

Election of Officers

Cross Creek Church

Jesus is the King and Head of the church.¹ By His Spirit working through the people of the church, He appoints men to special office for the purpose of exercising spiritual leadership (elders) and serving through works of mercy (deacons). This document explains the process for recognizing and appointing men to office at Cross Creek Church, in conjunction with all relevant procedures outlined in the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*² of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

Explanation

What kinds of church office are there?

“The ordinary and perpetual classes of office in the Church are **elders** and **deacons**.” (*BCO* 7-2).³ In the PCA we recognize a distinction between “ruling elders” (lay elders) and “teaching elders” (pastors). A church’s *Session* “consists of its pastor, pastors, its associate pastor(s) and its ruling elders” (*BCO* 4-3; 7-2).

What is the responsibility of the elders?

“The elders jointly have the government and spiritual oversight of the Church, including teaching. Only those elders who are specially gifted, called and trained by God to preach may serve as teaching elders” (pastors) (*BCO* 7-2).⁴

What are the duties of the elders?

“This office is one of dignity and usefulness. The man who fills it has in Scripture different titles expressive of his various duties. As he has the oversight of the flock of Christ, he is termed *bishop* or *pastor*. As it is his duty to be grave and prudent, an example to the flock, and to govern well in the house and Kingdom of Christ, he is termed *presbyter* or *elder*. As he expounds the Word, and by sound doctrine both exhorts and convinces the gainsayer, he is termed *teacher*. These titles do not indicate different grades of office, but all describe one and the same office” (*BCO* 8-1).

¹ See Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18.

² The *BCO* can be read online at <http://www.pcaac.org/what-we-believe/>.

³ See Titus 1; 1 Tim. 3; Phil. 1:1; Acts 6.

⁴ See 1 Tim. 5:17; Eph. 4:11.

“It belongs to those in the office of elder, both severally and jointly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to his charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enter therein. They must exercise government and discipline, and take oversight not only of the spiritual interests of the particular church, but also the Church generally when called thereunto. They should visit the people at their homes, especially the sick. They should instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, nourish and guard the children of the Church. They should set a worthy example to the flock entrusted to their care by their zeal to evangelize the unconverted and make disciples. All those duties which private Christians are bound to discharge by the law of love are especially incumbent upon them by divine vocation, and are to be discharged as official duties. They should pray with and for the people, being careful and diligent in seeking the fruit of the preached Word among the flock” (BCO 8-3).⁵

What are the additional responsibilities of teaching elders (pastors)?

“When a man is called to labor as a teaching elder, it belongs to his order, in addition to those functions he shares with all other elders, to feed the flock by reading, expounding and preaching the Word of God and to administer the Sacraments. As he is sent to declare the will of God to sinners, and to beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, he is termed *ambassador*. As he bears glad tidings of salvation to the ignorant and perishing, he is termed *evangelist*. As he stands to proclaim the Gospel, he is termed *preacher*. As he dispenses the manifold grace of God, and the ordinances instituted by Christ, he is termed *steward* of the mysteries of God” (BCO 8-5).

Do teaching and ruling elders possess the same authority?

“Elders being of one class of office, ruling elders possess the same authority and eligibility to office in the courts of the Church as teaching elders. They should, moreover, cultivate zealously their own aptness to teach the Bible and should improve every opportunity of doing so” (BCO 8-8,9).⁶

What is the responsibility of the deacons?

“The office of deacon is not one of rule, but rather of service both to the physical and spiritual needs of the people... The office is one of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus; it expresses also the communion of saints, especially in their helping one another in time of need” (BCO 7-2).⁷

What are the duties of the deacons?

⁵ See 1 Pet. 5:1-3; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 4:16; 5:17.

⁶ See 1 Pet. 5:1-5.

⁷ See 1 Tim. 5:17; Acts 6:2-4.

“It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these gifts among the objects to which they are contributed. They shall have the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation. In matters of special importance affecting the property of the church, they cannot take final action without the approval of the Session and consent of the congregation. In the discharge of their duties the deacons are under the supervision and authority of the Session.” (BCO 9-2).

