the church . . . ***Standards for ordained service reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life . . .*** The council responsible for ordination and/or installation . . . shall examine each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate’s ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation.

**DEACONS:
THE MINISTRY OF *COMPASSION AND SERVICE***

The ministry of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion, and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry.

Deacons may be individually commissioned or organized as a board of deacons. In either case, their ministry is under the supervision and authority of the session. Deacons may also be given special assignments in the congregation, such as caring for members in need, handling educational tasks, cultivating liberality in giving, collecting and disbursing monies to specific persons or causes, or overseeing the buildings and property of the congregation. Deacons shall assume other duties as may be delegated to them by the session, including assisting with the Lord's Supper . . .

**RULING ELDERS:
THE MINISTRY OF *DISCERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE***

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.

GENERAL PROVISIONS FOR DEACONS AND RULING ELDERS

ELECTION

Ruling elders and deacons are men and women elected by the congregation from among its members. The nomination and election of ruling elders and deacons shall express the rich diversity of the congregation's membership and shall guarantee participation and inclusiveness . . . Ruling elders and deacons shall be nominated by a committee elected by the congregation, drawn from and representative of its membership.

Congregations may provide by their own rule for a congregational nominating committee, provided that the committee shall consist of at least three active members of the congregation, and shall include at least one ruling elder who is currently serving on the session. The pastor shall serve ex officio and without vote. When elections are held, full opportunity shall always be given to the congregation for nomination from the floor of the congregational meeting by any active member of the congregation. A majority of all the active members present and voting shall be required to elect.

PREPARATION

When persons have been elected to the ordered ministry of ruling elder or deacon, *the session shall provide a period of study and preparation, after which the session shall examine them* as to their personal faith; knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church; and the duties of the ministry. The session shall also confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the ministry appropriate to the order. If the examination is approved, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation.

ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION

The service of ordination and installation shall focus upon Christ and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church, and shall include a sermon appropriate to the occasion. The moderator of session or person authorized to preside shall state briefly the nature of the ministry of ruling elder and deacon. The act of ordination and installation takes place in the context of worship. The order for that service of worship in the Directory for Worship . . . shall be followed.

TERMS OF SERVICE

Ruling elders and deacons shall be elected to serve terms of no more than three years on the session or board of deacons, and may be eligible for reelection according to congregational rule. However, no ruling elder or deacon shall be eligible to serve more than six consecutive years, and a ruling elder or deacon who has served six consecutive years shall be ineligible for election to the same board for at least one year. Election shall be to classes as nearly equal in number as possible, with the term of only one class ending each year. The presbytery may, upon written request and by majority vote, grant a congregation a waiver of this limitation on terms.

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 . . .

THE SESSION

COMPOSITION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The session shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service as ruling elders, together with all installed pastors and associate pastors. All members of the session are entitled to vote . . .

The session shall have responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the session shall keep before it the marks of the Church . . ., the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have identified themselves throughout history . . . and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

In light of this charge, *the session has responsibility and power* to:

a. provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard. This responsibility shall include providing a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, education, and spiritual nurture; providing for regular preaching of the Word by a teaching elder or other person prepared and approved for the work; planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world with the message of salvation and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship; planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community in accordance with the prophetic witness of Jesus Christ; and initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to the love and grace of God.

b. provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received. This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate, in accordance with the principles of the Directory for Worship; and exercising pastoral care among the congregation; in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the congregation may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.

c. nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ. This responsibility shall include receiving and dismissing members; reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership; providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship; training, examining, ordaining, and installing those elected by the congregation as ruling elders and deacons; encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources; managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission; directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation; employing the administrative staff of the congregation; leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

THE OFFICE OF RULING ELDER at Rosedale Gardens Presbyterian Church

THE SESSION

Our Session is made up of 21 elders of 3 classes, each serving 3 years. Additionally, a “youth elder” serves a term of 1 year. Elders are elected by the congregation, usually at the spring congregational meeting.

As spelled out in our Presbyterian constitution, the *Book of Order*, the Session is the governing body of the congregation, to which all boards, committees and organizations are subordinate. All decisions pertaining to the policies and operations of the congregation remain with the Session. Session holds stated meetings the **third Wednesday evening** of each month—except for July & August.

DUTIES OF RULING ELDERS AT ROSEDALE GARDENS

In addition to the general outline of the elder’s responsibilities, there are specific duties expected through the year. Every elder should also be willing to serve as a committee chairperson at some point in his or her term of office.

Monthly: Attendance and participation at **Session meetings** and **committee meetings**

Yearly: Attend **congregational meetings**; attendance and participation at annual **Session Retreat**

Periodically: Serve **Communion** in worship; meet with and examine **candidates for membership**

As a leader in this congregation, your consistent support and involvement in the worship, work, study and fellowship of the congregation is expected.

**THE OFFICE OF DEACON
at Rosedale Gardens Presbyterian Church**

THE BOARD OF DEACONS

Our Board of Deacons consists of 20 members, elected in three classes to serve terms of three years. There is also a “youth deacon” elected to serve a term of one year. Deacons are elected by the congregation at the Congregational Meeting in the spring. The Board of Deacons primarily carries out tasks of caring within our congregation. Our Board of Deacons holds stated monthly meetings the **first Tuesday evening** of the month.

DUTIES OF DEACONS AT ROSEDALE GARDENS

In addition to attendance at monthly meetings, each deacon at Rosedale Gardens is expected to carry out the following responsibilities:

- assist in preparation and clean-up of **communion**, as well as serving
- maintain **monthly contact with a “VIP”** with cards, calls and visits
- be **available “on call”** as needed to help pastors with visitation

In addition, each deacon participates in the shared work of the Board:

- order and display *CareNotes* literature
- sending “**care cards**” to **VIPs** each month
- coordinate **Blood Drives** in the congregation
- **deliver sanctuary flowers** to members in need
- provide **funeral luncheons** as requested
- coordinate **food deliveries** at Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas, as well as oversee the food pantry
- coordinate Sunday **Coffee Hour** schedule and **Sunday Supper** ministry
- deliver clothes and other needed items to **homeless ministry at Fort Street Presbyterian Church** in Detroit
- coordinate Advent/Christmas “**Giving Tree**” and spring “**Spring Into Giving**” projects collecting needed items for local organizations

As a leader in this congregation, your consistent support and involvement in the worship, work, study, and fellowship of the congregation is expected.

A MESSAGE FOR YOU

if you're considering serving the Lord in this way:

The information in this booklet may seem overwhelming to you at first. But it is realistic and honest: *answering the call to be a deacon or ruling elder requires time and commitment.* But you will not be alone. The Lord promises to be with us whenever we endeavor on His behalf. Additionally, you serve as part of a team—the session, or board of deacons—working together to fulfill the tasks at hand. The Pastors are also available to help in any way they can.

As you answer the call to serve the Lord as a Ruling Elder or Deacon at Rosedale Gardens Presbyterian Church, remember that you are an ordained officer in the Presbyterian Church (USA): you have a high calling of of servant ministry under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who “came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)