

# Covenant of Conduct

## Session Starter

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## Prayer

God of love, may mercy, compassion and truth be our companions as we lead and serve this congregation. May we honour the high office of elder by fulfilling the vows we have taken in the service of Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

## Introduction: Book of Forms section 132

Elders should be committed Christians, in regular attendance at public worship, persons of sound judgment, upright character, either knowledgeable or prepared to learn of the government of the church.

## Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:12 NRSV

Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

## A Brief Commentary

Paul writes a letter of instruction and encouragement to Timothy. He thinks of Timothy as a loyal child in the faith. Paul urges the young man not to be intimidated by his seniors but to be, by God's grace, an example to them of Christian faith and behaviour.

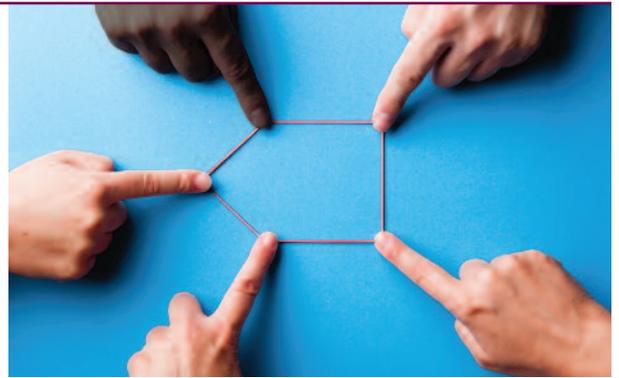
## Reflection

Paul's letter reminds the church of every age that, though all fall short of God's glory, we can be energized by the Holy Spirit to be a positive and effective community.

Book of Forms section 132 reflects that challenging reality by urging elders to be exemplary Christians in the church.

The church is blessed with wonderful elders. Congregations are led and served by people who exemplify grace, wisdom and generosity – who are kind, thoughtful and supportive.

But Christians, even elders, can submit to the temptation of unethical behaviour. Elders sometimes



forget what they promised to God and the church when they were ordained.

What can be done to help elders honour their high calling? One possibility is for a session to adopt a covenant of conduct.

For example, a session could consider the ordination vows (Book of Forms 449) their covenant of conduct. Each year, the session could review and reflect on how the vows affect their role in the church.

A session might adopt a passage of scripture, such as Galatians 5:22-23, for a covenant of conduct. Once or twice a year, elders could share how another elder has shown love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control during the meeting or in the life of the pastoral charge.

A session could write its own covenant of conduct that includes promises such as to:

- read a portion of the Bible daily
- pray for the congregation, elders and minister daily
- listen with openness to new ideas
- let decisions be guided by faith, hope, love
- support decisions even when you disagree
- honour the confidentiality of the session
- declare possible conflict of interest
- support the mission of the congregation
- help provide pastoral care and leadership
- comply with the governance of the denomination ... and so on.

Perhaps such a covenant will encourage elders to live and work in a spirit of the unity of Christ.

## Follow up:

1. What would be the value of a Covenant of Conduct for a session?
2. Should we consider creating such a covenant?