

What's on your mind?

May a non-elected elder serve as a representative elder?

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Some 200 of our sessions have opted for the term service model of electing elders. Term service means an elder is elected for a six-year term instead of an open-ended life term. At the end of the term, an elder must step down from the session but is immediately eligible to stand for re-election. Once ordained, an elder is ordained for life regardless of the length of service.

Because of term service, an increasing number of congregations have skilled and knowledgeable elders who have finished a term and not been re-elected. Therefore, they are not serving on a session and may be freer to participate in other areas of the life of the church.

From time to time, I am asked if such elders may serve as the congregation's representative or equalizing elders to the presbytery.

When presbytery asks your session to name a representative elder, you might think, "Let's see now. Pete Moss would do a good job. He's not on the session just now so maybe he's got time to get involved at the presbytery level."

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has stated that for an elder to serve as a member of the presbytery, that elder must be currently elected and serving on the session of her/his own congregation. (See *Acts and Proceedings* 2008, page 254.)

Why? Well, for a number of reasons.

When an elder is on the session's constituent roll, that elder is accountable to the session for the work done as an elder. S/he is also directly involved in the governance of the congregation and should, therefore,

be aware of the issues before the session and congregation. However, once an elder is no longer on the constituent roll of the session, that elder will no longer be directly involved the day-to-day decision-making of the session and not as aware of congregation's needs and plans. It stands to reason such an elder would not be able to represent the congregation at the presbytery as well nor with the same degree of accountability as an elder still on the session.

The same is true for, ministers of Word and Sacraments and members of the Order of Diaconal Ministry. They must be members of, and accountable to, a presbytery before they can participate at synod or General Assembly. Those on the appendix to the roll of presbytery, such as retired ministers or ministers without a charge, may not serve at synod or General Assembly.

A related matter currently before the church deals with whether or not non-elected but ordained elders may serve as assessor elders. Assessor elders are appointed by a higher court to assist the work of a lower court. For example, a presbytery may appoint elders from St. Gonnabe to serve on the session of St. Wannabe for a prescribed period of time and for a particular task. It has been suggested that such assessor elders must be members in good standing of the church, but need not be currently serving on a session. Once appointed to another session as assessor elders, they would be considered to be on the constituent roll and, therefore, would be eligible to represent that congregation in the higher courts of the church. A decision on this recommendation is expected to be made at the 2013 General Assembly.

General Assembly

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