

**Central Valley Evangelical Reformed Church
Of
Modesto, California Inc.**

**OFFICIAL CONSTITUTION
Adopted July 2004**

ARTICLE I NAME

The name of this church shall be Central Valley Evangelical Reformed Church.

ARTICLE II FOUNDATION AND PURPOSE

1. The **FOUNDATION** of this Church is the Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor 3:11) who provides guidance for all its affairs through the Word of God and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in believers. This Church does hereby affirm its faith that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in the original autographs are the infallible, inerrant, and inspired Word of God (Mark 13:31).

2. The **PURPOSE** of this church is to glorify God through submission to His Word in true worship, proclaiming grace in Christ to sinners, and building up the saints through doctrinal and applicatory preaching of the whole counsel of God, and faithful observance of Christ's sacraments

ARTICLE III GOVERNMENT & AFFILIATION

1. The **AUTHORITY** and Cornerstone of this church is Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:23). Therefore, we acknowledge no human ecclesiastical authority. We embrace the Old and New Testaments as the only final and binding authority given to us by Christ for all matters relating to faith and practice. (Isa. 8:20; John 8:31; II Tim. 1:13; 4:1-4; I Tim. 6:3).

2. The **GOVERNMENT** of this church shall be a plurality and a parity of Elders chosen and submitted to according to the principles outlined in Appendix A. The Elders are at all times subject to the authority of Scripture (II Cor. 1:24; 2:17; 4:1-5; I Cor. 4:1-2; I Tim. 5:19-21).

3. The **AFFILIATION** of this church shall be on a case-by-case basis with other like-minded churches in matters of mutual faith, interest, and concern (II Cor. 8:18-24).

ARTICLE IV MEMBERSHIP

1. **QUALIFICATIONS.** The membership of this Church shall consist of persons who:

Agree to the beliefs and practices of this church as set forth in this Constitution

Substantially subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith

Does not contradict their profession through their manner of life (Matt. 7:22-23)

Have been lawfully baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19)

Considers their permanent residence to be in our geographical region (Eph. 1:1)
Submits themselves to the government of this church (Philemon 2; Heb. 13:7,17)
And who are received by the recommendation of the Elders.

A. ADMISSION OF MEMBERS.

Members shall be received by the statement of their faith, their letter from another church of like faith, or restoration after discipline upon satisfactory evidence being given of Scriptural repentance and confession to the church. If the applicant is, or has been, a member of another church, special effort will be made to determine the person's standing in that church and his or her reasons for leaving (Acts 15:1-2 with 24-25). If a former church raises an objection that the Elders consider valid, the applicant may be denied membership at their discretion (III John 8-10).

B. INSTRUCTION TO NEW MEMBERS.

All persons uniting with this Church in any of the ways set forth in Section A above shall previously, by the Elders, be made acquainted with the Church Constitution and the Westminster Confession of Faith.

2. MEMBERSHIP: A member is any member who is not under church discipline and regularly attends the services of the church. A member shall not be considered a regular attendee if he or she has missed the weekly gathering of the Body for a period of three months or more for reasons other than illness, emergencies, vacation, business, education away from home, or any other unintentional hindrance.

A. COMMUNICANT MEMBERS

The elders of the church recognize, though admitting all persons into membership who meet the qualifications of Section I above, that the head of the household is responsible before God for the spiritual condition of that household. The head of the household therefore makes recommendations to the elders concerning members of his household with regard to the Lord's Supper. Under the headship of Christ, the administration of church sacraments (or ordinances) remains with the elders. However, in such administration, the elders are to respect the spiritual responsibility of the head of the household.

B. NON-COMMUNICANT MEMBERS

Children of member households who have not yet come to the Lord's Table, are recognized by the elders of the church to be non-communicant members.

3. DISCIPLINE. This church shall employ discipline according to the Scriptural directives outlined in the grievance procedure below. Discipline may be occasioned by any Scriptural cause, including, but not limited to, teaching doctrine contrary to this constitution and the Westminster Confession of Faith, unrepentant, sinful behavior as described by the Bible, or unwillingness to reconcile with an aggrieved brother or sister. All discipline will be conducted in Christian love for the purpose of complete restoration, with the only reason for dismissal being the refusal to repent (Matt 18:15-17, 1Cor 5:1-4, James 5:19-20).

A. CONTRARY TEACHING

If a member deliberately persists in the propagation of serious doctrinal error contrary to Scripture, or attempts to sow discord among the Body, the Elders will confront the member in love and with patience according to the Word of God (I Cor. 1:10-4:21; Titus 3:10). If, after receiving admonition from the Elders, a member persists in such behavior, the Elders shall report the situation to the church at a specially called meeting.

B. UNREPENTANT, SINFUL BEHAVIOR

Some misconduct on the part of a member is so detrimental to the unity, holiness and testimony of the church that the Lord requires public reproof to be accompanied by the suspension of some or all of the privileges of membership appropriate to the nature and gravity of the offense (Rom. 16:17-20; II Thess. 3:14-15; 1 Corinthians 5). Upon learning of such behavior, the Elders shall confront the member in love and with patience according to the Word of God. If, after receiving admonition from the Elders, a member persists in such behavior, the Elders shall report the situation to the church at a specially called meeting.