Nominations

How are officer candidates nominated?

“At such times as determined by the Session, communicant members of the congregation may submit names to the Session, keeping in mind that each prospective officer should be an active male member who meets the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1” (BCO 24-1).

At Cross Creek Church, nomination periods will be announced periodically as needed. In order to nominate someone, both you and the person you are nominating must be a communing member in good standing of our congregation. We also recommend that you first speak to him about his willingness to serve. An Officer Nomination Form is available at <http://crosscreek.us/officers>.

Who should be considered for elder?

“He that fills this office should possess a competency of human learning and be blameless in life, sound in the faith and apt to teach. He should exhibit a sobriety and holiness of life becoming the Gospel. He should rule his own house well and should have a good report of them that are outside the Church” (BCO 8-2).⁸ For more information, please see the Officer Nomination Form: <http://crosscreek.us/officers>.

Who should be considered for deacon?

“To the office of deacon, which is spiritual in nature, shall be chosen men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound judgment” (BCO 9-3)⁹. For more information, please see the Officer Nomination Form: <http://crosscreek.us/officers>.

Can someone currently holding one kind of church office be nominated for another?

⁸ See 1 Tim. 3; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 1; 1 Pet. 5; Acts 20:28ff.

⁹ See 1 Tim. 3:8-13.

Yes. For example, a current deacon can be nominated for elder.

Training and Examination

How are nominees tested and prepared?

Serving as a church officer is a high calling that requires tested godliness and trustworthiness. The process of discerning these qualities involves the Holy Spirit, the congregation, the Session, and the candidates themselves, and takes considerable prayer and time for the nominee and for those surrounding him. Nominees who both qualify and affirm a willingness to serve will begin training (*BCO* 24-1).

What happens after officer training?

“Each nominee shall then be examined in:

- a. his Christian experience, especially his personal character and family management (based on the qualifications set out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9),
- b. his knowledge of Bible content,
- c. his knowledge of the system of doctrine, government, discipline contained in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America (*BCO* Preface III, The Constitution Defined),
- d. the duties of the office to which he has been nominated, and
- e. his willingness to give assent to the questions required for ordination. (*BCO* 24-6)” (*BCO* 24-1).

Election and Ordination

How are officer candidates elected to office?

“If there are candidates eligible for the election, the Session shall report to the congregation those eligible, giving at least thirty (30) days prior notice of the time and place of a congregational meeting for elections.” (see *BCO* 24-1-5). Only communing members in good and regular standing may vote, and a majority vote of those present is required for election.

Once candidates have been elected, how are they ordained?

Following election, the new officers will be ordained and installed in their office at a worship service (see *BCO* 24-6). The officer candidate must affirm the following ordination vows:

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church¹⁰, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
4. Do you accept the office of ruling elder (or deacon, as the case may be) in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the Church of which God has made you an officer?
5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the Church?

The members of the church also affirm the following:

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as a ruling elder (or deacon), and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which his office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this Church, entitles him?

How long does an officer serve?

“Ordination to the offices of ruling elder or deacon is perpetual” (*BCO* 24-7), although there are provisions for sabbaticals and other means of being released from active duty in certain situations.¹¹ At Cross Creek, we encourage officers to periodically take a one year sabbatical (recommended every three years; mandatory after six). A sabbatical is a time of rest from the day-to-day active duties of the office. An officer on sabbatical retains his ordination but is freed from the responsibility to attend regular meetings and does not retain voting privileges.

Please visit <http://crosscreek.us/officers> if you'd like to nominate someone for office.

¹⁰ The *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* can be found at <http://www.pcaac.org/resources/wcf/>.

¹¹ The *BCO* outlines several scenarios for being released from active duty, such as demission (stepping down from office, *BCO* 24-7; 38-2), divestiture (being removed from office without offense, *BCO* 24-7), deposition (being removed from office with offense, *BCO* 24-7), and retirement (being granted emeritus status, *BCO* 24-10).