

THE SPECIAL OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

ELDERS and DEACONS

TOPICS:

- **#1 – Desiring to be an Office-bearer**
 - **#2 – Preparing to be an Office-bearer**
 - **#3 – What the Special Offices are**
 - **#4 – The Work of Elders**
 - **#5 – The Work of Deacons**
 - **#6 – How Office-bearers are Chosen**
 - **#7 – Our Calling toward Office-bearers**
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THE SPECIAL OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

#4: THE WORK OF ELDERS

SCRIPTURES CONCERNING THE DUTIES OF ELDERS

- I TIMOTHY 3:4-5 – *“One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)”*
- ACTS 20:28 – *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”*

SCRIPTURES CONCERNING THE DUTIES OF ELDERS

- I PETER 5:1-3 – *“The elders which are among you I exhort ...: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”*
- HEBREWS 13:17 – *“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”*

DUTIES OF ELDERS

Rule the church of God

Take care of the church

Take heed to the flock

Be overseers of the flock

Feed the church of God

Feed the flock of God

Take oversight of the flock

Be examples to the flock

Rule the people of God

Watch for the souls of God's people

ARTICLE 23 of the CHURCH ORDER

The office of the elders, in addition to what was said in Article 16 to be their duty in common with the minister of the Word, is to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow-elders and the deacons, faithfully discharge their office, and both before and after the Lord's Supper, as time and circumstances may demand, for the edification of the churches, to visit the families of the congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian religion.

ARTICLE 16 OF THE CHURCH ORDER

“The office of the minister is to continue in prayer and in the ministry of the Word, to dispense the sacraments, to watch over his brethren, the elders and deacons, as well as the congregation, and finally, with the elders, to exercise church discipline and to see to it that everything is done decently and in good order.”

OVERVIEW OF DUTIES OF ELDERS

- Their duties are (1) stated in Scripture, (2) summarized in the Church Order, and (3) referred to in the “Form for Ordination of Elders”
- THE DUTIES
 - To take oversight of all office-bearers in the church.
 - To supervise the pastor’s preaching (doctrine) and life.
 - To give counsel and advice to pastors and members.
 - To take oversight of the members of the church.
 - To conduct family visitation among the members.
 - To exercise Christian discipline in the church.
 - To protect the sheep of Christ.
 - To maintain good order in the church.
 - To be examples to the flock.

THE DUTY OF OVERSIGHT/RULING IN THE CHURCH

- **Must Rule/Govern/Supervise the OFFICEBEARERS:**
 - **ELDERS** - elders must supervise each other (Acts 20:28).
 - **DEACONS** - that they dispense mercies of Christ properly.
 - **PASTOR** - supervise his doctrine (preaching) and life.
- **Must Rule/Govern/Supervise the CONGREGATION:**
 - Pay attention to the doctrine and life of the members.
 - Not every detail, but with a view to their spiritual welfare.
 - Consider if they are doing things harmful to their souls.
 - Also if they are bringing shame on the church and Christ.
 - Do this especially through Family Visitation and Discipline.

THE DUTY OF SUPERVISING THE PASTOR

Prof. H. Hanko, Notes On The Church Order: *“The minister is also under the supervision of the elders. He, too, is subject to their rule. This is true as far as his personal life is concerned. He is not above the consistory in any way. His doctrine and conversation are subject to the scrutiny of the consistory. But especially his preaching is under their supervision.”*

Form for Ordination/Installation of Elders: *“It is also their duty particularly to have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the Word, to the end that all things may be directed to the edification of the church; and that no strange doctrine be taught, according to that which we read, Acts 20, where the apostle exhorteth to watch diligently against the wolves which might come into the sheepfold of Christ; for the performance of which the elders are in duty bound diligently to search the Word of God, and continually be meditating on the mysteries of faith.”*

THE DUTY OF DOING DISCIPLINE WORK

- **Discipline is the responsibility of elders (as kings). Matt. 18:15ff, Acts 20:28ff, II Thess. 3:14-15, etc.**
- **Members are and continue to be disciplined if they err in doctrine or life, and remain impenitent.**
- **The purpose and goal of Christian discipline is to restore the erring member.**
- **Church Order gives biblical instruction re discipline:**
 - **Art. 71 re The Character of Christian Discipline**
 - **Art. 72-73 re Discipline for Private Sins**
 - **Art. 74-78 re Discipline for Public Sins**
 - **Art. 79-80 re Discipline of Office Bearers**
- **The elders must carry out this discipline work.**

THE DUTY OF FAMILY VISITATION

1. What is Family Visitation?

- The elders visit each family and member in the church.**
- They inquire into the spiritual welfare of the members.**

2. How is it Done?

- Two elders, or the pastor and an elder, visit in the homes of each family or individual member.**
- They bring and apply God's Word to each family – can choose a theme text, and pastor first preaches on it.**
- The pastor and elders ask about and address the particular needs of each family or individual.**
- This must be done a minimum of once every year for each family or individual in the church.**

THE DUTY OF FAMILY VISITATION

3. What are the Main Purposes of Family Visitation?

- CO Art. 23: *“for the edification of the churches.”*
- CO Art. 23: *“to comfort and instruct the members.”*

4. What are the Benefits of Family Visitation?

- Know the members, aware of their needs and struggles, address their concerns right away, etc.
- Very helpful to the pastor in all his work: his preaching, teaching, prayers, pastoral work, etc.
- The office-bearers are able to fulfil the purposes mentioned in Article 23 of the Church Order.
- Thus a very important and necessary work for the elders to do. (NB: most of Article 23 devoted to this duty.)

FAMILY VISITATION

Prof. H. Hanko

Notes on Church Order

[Family visitation] is a most wonderful opportunity to bring the Word of God to the individuals in the church of Christ and address that Word of God to the particular needs of each member.

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

Family Visitation

Family visitation, rightly conducted, is and can be a valuable instrument in pastoral care and in the life and well-being of the members of the flock as a whole.

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ELDERS DOING THEIR WORK TOGETHER (not independently)

Prof. H. Hanko, Notes On The Church Order

It is important for the well being of the church that the elders faithfully perform their work. Each elder has the individual calling to watch over the church and he must, of necessity, engage in much personal labor. However, he has his authority only in conjunction with the other elders, so that no individual elder can take unilateral action. Every decision must be by the body, and the official action of the elders must be by the consistory as a whole.