C. FORMAL DISCIPLINARY MEETING

Should the Elders deem it necessary to convene a formal disciplinary meeting, the Elders shall report their findings and disciplinary measures to be taken. In all cases of suspension the offending person is still to be regarded as a brother or sister in Christ and as a member of the church, and not as a wicked individual cut off from fellowship (Matt. 18:17-18; II Thess. 3:15). See Section IV. E. below regarding dismissal.

4. REVOCATION OF MEMBERSHIP

A. Physical Death

When a member dies, his or her name shall automatically be removed from the membership records (Heb. 12:23).

B. By Transfer

If requested, the Elders will grant to a departing member in good standing, a letter of transfer to the fellowship of another church (Acts 18:27). No such letter may be given to a member who is at the time under the corrective discipline of this church; rather, the church requesting a letter shall be notified of the discipline. The Elders may refuse, on a case-by-case basis, to grant a letter of transfer to any church which is, in their judgment, disloyal to "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3) or which does not exercise godly care over its members.

C. By Resignation

Membership in this church is entered into and initiated jointly by voluntary commitment from the individual applicant and acceptance by the church. Accordingly, it follows that members cannot terminate their membership unilaterally under all circumstances. As a general rule, a member may voluntarily resign from membership peaceably in an orderly manner. However, a resignation offered by a person guilty of sin, which calls for corrective discipline, is not valid, and the church may proceed with discipline as outlined in Section III (Acts 15:24; I John 2:18-19 with II John 7-11).

D. By Lack of Attendance

In the unlikely event a member ceases to regularly attend the stated meetings of the church, every effort will be made to determine the cause of absence. Should a member fail to attend for three months, the Elders may place the member on an inactive list. At all times, effort will be made to restore and reconcile a member to the Body.

E. By Dismissal

According to the teachings of Scripture, a congregation must cut off from its fellowship and visible membership any person who refuses to repent and submit to scriptural discipline of Matthew 18:15-17 as set forth in Section IV. As a general practice,

dismissal will be considered if a suspended member has not been reconciled to the church after a period of three months.

5. DISCLOSURE

Central Valley Evangelical Reformed Church does not exist in isolation from, but is a part of all true churches (Gal 1:13, 22; Eph 3:21). Accordingly, open and forthright communication among churches is vital for the purity, peace, edification, and unity of the Bride of Christ. Therefore the Elders may, at their discretion, disclose to the members of the Central Valley Evangelical Reformed Church and to other like-minded churches the circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated (Acts 15:24; 1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17; 4:10).

Central Valley Evangelical Reformed Church does not exist in isolation from society at large. Accordingly, it has a moral obligation both to act with integrity and to maintain its testimony before the civil authorities and society in general (2 Cor 8:20-21). Therefore, the Elders may, at their discretion, disclose to persons outside the ecclesiastical circles mentioned above the circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated (Lev 5:1; Prov 29:24; Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 4:15).

Termination of membership does not give license to former members to sow discord, to spread false teachings or slander, or to engage in any other behavior that threatens the peace and unity of this church or all true churches. Accordingly, when it is established that a member is behaving divisively, the Elders may issue whatever warnings they deem appropriate to preserve the peace and harmony of this congregation and to all true churches (Acts 15:24; Rom 16:17-20; 1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17; 4:14-15).

6. APPEAL. Notwithstanding any of the provisions above, members shall of the right of appeal any decisions of the session to the presbytery in accordance with the book of church order.

7. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE. The three steps of Matthew 18:15-17 are to be followed as outlined below:

FIRST: The aggrieved member must first, alone, address the offending member, clearly stating the offense in love and gentleness.

SECOND: Should the offending member fail to acknowledge the offense, the aggrieved member shall return in the company of two or three witnesses to again address the offending member in love and gentleness.

THIRD: Should the offending member still fail to acknowledge the offense, the aggrieved member and witnesses shall bring the matter before the Elders, in accordance with the procedural elements of the book of church order. Should the Elders unanimously agree with the aggrieved member and witnesses, they shall follow the guidelines below. In the event that the offense is against one of the Elders, unanimity shall be required only among the remaining Elders.

ARTICLE V CHURCH ADMINISTRATION

1. GENERAL STATEMENT. The official leaders of the Church shall be Elders and Deacons as outlined in **Appendices A and B**. All other appointees, teachers, and committee members shall be appointed by, and serve under, the supervision of the Elders and shall be active members in good standing. All decisions of the Elders shall require unanimous consensus, except for the unique disciplinary situation described below under **Article V, Section 1, Part B**.

A. Calling a New Teaching Elder. Upon vacancy of the teaching Elder the remaining Elders shall be the Pulpit Committee and may seek the input of the Deacons and the congregation. Until the preaching vacancy has been filled, the remaining Elders shall in the interim preach or invite a preaching elder from another Body. Should it be necessary to go outside the Body, any person invited to fill the preaching Elder position shall meet all of the requirements as outlined in Appendix A, and receive unanimous nomination by the existing elders.

B. Dismissing an Elder. If there has been an offense between a member and Elder, the aggrieved member is expected to follow the procedure outlined in **Article IV, Section 7**. The accusing member and witnesses are to bring the issue to the remaining Elders and then prayerfully and diligently wait upon them and their decision. Should witnesses be presented, a thorough investigation must be made that all judgment be righteous (Jn 7:24). Elders who walk sinfully must not be spared but be rebuked before the whole congregation (1 Tim 5:20; Lev 4:22,27). This must be done to bring godly fear of sin before all (Gen 39:9; Ps 19:13). If there is repentance before or after this step, the remaining Elders are to decide whether or not the Elder should remain in his position. In either case, if the remaining Elders decide that the offending Elder should resign or remain, a specially called meeting will be called to announce the decision and present the grounds upon which the decision was made. Should an Elder be asked to resign, the church will as a general rule continue any previous compensation plan for a period of one month following dismissal.

