

What's on your mind?

May elders be elected as a slate?

**Don Muir, Associate Secretary
General Assembly Office**

May elders be elected as a slate? Is it permissible for a session to present a list of names to the congregation and say, "Here are the people we think should serve the congregation on the session. Please vote yes or no for the group"?

Electing elders is one of the most important tasks a Presbyterian congregation performs. The life and ministry of the faith community is greatly enhanced when committed women and men are chosen to this servant-leader role. *Living Faith*, a statement of Christian belief that was adopted as a subordinate standard of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, reminds us of the significant scope of elder responsibility.

Through the office of ruling elder, men and women are ordained to share with the minister in the leadership, pastor care, and oversight of the congregation.

Living Faith 7.2.4

The minister is not solely responsible for the mission and ministry of a congregation. Elders are expected to walk alongside the minister to help the congregation be a community where Christian faith, hope and love are generously nurtured and shared. Electing elders with God-given gifts to lead and serve is a wonderful act of discernment for any Presbyterian congregation.

Section 132 of the Book of Forms outlines how we elect elders. (See this section for details.) There are two kinds of ballots. One is a Ballot of Members. The Ballot of Members carries the name of every member of the congregation except for those already on the session. An election process is followed that guides the session as they decide who they will ask to consider becoming an elder.

The other kind of ballot is the Ballot of Nominees. The Ballot of Nominees contains the names of members of the congregation who have been nominated to stand for election to this office. For example, a ballot with the names of five elder nominees could be distributed to the members of the congregation as one step in the election.

It is at this point, some sessions are tempted to ask the congregation to vote for the elders as a slate. In other words, the list of candidates is presented as a block and the members are asked to simply vote yes, I accept this list of candidates or no, I don't accept this list of candidates.

Voting by slate limits the intended opportunity for discernment. As you may know, electing elders is meant to be a three-fold process of discernment. The candidate, the congregation and the session, ponder and pray about whether or not the candidate has God-given gifts for eldership. To be presented with a slate hampers the congregation's discernment. Members are put in a position of either voting for all the candidates, even if they have reservations about one or more of them, or rejecting the entire group. When the Ballot of Nominees is used as intended, members, after prayerful and thoughtful consideration, mark only the names of those they believe have gifts for eldership. It might be, in this example, all five, none of them, or any number in between. In the end, the session tallies the results and admits only those deemed to have received strong enough support from the congregation to confirm this as a call from God.