

## Church Elders - God's Provision

What comes to mind when you hear these terms - Friend, Confidant, Counselor, Advocate, Mediator, Encourager, Leader, Advisor, Family? These terms are all very positive in their definition and beneficial to an individual who embraces someone of this character. There are probably several people in our lives that could be described in this way. Who of us does not want a friend, confidant, counselor, advocate, mediator, encourager, leader, advisor, or family in our lives? But oftentimes, we don't realize or remember that this describes the Pastor and Elders of the church. Another question is "Do we recognize and acknowledge them as such"?

The term "Elder" (which includes the Pastor) is well defined in scripture and inspired by God as "an official and leader in the early Christian Church". In both the Old and New Testaments, the term "elder" indicates one of advanced age (Hebrew. zaqen [eqz]; Greek presbyteros [presbuvtero']) who had an office of leadership within the people of God. There are at least 30 bible passages which reference the title "Elder" and which provide guidance as to their qualifications and responsibilities. In Acts 6:1-7, the disciples recognized the need for "Brothers" who would assist in leadership roles to help remove the burden from those sharing the gospel. Later, these brothers are referred to as "Elders" or "those in authority". The terms "Elders" and "Overseers", are used interchangeably but there is a difference between the two terms.

- (1) The term *elder*, stresses the **dignity** and **position** of this ministry in the church.
- (2) On the other hand, *overseer* stresses the **function** and **work** of an elder.

Probably the most important function or work of the Elder is described in Hebrews 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for **they keep watch over your souls** as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.* Also in Acts 20:28, it says, *(Elders) Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

How many times have we felt the need to confide in someone, to counsel with someone, to have a caring person help us through a trial or to pray for us, to have someone we could call "Friend"? We have those resources at Bethany through the Pastor and Elders. Do you know your Elders? Have you reached out to them either in need or in support though prayer? The responsibility and challenges they face have only increased as we live in a world that is more driven by a "Me" philosophy.

But what is it that defines an Elder? We find this in Titus 1:6-11 *6 An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7 Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. 8 Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. 10 For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. 11 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain.*

At Bethany, our Elders are selected by the Pastor after consulting with the serving Elders, and are then approved by the members of the congregation. In this selection and approval process, the Elders are empowered with, and tasked to perform, their responsibilities. In 1 Peter 5:1-4 it says, *To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve.* However, even though there is a process to select Elders within the church, Elders are, in fact, chosen as overseers by the Holy Spirit, as noted above in Acts 20:28.

As the Elders perform their called and designated responsibilities, the congregation also has a responsibility. That responsibility is found in Hebrews 13:7 *Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.* Also in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 *But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and James 5:14 *Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.* When Paul instructed Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:17, he taught, *“The Elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching”.* So, the Pastor and Elders are not just to be honored, but “are to be considered worthy of double honor”. This is a great calling and expectation for all the members of the congregation.*

Would you like a friend, confidant, counselor, advocate, mediator, encourager, leader, advisor, or be part of a church family? Reach out to your Pastor and Elders, support them in their work, be responsive to them, pray for them, and look to them for help as they “watch for your souls” and perform the tasks God has set down for them.

Submitted by Bethany Lutheran Church Elders

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