C. Severance. Should the teaching Elder resign in good standing, when possible, a severance pay of one week per year of service, with minimum of 4 weeks will be given. The teaching Elder is expected to give the church at least one month's notice.

2. COMMUNICATION. The Elders shall regularly communicate to the congregation at a specially called meeting their decisions regarding unbudgeted expenditures, appointments, and recommendations for Elders or Deacons. The Elders may, at any time, determine an issue of significant importance to convene the church membership. Should a member believe a decision to be so egregious that it merits discipline, the member shall follow the guidelines given in **Article IV, Section 7**.

3. EMPLOYEES. The Elders may, as the situation warrants, hire employees to meet church needs. The Elders shall be responsible for determining the duties of and hiring such personnel.

ARTICLE VI CHURCH FINANCES

1. FUNDRAISING. No method of raising funds shall be entertained which solicits money from non-believers (3 John 5-8).

2. CONTRIBUTIONS. All money contributed to the church shall be duly recorded and deposited by any volunteers the Elders or Deacons may appoint. Weekly reports will be given to the Elder overseeing finances, as well as any other people he directs.

- 3. FINANCIAL PLANNING.** The Elders shall determine the budget for the year on an annual basis. The Elders shall make available upon request the church budget.
- 4. TRUSTEES.** The Elder overseeing finance may appoint members in addition to himself who will serve as trustees for the Church. These trustees will be the agents of process.
- 5. AUTHORITY TO BIND THE CHURCH.** Only the Elders have authority, in accordance with this Constitution, and any other applicable state or federal laws, to execute legal documents relating to real estate, church property, and church finances.
- 6. REPORTS/AUDITS.** Financial reports shall be kept for a period of seven years and made available to any member upon request.

ARTICLE VII CHURCH PROPERTY

In the event of a division of this Church, the property and assets of this Church shall belong to that group of division that represents the largest portion of the membership recognizing this constitution.

ARTICLE VIII REVISIONS & AMENDMENTS

The Constitution shall be amended upon recommendation of the Elders. All revisions, additions and amendments shall be recorded in the official business meeting minutes stating the original wording and the revised, added or amended wording in the new constitution.

ARTICLE IX MEETINGS

- 1. WORSHIP.** Public services shall be held every Sunday, barring any unforeseen circumstances. The Elders may, at their discretion, initiate other church services during the week.
- 2. FOR BUSINESS.**
 - A. The Annual Meeting.** An annual meeting shall be held some time during the last quarter of the calendar year for the purpose of announcing appointed positions, recognizing new Deacons and new Elders, and reviewing other business.
 - B. Special Meetings.** The Elders may call for a special meeting. Notice of the meeting shall be given two weeks in advance from the pulpit, the particular object of such meeting being clearly stated in the notice. In the case of an emergency, the meeting can be called within a shorter period of time if the entire active membership has been contacted by telephone or mail.

ARTICLE X INDEMNIFICATION CLAUSE

- 1. RIGHT OF INDEMNITY.** To the fullest extent permitted by law, this corporation shall indemnify its Directors, officers, employees, agents, and other persons described in Section 9246(a) of the California Corporations Code, including persons formerly occupying any such

position, against all expenses, judgments, fines, settlements and other amounts actually and reasonably incurred by them in connection with any "proceeding," as that term is used in that Section of the California Corporations Code, and including an action by or in the right of the corporation, by reason of the fact that the person is or was a person described in that Section. "Expenses," as used in this Bylaw Section, shall have the same meaning as in Section 9246(a) of the California Corporations Code.

2. APPROVAL OF INDEMNITY. On written request to the Officers of the Corporation by any person seeking indemnification under Section 9246(b) or Section 9246(c) of the California Corporations Code, the Officers of the Corporation shall promptly determine under Section 9246(e) of the California Corporations Code whether the applicable standard of conduct set forth in Section 9246(b) or Section 9246(c) has been met and, if so, the Officers of the Corporation shall authorize indemnification. If the Officers of the Corporation cannot authorize indemnification because the number of Directors who are parties to the proceeding with respect to which indemnification is sought prevents the formation of a quorum of Directors who are not parties to that proceeding, the Officers of the Corporation shall promptly call a meeting of members. At that meeting the members shall determine under Corporations Code section 9246(e) whether the applicable standard of conduct has been met and, if so, the members present at the meeting in person or by proxy shall authorize indemnification. If the members are unable to authorize indemnification, application to authorize indemnification may be made to the court in which the proceeding is or was pending.

3. ADVANCEMENT OF EXPENSES. To the fullest extent permitted by law, and except as otherwise determined by the Officers of the Corporation, in a specific instance, expenses incurred by a person seeking indemnification under this Article in defending any proceeding covered by this Article shall be advanced by the corporation before final disposition of the proceeding, on receipt by the corporation of an undertaking by or on behalf of that person that the advance will be repaid unless it is ultimately determined that the person is entitled to be indemnified by the corporation for those expenses.

4. INDEMNIFICATION CONSISTENT WITH CORPORATIONS CODE. No provision made by this corporation to indemnify its officers or Directors for the defense of any proceeding, whether contained in the *Articles of Incorporation*, this *Constitution*, a resolution of the Board of Directors, an agreement, or otherwise, shall be valid unless it is consistent with this Constitution, and with Section 9246 of the California Corporations Code.

