

Outlining a General Process for Establishing Elders in a Congregation Where There are None **By Bob Young**

The Bible does not tell us specifically how the early church established elders. The elders of the Jerusalem church are first referred in Acts 11. Paul sent Titus to Crete to correct things deficient and to name elders (Titus 1:5). Paul returned to the churches he had established to establish elders (Acts 14:21-23). It appears that the church in Thessalonica may have had formal leaders shortly after its establishment, based on Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, written probably within six months of the beginning of the church (1 Thess. 5:13-14). Paul's first visit to Ephesus is recorded in Acts 18-19, and the church in Ephesus had elders (Acts 20), suggesting that the instructions Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus a few years later may have been corrective (1 Timothy 3).

Because the Bible does not provide an exact process for naming elders and church leaders, one must develop a process consistent with biblical teaching and applicable to the circumstances of the congregation. The following is a general process which can be applied in various places. Each church can adapt the guidelines as needed for special circumstances in the local church.

Note: In most churches where elders already exist, existing elders oversee or guide the process of adding elders. Some elders, however, wish to distance themselves from the process and use a committee of members to oversee the process. In a church where no eldership exists, the process often depends on the involvement and guidance of the minister, as in Titus 1.

Establish the need for and desire to establish elders

The appointment of elders should be the subject of teaching and preaching, prayer, and a general agreement by the church that elders are an important part of biblical organization.

Devote a specific time to Biblical teaching about elders

Continue regular prayer for God's guidance and wisdom

Use a series of lessons or classes, sermons, and bulletin articles concerning elders

- What elders do
- How elders and leaders involve others in the work
- What will be different in this church when we have elders
- What contribution will the elders make, how will the church be organized differently, what differences will there be in the work
- Note: several bulletin articles and studies are available for use in teaching and preaching

Share biblical principles that can guide the process

Who are the spiritual leaders of this church? Who are those you trust, those who influence you spiritually, those you want to be like, those you follow, those you confide in

Who is current doing the work, who is already shepherding? Who is doing the work, caring for the flock? "Do make a person an elder who is not eldering."

To whom do you look to as example—in spirituality, as a Bible student, teacher, counselor, mentor, equipper, and trainer?

Who are the servants, those who do the most to help with the work?

Who involves other people in the work?

Identify the candidates

Note: for this part of the process, in a congregation without elders, it is good to identify a committee of respected, mature members to oversee the process.

→ Having the biblical principles in mind, and in view of the Bible teaching that has been done, the members of the church should be encouraged to submit names. This can happen in a week or two at the most. The purpose is to identify the leaders, with the Biblical characteristics in mind (including family relationships)

→ Encourage every member to submit the names of all they consider elder leaders, mentioning all of those whom they think should serve as elders

→ The committee should make a list of the names and identify those who are the outstanding leaders, those with the greatest level of support. (Note: There will likely be a certain number of candidates with a higher level of recognition as leaders than others who may be listed with minimal recognition as leaders.)

→ Submit the names of the outstanding candidates to the church as potential elders. Allow a brief time for the congregation to respond with biblical reasons such should not serve. This process should include analysis of every characteristic, including their family situations.

→ Concerns should be investigated by the committee, but accepted as valid only with two or more witnesses

Use the process for the growth of future leaders

Encourage those whose influence and work in the congregation is in development to continue. This is not a rejection; this is an indication that they are future leaders.

Name and Install the elders

There is no specific process mentioned in Scripture.

Some churches like to use experienced evangelists or missionaries to be present for the installation.

Some churches like to use elders from another congregation to be present and oversee the installation.

It is good for the new elders to affirm verbally their willingness to accept the role and responsibility; it is good for the members of the congregation to affirm verbally their willingness to accept these leaders and to follow them.

Questions and Answers

A church does not have to name elders and deacons at the same time. Elders can be established in a church without deacons.