

A Session Retreat

The following is an outline that has been used successfully in many congregations. Fill in the details to have a tailor-made retreat for your own congregation.

1. Use an **ice-breaker** to help your group connect with each other, relax and have some fun together.

2. Our Tasks as Elders

On a sheet, create a checklist of some of the important functions of elders:

- * Meet regularly for the purpose of establishing good order and providing pastoral care.
- * Provide policy and procedures for church building and property use.
- * Visit, counsel and encourage members and adherents.
- * Maintain membership, baptism and adherent rolls.
- * Be responsible for instruction and examination of candidates for membership.
- * Be responsible for the provision of baptism.
- * Regulate the hours and forms of public worship.
- * Appoint an organist and other leaders of praise.
- * Be responsible for the Christian education program for persons of all ages.
- * Be responsible for all aspects of stewardship and mission.
- * Support the minister in the performance of his/her duties.
- * Be responsible for the carrying out of duties connected to Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly.

Process:

Divide elders in pairs. Give each pair a list of the tasks listed above. Through conversation, negotiation and consensus, rank each item from 1 to 12 (1 being most important for your congregation). When each pair has finished, create groups of four (two pairs). Compare lists and, again through conversation, negotiation and consensus, create a list that reflects the priorities of the entire group. Form a group with all participants and, once again, create a list on chart paper that reflects the priorities of your entire session.

Ask: *How are we doing as a session? Do the priorities we have listed reflect how we are currently using our time? How can we increase support for areas that are receiving less attention?* Highlight the priority areas on your chart. These will inform your work together in the next year.

3. Sharing Faith

Read sections about sharing faith from *Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief* (The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1984). Suitable sections are 8.1 and 9.1.

Invite elders to participate in an old Quaker activity called "The Four Quaker Questions." This exercise is a non-threatening way to move from well-known experiences to sharing of Christian faith.

In groups of 4, answer the following questions:

- * Where were you living between the ages of seven and twelve and what were the winters like then?
- * How was your home heated during that time?
- * What was the centre of warmth in your life when you were a child? (It could be a place in the house, a time of year, a person, etc.)
- * When did God become a "warm" person to you...and how did it happen?

Here are additional sets of questions, which may be chosen:

- * What was the first prayer you ever learned?
- * Who taught you this prayer? Tell about that person.
- * Tell about a time when you prayed long and hard.
- * Do you think that God answers all our prayers?
- * What has been your favourite trip?
- * What kinds of things do you like to do to get ready for a trip?
- * Finish this sentence: The best thing about trips is...
- * If life is like a trip, where do you think it will end?
- * What is the smallest thing you know?
- * What is the biggest thing you know?
- * Who does God love more, someone with a small faith or someone with a big faith?
- * If you could say something encouraging to someone who has a little faith, what would you say?
- * What is your favourite animal?
- * If you could choose any animal at all for a pet, what would you choose?
- * Name an animal in the Bible.
- * Why do you think that the Bible says that we are like sheep without a shepherd?
- * What is the best gift you have ever received?
- * Have you ever been surprised by a gift? Tell about that.
- * Why do people give each other gifts?
- * Why do we say that God's Holy Spirit is like a gift to us?

4. Conclude your retreat with **worship**.