5. INAPPLICABILITY TO CERTAIN FIDUCIARIES. This Article regarding indemnification does not apply to any proceeding against a trustee, investment manager, or other fiduciary of an employee benefit plan in such person's capacity as such, even though such person may also be an agent of the corporation as that term is defined in Section 9246(a) of the California Corporations Code. This corporation shall have the power to indemnify such a trustee, investment manager, or other fiduciary to the extent permitted by Section 207(f) of the California Corporations Code.

Appendix A

Central Valley Evangelical Reformed Church Eldership

Elder

Definition

The word "pastor" is, interestingly enough, found only once in the Bible in Ephesians 4:11-12: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry". The word translated "pastor" in Ephesians 4 is the Greek word "poimenas" which literally means "shepherds". In all other fifteen New Testament occurrences, "poimen" is translated "shepherd". Pastoring is something that is done; it is not a title. To pastor is to shepherd and thus reflect Christ's role as the Chief Shepherd - a protector of the flock which is the Body of Christ.

We do, however, in Scripture find a title given to leaders of the church. Namely, "Elder". The words translated as "Elder" in the New Testament are "presbuteros" and "episkopos". And of all passages which use these words, none are more relevant than I Timothy 3 and Titus I which each describe the qualifications of Elders (See qualifications below).

Role

An Elder, as shepherd, is a protector. In Acts 20, Paul sends for the Elders of the church at Ephesus. It is important to note that he does not call the "pastors" but rather the "Elders" to meet with him. As Paul tells Titus in Titus 1:5, the work of establishing the churches in Crete was not finished since Titus was to "appoint Elders in every city."

It seems obvious, then, that the leaders of the church were Elders who were gifted with the responsibility to pastor or shepherd the local bodies. This is confirmed by Paul's comment to the Ephesian Elders in Acts 20:28: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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." Additionally, we find this in 1 Peter 5:1-4: "The Elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow Elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."

Plurality of Shepherd Elders

Of the few references we have, Biblically, to Elders, all describe the leadership of the early church as being a plurality of Elders. We have already seen that Paul called the multiple "Elders" of the Ephesian church. Acts 14 describes the appointment of "Elders" in every church. According to Acts 16 there were multiple Elders at Jerusalem who united with the twelve apostles to consider the doctrinal controversy introduced in Acts 15. Titus is to "appoint Elders in every city", and James encourages those who are sick to "call for the Elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14).

It becomes obvious, after a careful, methodical review of the New Testament, that the leadership structure of the early church was a plurality of shepherding Elders. We can see, given the fallibility of human nature, that collective leadership provides a church with a balance of gifts and wisdom. In a pyramidal structure of organization, the important balancing of one another's weaknesses and strengths normally does not occur. When someone is moved atop a pyramid, that person no longer has colleagues, only subordinates and advisors.

With a plurality of Elders, however, different Elders complement one another, balancing weaknesses and strengths. If one Elder has a tendency to be too matter-of-fact and emotionless with people, the others can temper his harshness, If one Elder dislikes confrontation, the others can press for action should the need arise. Elders who are more doctrinally discerning can sharpen those who are more prayer-minded.

The concept of a pastor, above the Elders, has been justified by some under the concept of "first among equals". Of those who followed Jesus, Christ chose twelve disciples, and from those twelve He singled out three. On key occasions, Jesus chose only Peter, James and John to accompany Him to witness His power, glory, and agony. In all four lists of the apostles' names, Peter's name is always first. Matthew even calls Peter "the first" in Matthew 10:2, and Paul acknowledges Peter, James, and John as the "pillars" of the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9).

However, though Peter was often the chief speaker, a natural leader, and the pillar of the church, he possessed no legal or official rank or title above the other eleven. The other apostles were not his subordinates, nor were they his "staff" or team of assistants. Peter is never called the "senior apostle". Much to the contrary, in 1 Peter 5:1, Peter exhorts the Elders of the church among whom he considered himself "a fellow Elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed."

It is obvious that some of the Elders will be perceived as more visible leaders of the local church, just as Peter, James and John were. Paul said this to Timothy in I Tim 5:17-18: "Let the Elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain', and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" Paul acknowledged that though all Elders are to be able to teach the Word, not all are able to work fully at preaching and teaching. Those who do should be properly acknowledged by the church, even to the extent that they are paid.

It should be cautioned that Elders who are first among their equals are not to do all the thinking and decision-making for the group, nor are they the "pastors" while the others are merely "Elders". To call one Elder "pastor" and the rest "Elders" is to act without Biblical precedence. To do so can easily result, not in Biblical Eldership, but instead in the separation in office between teaching Elder and other Elders as took place in the second century of the church. While we have allowed the title "Pastor" within the auspices of Central Valley Evangelical Reformed Church, we strongly encourage members to remember and guard against the temptation of seeing this as a separation between elders.

