



THE PROCESS IN A MISSION CHURCH FOR TRAINING AND ELECTING RULING ELDERS, ELECTING A MINISTER, AND ORGANIZING INTO A PARTICULAR CHURCH

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Background

The Scriptures state that Jesus gives elders to his Church to lead, watch over, and care for the members of his Church through preaching and teaching God's word, administering the Sacraments, exercising government and discipline, and setting an example to those under their care.

Elders can lead and serve as *teaching elders*. Teaching elders are ordained ministers of the gospel, gifted and called to teach and preach God's Word and administer the sacraments, in addition to those duties they share with all other elders. Elders can also lead and serve as *ruling elders*. Ruling elders are members of the church, gifted and called to govern the church. (For more information on the Presbyterian form of government and the Biblical support for that government, contact Elliot Grudem by email at [egrudem {at} ctkraleigh.org](mailto:egrudem@ctkraleigh.org).)

Churches without ruling elders in the Presbyterian Church in America (hereafter, PCA) are called mission churches. Mission churches are churches without a permanent governing body. That is, they don't have what the PCA calls a Session (collection of duly elected elders), because a Session requires not only teaching elders, but also ruling elders.

In the PCA, the temporary government of a mission church can take a variety of forms. One of those forms is for the church to be governed by an evangelist. An evangelist is a teaching elder (often the minister that plants the church) commissioned by a regional body of elders (called a Presbytery) to establish a mission church by developing elders for the church. The Presbytery gives the evangelist the power to function in some areas in the place of the Session and in other areas, required to look to the Presbytery to function in the place of the session. (In all areas, the evangelist is held accountable by the Presbytery.) The Presbytery decided that Christ the King (CTK) and its members would be best served if governed by an evangelist.

Since the governing structure of a mission church is temporary, one of the goals of a mission church is to elect ruling elders that will, with the teaching elders, make up the Session. When this happens, the mission church can be organized into a *particular* church by the Presbytery. (A senior minister will also be called by the congregation, once particularized, as detailed in BCO, chapter 5, section 11.)

Training, Nominating, and Electing Ruling Elders

Prior to electing men to serve as ruling elders, the men must be trained and nominated. The process for doing so is described, in detail, in one part of the PCA's constitution, *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (which can be found at www.pcaac.org, hereafter, BCO).

A summary of the process *for a mission church only*, taken from BCO chapter 5, section 9, follows:

- “All men of the mission church (unless they decline) shall receive instruction in the qualifications and work of the office of ruling elder by the...evangelist” (BCO, chapter 5, section 9, paragraph 1). This training is detailed in the document “Ruling Elder Training Syllabus” and is available in the resources section of www.ckraleigh.org.
- Once their training is complete, the men that have completed the training and desire to be examined will be examined by a group of teaching and ruling elders from the Presbytery. The examination will cover:
 - Their Christian experience (including issues related the character and family management required for the office as set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9).
 - Their knowledge of the Bible.
 - Their knowledge and acceptance of the BCO, especially related to the systems of government and discipline in the church.
 - Their knowledge and acceptance of the system of doctrine found in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* together with *The Larger Catechism* and *The Shorter Catechism*.
 - Their knowledge and acceptance of the duties of the office of ruling elder.
 - Their willingness to assent to the questions required for ordination, found in BCO, chapter 24, section 5. The questions are as follows:
 - Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
 - Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
 - Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
 - Do you accept the office of ruling elder in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the Church of which God has made you an officer?
 - Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
 - Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the Church?
- A list of the men found qualified will then be submitted to the members of the church. From that list, members will nominate men they believe should serve the church as ruling elders.
- At a congregational meeting, the members present will vote on the nominees. Those receiving a majority vote of those members present will be elected to the office of ruling elder.

The group of teaching and ruling elders from the Presbytery that will examine the elders is called a commission. That means they are empowered by Presbytery to conduct business on behalf of Presbytery. This commission can only be formed at the request of the congregation. Therefore, members of CTK seeking to be organized into a congregation of the PCA (thereby becoming a particular church), must request the Presbytery assist them with the process. The way the congregation requests this is by sending a petition to Presbytery signed by CTK members. Once Presbytery approves the petition, they will form the commission to organize CTK into a particular church. One of the steps in this process is to examine potential candidates to serve as elders. (See BCO, chapter 5, sections 8 and 9 for more information.)

Pastoral Nominating Committee

Once a church elects a permanent governing body, the church is no longer a mission church and is now considered a particular church. For CTK to become a particular church, the church’s temporary governing structure (evangelist) must be replaced by the permanent governing body (session). When that happens, the evangelist’s call to plant the church expires. And so CTK will, therefore, need to elect a pastor. (See BCO, chapter 5, section 11 for more information.)

To elect a pastor in the PCA, the congregation must first elect a pulpit nominating committee from its members. This committee “shall, after consultation and deliberation, recommend to the congregation a pastoral candidate who, in its judgment, fulfills the Constitutional requirements of that office... and is most suited to be profitable to the spiritual needs of the congregation” (BCO, chapter 20, section 2).

The committee’s recommendation will be presented to the congregation at a called meeting at which time the congregation will vote on their recommendation and (if approved) sign the call for their elected minister.

Service of Organization

Once ruling elders are elected and a minister called, the ruling elders will need to be ordained and installed and the minister will need to be installed. This takes place in a service of organization (see BCO, chapter 5, section 8 for more information). The church will also be organized into a particular congregation of the PCA at this service.

Once a church is particularized, the process for nominating, training, and electing ruling elders changes. That process is detailed in BCO, chapter 24.