

Session Starter 30:

Discerning the call of God to be an elder

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Prayer: (Based on Elder Ordination Prayer)

Almighty God, in every age you choose servants to speak your word and lead your people. We thank you for calling us to serve you as ruling elders. By the power of your Spirit, develop our gifts for ministry. May we seek the mind of Christ in all we do. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduction: *Book of Forms* section 132

Election to the eldership is the call of God, through the congregation, for service in Christ's Church.

Scripture: Mark 1:16 *The Message*

Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They didn't ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed.

A Brief Commentary:

Eugene Peterson's version of this passage provides a fresh impression of this story. Ordinary people doing ordinary work are called to an extraordinary ministry by Christ.

Reflection:

How does an ordinary member of a congregation know if he or she is being called by God to the extraordinary service of an elder? The decision is seldom as clear as having Jesus tap you on the shoulder while you're trolling for trout. Nevertheless, the election process we use is meant to help candidates arrive at a spiritually guided answer.

Sorting out the call of God to eldership is a three-fold discernment process involving the congregation, the session and the candidate.

The congregation should be encouraged to prayerfully and thoughtfully consider the gifts of the candidates and the needs of the congregation. The

discernment of the congregation is expressed through votes. Whether the congregation uses the ballot of nominees or the ballot of members (see *Book of Forms* 132.2), a substantial number of votes from the congregation for an individual can be an indication that God is calling that person.

If using the ballot of nominees, **the session** must prayerfully and thoughtfully consider each person nominated and decide which names to include on the ballot. If using the ballot of members, the session will decide which candidates to approach about serving as an elder based on their suitability for this ministry and the number of votes the candidate receives from the congregation.

Finally, **the candidates** must prayerfully and thoughtfully discern whether or not they believe they have gifts to serve as elders.

When all three levels of discernment say "yes" it can be a pretty clear sign that God is calling an ordinary person to this extraordinary ministry.

Follow up:

1. Invite elders to tell the story of how they discerned God's call to eldership.
2. What do the scriptures say about gifts for the eldership? (See 1 Timothy 4:12, Peter 5:1-5, among other passages)
3. What does The Presbyterian Church in Canada say about requirements for eldership? (See *Book of Forms* sections 132, 106-106.2 and 449-449.4)