Principle #1: Historic, Biblical church government is a plurality of Elders, each co-equal in status, but assigned areas of responsibility in accordance with their gifts

Principle #2: Those Elders who are able to dedicate a greater effort to the preaching and teaching of God's Word are worthy to be supported financially by the church

Qualifications

No more complete list of qualifications for Eldership exists in Scripture than in 1 Timothy 3:2-7, Titus 1:6-9, and I Peter 5:1-3. These qualifications are enumerated and explained below:

1) Above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6):

Nearly all of the qualifications in Timothy and Titus relate to the Elder Candidate's moral and spiritual qualities. Thus, it is appropriate that Paul begins both of his lists with the statement that a Candidate must be "above reproach". What is meant by this term is clarified by the character qualities that follow in the subsequent verses. Additionally, to "reproach" is to cast blame. The Candidate must therefore be above blame with regard to character and his relationships with others, especially family. This implies, as Paul will state at the end of his list in 1 Timothy, that a potential Elder must possess a good reputation within the church and outside the church.

Principle #3: A man will only be nominated to the position of Elder Candidate after he has earned a good reputation among the church members. Any person recruited from outside Central Valley Evangelical Reformed Church to the position of preaching Elder must have a similarly good reputation in his current church

Principle #4: A potential Elder Candidate must have a good reputation in the community as reflected by the respect of his family, friends, neighbors, peers, and co-workers.

2) **The husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6):**

This phrase has been an issue of debate in the church for centuries. Some have interpreted this as meaning "married only once." But most commentators agree that it means monogamy--only one wife at one time--and that the Overseer must be completely faithful to his wife.

In reality, Paul sets a high standard for Elders. Given that ancient society was often polygamous, respect for women and fidelity toward them was not a high priority. Paul says that, in an Elder, fidelity is of first priority. Why? Consider this illustration given in Eph. 5:22-27: "Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that she should be holy and without blemish."

The analogy is unmistakable. A godly, Christian marriage is to illustrate to the lost world Christ's relationship to the church. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved His Bride, the Church. This is faithfulness of the highest kind, since Jesus laid down His life for His Bride. How could we not expect a leader of the Church to reflect a pure example of this testimony in his own marriage?

With regard to single men, the overarching principle of "above reproach" must hold sway. Paul was single and was able to commit himself completely to ministry. He would say in 1 Cor 7:32: "He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord--how he may please the Lord." Remaining unmarried, then, was as virtuous as being married. Furthermore, Paul felt qualified to give advice on the issues of marriage, even though he himself was single. In 1 Cor 7:25-26, Paul says: "Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy." In other words, Paul's advice was made

trustworthy because it reflected God's wisdom. The argument that a single man can not advise married men simply would not be supported by Paul's example.

Divorced men present a more difficult case. It is important to remember that Mal 2:16 reads: "For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence." Matthew 19, for example, makes it clear that God's design does not include divorce and that Moses only permitted it because of sin or the "hardness of heart". Because the position of Elder is to be above reproach divorced men will only be nominated to candidacy on a case by case basis.

Principle 5: A potential Elder Candidate, if he is married must evidence a marriage of faithful love and monogamy

3) Having children who are faithful, who are not given to the charge of being wild or disobedient (Titus 1:6):

The NIV and NASB translations render the word "pista" in Titus 1:6 as "believe". If one examines the use of this adjective in the Pastoral Epistles, it is quickly discovered that every other time the word is rendered "faithful". Thus, the KJV and NKJV translation of "pista" as "faithful" in this verse is likely best. It is because the children are faithful in honoring their mother and father that they are not given to the charge of being wild or disobedient. Again, the emphasis here, as with marriage, is credibility. Because the Elder must shepherd and lead the flock, it is important that his role as a father reflects godly shepherding of his family. As Paul writes in 1 Tim 3:4-6, an Elder "must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of Gods church?)."

The words "wild" and "disobedient" suggest consistent, willfully bad behavior. Certainly, a man cannot be held to the impossible standard of having perfect children. However, he should be expected to discipline, train, and manage his children. Each man's family must be evaluated on its own merits.

Principle #6: A potential Elder Candidate, if he is a parent with children in the home, must evidence a family in which the children are faithful and not given to consistent, willfully disobedient behavior

4) Temperate (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7):

The word used for "temperate" is "nephaios" and is only found in the Pastoral Epistles. It literally means "not mixed with wine." Titus 1:7 clarifies the issue by saying more specifically "not addicted to wine". Thus, being temperate is more about self-control than it is about abstinence.

5) Self-Controlled (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7):

Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit and, most would agree, one of the most difficult disciplines to develop. Thus, Elders must be mature in the exercise of their appetites and wills, subordinating all things of the flesh to the ruling of the Spirit. Titus 1 describes such a leader as "not overbearing, not quick, not given to drunkenness, not violent, and not pursuing dishonest gain."

6) Hospitable (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8):

In Titus, Paul describes hospitality as the opposite of an overbearing, quick-tempered and violent attitude. Those who are hospitable tend to elevate the needs of others above their own. Because of this, their interpersonal skills are such that people enjoy being around them. Furthermore, an Elder welcomes such people, being hospitable to them in all circumstances.

Principle #7: A potential Elder Candidate must be self-controlled with respect to alcohol, money, and time

Principle #8: A potential Elder must be hospitable and skilled in working with people

7) Not fond of sordid gain (Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1):

Peter's admonition in 1 Peter 5 is particularly appropriate: "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; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." In other words, the motivation behind desiring the position of an Elder, which Paul describes in Titus as "desiring a good work", must not be for personal gain. Too many Elders see their position as a vocation. The moment that the Eldership becomes simply a money-making job, is the moment that a man is serving self rather than the flock. Greediness will be revealed in other areas as well. Do the possessions, home, secondary vocation, and standard of living reflect a heart that is greedy? Is the potential Elder generous, recognizing that all that he owns was given to him by God?

