

Being a Representative Elder

Session Starter Number 31

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Prayer: (Based on Psalm 40:4)

Happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. Dear God, guide us so we will place our trust in you and resist selfish motives or misguided influences as we seek your will. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Introduction: *Book of Forms* section 114.7

The session will appoint one of its number as representative elder to the presbytery ...

Scripture: Philippians 2:5 NRSV

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus ...

A Brief Commentary:

Paul nudges the Philippians towards nurturing a generous, humble and caring spirit. He concludes these encouraging words by directing them to have the same humility and astounding obedience towards God that was in Jesus.

Reflection:

Every session is to appoint a representative elder to presbytery. This elder is to attend presbytery meetings, take part in presbytery work and keep the session informed of presbytery decisions and actions.

The elder represents the congregation in that s/he conveys questions, concerns or suggestions of the congregation to the presbytery while participating in discussion and voting on recommendations. The elder should not represent the congregation in the sense of arriving at presbytery with his/her mind firmly made up regarding how to vote. This undermines the principle and value of group decision-making. For example, imagine the presbytery considers whether or not to erect a new congregation in Boomtown. Two established congregations in the community are

concerned they will lose members to the new congregation so the sessions advise their representative elders to, "Speak and vote against this recommendation."

Of course, elders, ministers and diaconal ministers mull over ideas of how they think certain presbytery decisions should go. They represent their congregations by expressing these ideas as part of the group discernment. During the meeting, presbyters may hear information that changes their minds so that, despite earlier thoughts, they may come to the new conclusion, for example, to vote in favour of establishing a new congregation. Like the Philippians, we are to pray that we have the mind of Christ as we seek to do God's will.

Some congregations are asked to appoint an equalizing elder as well as a representative elder. An equalizing elder is needed when the total number of ministers or diaconal ministers on the constituent roll of presbytery exceeds the number of pastoral charges. This results in their being more ministers than elders on the roll. Therefore, some congregations are asked to send an extra elder to "equalize" the minister-elder balance.

Congregations may also appoint alternate elders to serve as substitutes if the representative or equalizing elder is unable to attend a meeting.

Please see sections 114.7.1-114.8 and 131-131.6 in the Book of Forms for more information on this subject.

Follow up:

1. Who is our representative elder?
2. Invite this elder talk about what it is like to be a representative elder.
3. What would be the impact of appointing a new representative elder periodically?