Principle 9: A potential Elder Candidate must evidence a life that is neither tied to possessions nor engaged in an unhealthy pursuit of wealth

8) Able to Provide an Example (1 Peter 5:3):

An Elder must be an example of Christian living that others will want to imitate. If a man is not a godly model for others to follow, he cannot be an Elder even if he is a good teacher and manager. Paul gave us these admonitions: Phil 3:17-18: "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern"; I Cor 11:1: "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ"; and 2 Thess 3:7-9: "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toll night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us." One of the greatest ways to inspire and influence others is through personal example; character and deed, not title or position, are what really count.

Principle #10: A potential Elder Candidate must demonstrate consistent wisdom in day-to-day living, serving as a model of Christ to other believers

9) Able to Teach and Defend the Faith (1 Timothy 3:6; Titus 1:9):

Perhaps no other qualification is as important as this one. When the apostles determined, in Acts 6, that they could not devote the time and energy to solve some of the practical, administrative concerns of the church, it was because they felt their responsibility was to dedicate themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word."

An Elder must be able to teach and defend the faith. It doesn't matter how successful a businessman he is, how eloquently he speaks, or how intelligent he is. If the Elder isn't firmly committed to Biblical doctrine, able to instruct others and able to discern falsehood, then he does not qualify as an Elder. Paul says in Titus 1:9 that an Elder must "hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching." Why? Because he must be able "to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict."

I Timothy encourages that an Elder not be a recent convert because he may be easily enticed by false doctrine. The "teaching" of Titus 1:9 is that which was given to the churches through the prophets, Christ, and apostles. Since the local church is the "pillar and support of the truth" as Paul describes in I Timothy 3:15, its leaders must be rock-solid pillars of truth and discernment or the house will crumble. An Elder must demonstrate a love for the Bible that is evidenced by years of study and the promise of a lifetime of devotion to God's Word.

Principle #11: A potential Elder Candidate must not be a recent convert

Principle #12: A potential Elder Candidate must demonstrate a firm understanding of historic, Biblical doctrine and prove himself able to teach the Body and refute those who contradict Biblical truth

Principles of Eldership

Principle #1: Historic, Biblical church government is a plurality of Elders, each co-equal in status, but assigned areas of responsibility in accordance with their gifts

Principle #2: Those Elders who are able to dedicate a greater effort to the preaching and teaching of God's Word are worthy to be supported financially by the church

Principle #3: A man will only be nominated to the position of Elder Candidate after he has earned a good reputation among the church members. Any person recruited from outside Central Valley Evangelical Reformed Church to the position of preaching Elder must have a similarly good reputation in his current church

Principle #4: A potential Elder Candidate must have a good reputation in the community as reflected by the respect of his family, friends, neighbors, peers, and co-workers.

Principle 5: A potential Elder Candidate, if he is married must evidence a marriage of faithful love and monogamy

Principle #6: A potential Elder Candidate, if he is a parent with children in the home, must evidence a family in which the children are faithful and not given to consistent, willfully disobedient behavior

Principle #7: A potential Elder Candidate must be self-controlled with respect to alcohol, money, and time

Principle #8: A potential Elder must be hospitable and skilled in working with people

Principle 9: A potential Elder Candidate must evidence a life that is neither tied to possessions nor engaged in an unhealthy pursuit of wealth

Principle #10: A potential Elder Candidate must demonstrate consistent wisdom in day-to-day living, serving as a model of Christ to other believers

Appointment of Elders

Rule 1: The Elders shall be responsible for recommending to the church new Elder Candidates:

According to I Timothy 5:17 it is the Elders who "direct the affairs of the church". The word "direct" is "prohistemi" which means "lead" or "manage". Thus, in important spiritual matters such as selecting, examining, and recommending Elder Candidates, the existing Elders should direct the entire process. It is vital that Elders recognize that God works in some men to desire to shepherd the flock. If a man desires to be an Elder, he "desires a good work" according to Paul. If his motives are pure and he is qualified, then the Elders are obligated to see that such a person is not frustrated in his desire.

For this reason, a good Eldership will be praying and looking for capable men to join them and will be conscientiously training and preparing men for future leadership. As Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others." Ideally, long before the church examines a prospective Elder, he will have been mentored by the Elders and watched by the congregation. The key to reproducing leadership is to clearly plan for it.

Rule 2: Prospective Elder Candidates shall be thoroughly examined in a loving manner by the Eldership:

Since the qualifications for Eldership are to be taken seriously, it follows that a formal examination of a prospective Candidate's qualifications is necessary. Although the Elders are to conduct the examination, this does not mean that the congregation is passive. Biblical Elders should desire an informed, involved congregation. They should eagerly listen to, consult with, and seek the wisdom of fellow believers. If an Elder is to serve properly, he must know the needs of those whom he would serve.

Rule 3: The Elders shall nominate a Candidate to the congregation at any regularly scheduled or specially called meeting

Rule 4: If it is revealed that a Candidate lacks any of the Biblical qualifications enumerated in Appendix A, then the Candidate will be regarded as unfit for office until such time as the deficiency is remedied:

If objections or accusations are voiced as to a Candidate's qualifications, the Elders should investigate to determine if the accusations are Scripturally based. If not, the objections or accusations should be dismissed. No Candidate should be refused office because of one person's personal bias. However, should but one person in the congregation have a valid Biblical objection, the prospective Elder should be declared unfit for office. God's standards, not group popularity, should govern God's house.

Rule 5: If approved, the Elder Candidate will continue to be mentored by the existing Eldership until such time as the Elders recommend him to full membership:

While a man may have been mentored previously in the area of spiritual leadership, many matters of the Eldership are confidential. Additionally, the congregation should experience the leadership and example of the Candidate in a shepherding role in order to better evaluate him as a potential Elder. While specific periods may not be easily definable in every case, it is likely that at least six months should be spent in candidacy.

If the previous examination under Rule 2 above was thorough, this will likely be a confirmation of the Elder's calling rather than a secondary examination. Questions may arise during candidacy which must be addressed at this time, but issues, ideally, will have been addressed and resolved prior to the Candidate being recommended to full Eldership.

Rule 6: The office of Elder is a permanent position absent removal by the remaining elders or by resignation.

Appendix B

Central Valley Evangelical Reformed Church Diaconate

Deacon

Definition

The word "Deacon" is a nearly literal rendering of the Greek word "diakonos" which primarily denotes a "servant", either indentured or free. The first time the word is found in Scripture is in John 2 referring to the servants attending the water jugs at the wedding in Cana.

Role

As is clearly evident from 1 Timothy and Titus, the office of Deacon is separate from the office of Elder. Not only are the qualifications less stringent, but the duties as revealed in the New Testament are significantly different.

The first official Deacon appointment is likely found in Acts 6. Acts 6:1 reads: 'Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.'" With the rapid growth of the church, it soon became difficult for the apostles to look after both the shepherding and practical needs of the church. Confronted with a need to prioritize their responsibilities, the apostles "summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2-4).

The comment that it "is not good that we should...serve tables" must be understood in the light of what serving tables required of the apostles - namely, that they would have to "leave the Word of God". Thus, while practical needs are important in the Body, the Elders must give priority to "prayer and the ministry of the Word". Fortunately, the apostles wisely discerned an appropriate solution. They appointed men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom to meet these needs.

Although the Seven of Acts 6 are never directly referred to as "Deacons", it is clear that their primary ministry is one of practical service. Furthermore, the verb "diakoneo" does appear in Acts 6 where the Apostles mention "serving tables." The Seven are appointed to collect money and goods and then distribute them and they represent the church's corporate response to its needy widows. That the Apostles took the Seven's ministry seriously is demonstrated by the fact that 'they laid hands on them". As a result of this appointment, "the Word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith." Regardless whether or not the Seven were officially called "Deacons" at this time, they certainly were prototypes of the position, and by A.D. 62, the office of Deacon was a recognized position with an official title in at least two churches established by Paul (Ephesus and Philippi).

Principle #1: Historic, Biblical church government is a plurality of Elders, dedicated to prayer, the teaching of sound doctrine, and the guarding against false doctrine. Underneath these Elders are Deacons who are appointed to meet the practical ministry needs of the Body.

Qualifications

As with Elders, a list of qualifications for Deacons exists in 1 Timothy 3:

1) Dignified (1 Timothy 3:8):

A Deacon must be respectable and honorable, with a dignity that invites reverence. This trait would correspond well with the Apostles' declaration in Acts 6 that the Seven be "of good reputation". Furthermore, there is a close correlation between being "of good reputation" and being "full of wisdom". One is only worthy of respect to the degree that he reflects God's righteousness and wisdom. Such a person will be revered and honored as a godly man.

Principle #2: A man will only be nominated to the position of Deacon Candidate after he has earned a good reputation among the church members. He must be regarded as a godly man, respected for his wisdom and faith

2) Not double-tongued (1 Timothy 3:8):

Scholars have differed concerning the exact meaning of "double-tongued". Most likely, it suggests saying one thing to one person and a different thing to another. Whatever its exact meaning, the term plainly prohibits any kind of manipulative, insincere, or deceitful speech. Put into positive terms, a Deacon must be a man of integrity, whose words prove to be truthful and sincere.

Principle #3: A potential Deacon Candidate must be a man of integrity, known for truthfulness and sincerity

3) Not addicted to much wine (1 Timothy 3:8):

As with Elders, Deacons must demonstrate self-control, particularly in the areas of food, drink, and money. Paul's comment that they not be addicted to much wine does not mandate abstinence.

Principle #4: A potential Deacon must be recognized as self-controlled, not given to excess in worldly things

4) Not greedy for money (1 Timothy 3:8):

Deacons handle money, and where money is, there is always the potential for trouble. In I Tim 6:5, Paul cautions against the "useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain". Judas is a good example of someone who was "greedy for money." As the treasurer of the disciples, Judas spoke as if he cared for the poor, but he actually cared more about the money. After Mary poured her expensive perfume on Jesus' feet in worship, Judas sanctimoniously complained, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to poor people?" John, however, reveals Judas' real concern: "Now Judas said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it" (John 12:5-6).

Because of the corrupting power of money, it is important that Deacons be men who have proven histories of financial integrity. Every Deacon should be able to say as Samuel once did:

"Here I am. Witness against me before the LORD and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you" (1 Sam 12:2-3).

Principle #5: A potential Deacon Candidate must demonstrate integrity in all manners of money through a history of faithful financial stewardship

5) Holding to the mystery of the faith with clear conscience (1 Timothy 3:9):

The phrase "mystery of the faith" is synonymous to Paul's other comments in the Epistles of the "mystery of God", "mystery of Christ", "mystery of the Gospel", "mystery of His will," and "mystery of godliness". Each of these refers to the body of truth of which the Gospel or Christian faith is comprised.

A Deacon would bring disgrace upon the church by hypocritical behavior. Furthermore, a man whose personal life is at odds with his public profession cannot live with a "clear conscience". It is not possible to separate day-to-day living from our faith and as Paul says, our true worship is to give our bodies daily as "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:2).

Principle #6: A potential Deacon Candidate must have a lifestyle which is consistent with Biblical priorities and above reproach

6) Tested (1 Tim. 3:10):

1 Timothy 3:10 says that a Deacon Candidate must "first be tested...[before they] serve as Deacons, being found blameless." The verb "be" is the imperative form which means that it is not an option to examine the qualifications of Deacons. While this may seem obvious, many churches hurriedly approve Deacons out of felt necessity rather than follow Biblical processes.

7) Reverent, temperate and faithful wives (1 Tim. 3:11):

It is understandable that some of the qualifications for Elders, particularly those regarding the ability to teach and refute false doctrine are not requirements for Deacons. It is less obvious why only Deacons are required to have godly wives. Of course, in principle, an Elder must be above reproach and that includes having a godly marriage. However, Paul finds it important to discuss the wife of a Deacon.

The reason Deacons must have godly wives lies in the nature of the Diaconate, which is not a teaching, governing office like the Eldership. 1 Timothy 2:12 states: "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man...." Elders teach and govern the whole church and their wives are not to directly assist in this spiritual oversight. The Diaconate, on the other hand, provides loving, practical service to the needy. One of the traits of an ideal wife revealed in Proverbs 31:20 is that "she extends her hand to the poor; and she stretches out her hands to the needy." Wives can assist their Deacon husbands in this service without violating their God-ordained role in the church. Indeed, at times their assistance may be demanded, as in cases involving the care of single mothers, children, and sick or elderly women. A Deacon's wife is not an official Deacon, even though she assists her husband in the diaconal work.

Of the many qualities for a Deacon, perhaps the most interesting one is found in 1 Timothy 3:11 - wives who "are not given to gossip". As a Deacon's wife, a woman will possess confidential information about the practical needs of families within the church. While James already warns against the harm that a gossip can do, the spreading of sensitive, confidential information is

particularly malicious. Solomon writes that "he who spreads slander is a fool" (Prov 10:18). God blesses those who make peace with others and thus He expects us to speak in love and truth, to heal wounds, and to mend broken relationships. Therefore, a malicious gossip has no place ministering to the neediest members of God's family.

Principle #7: A married Deacon must have a wife who is respected for her temperance, faith, and self-control

8) Husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:12): See same requirement for Elders

Principle #8: A potential Deacon Candidate, if he is married, must evidence a marriage of faithful love and monogamy

9) Good manager of his household (1 Tim. 3:12): See same requirement for Elders.

Principle #9: A potential Deacon Candidate, if he is a parent with children in the home, must evidence a family in which the children are faithful and not given to consistently disobedient behavior

Principles of Diaconate

Principle #1: Historic, Biblical church government is a plurality of Elders, dedicated to prayer, the teaching of sound doctrine, and the guarding against false doctrine. Underneath these Elders are Deacons who are appointed to meet the practical ministry needs of the Body

Principle #2: A man will only be nominated to the position of Deacon Candidate after he has earned a good reputation among the church members. He must be regarded as a godly man, respected for his wisdom and faith

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Appointment of Deacons

Rule 1: The Elders shall be responsible for recommending to the church new Deacon Candidates:

According to 1 Timothy 5:17 it is the Elders who "direct the affairs of the church". The word "direct" is "prohistemi" which means "lead" or "manage". Thus, in important spiritual matters such as selecting, examining, and recommending Deacon Candidates, the existing Elders should direct the entire process. It is vital that Elders recognize the priority of ministering in prayer and proclamation of the Gospel. Because of this, practical ministry needs should be delegated, when possible, to godly Deacons. For this reason, a good Eldership will be praying and looking for capable men to be appointed as Deacons.

Rule 2: Prospective Deacon Candidates shall be thoroughly examined in a loving manner by the Eldership:

Since the qualifications for Deacons are to be taken seriously by the church, it follows that a formal examination of a prospective Candidate's qualifications is necessary. Although the Elders are to take the lead in all church procedures, this does not mean that the congregation need be passive. Biblical Elders should desire an informed, involved congregation. They should eagerly listen to, consult with, and seek the wisdom of fellow believers. If a Deacon is to serve properly, he must know the needs of those whom he would serve

Rule 3: If a Candidate is found to be lacking in any of the Biblical qualifications enumerated in Appendix B, the Candidate will be declared unfit for office until such time as the deficiency is remedied:

If objections or accusations are voiced as to a Candidate's character, the Elders should investigate to determine if the accusations are Scripturally based. If not, the objections or accusations should be dismissed. No Candidate should be refused office because of one person's personal bias. However, should but one person in the congregation have a valid Biblical objection, the prospective Deacon should be declared unfit for office. God's standards, not group popularity, should govern God's house.

Rule 4: If accepted, the Deacon will be publicly approved and prayed for by the Eldership:

Acts 6 describes the appointment of the Seven by the Apostles. In that appointment, the Apostles laid hands upon the Seven and prayed for them publicly before the entire body so as to show their approval by official appointment.

Rule 5: The office of Deacon is a permanent position absent removal by the elders or by resignation.